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Water level to drop at West Swan Lake ahead of restoration

GRUVER - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will start lowering the water level at West Swan Lake, near Gruver in Emmet County as part of a restoration project to improve its water quality, eliminate a rough fish population and provide quality habitat for fish and wildlife.

Construction will begin this fall on a new water control structure at the outlet of West Swan and a new fish barrier below the outlet of Ingham Lake. Construction should be completed by spring of 2023.

“These shallow lakes need to be actively managed to promote aquatic vegetation and prevent carp and other rough fish from entering the system,” said Rob Patterson, wildlife biologist with the Iowa DNR. “We are very excited to get started with this project at West Swan. We believe the changes coming to the lake will be very beneficial to fish and wildlife species, as well as the public who use the lake.”

Water levels will be held about 3.5 feet low during 2023 to allow native aquatic plants to germinate near the shoreline. The lower water will also allow managers to renovate the fishery before the lake is refilled. The DNR anticipates the lake will be completely refilled by the fall of 2024. Native fish will be restocked during 2024 as the lake is refilled.

West Swan Lake has been plagued with poor water quality for many years. The DNR has been working on a plan to improve the water quality over the past few years. The current fishery is dominated by common carp that uproot aquatic plants, stir up the sediment and contribute to poor water quality. The combination of removing carp from the lake and lowering the water level will promote revegetation near the lake shore. Once established, those plants will help to prevent harmful algae blooms, improve water quality and provide fish and wildlife important habitat.

Patterson said he expects to see wildlife respond almost immediately to the project with shorebirds and other wildlife taking advantage of the low water and exposed mudflats, and waterfowl using the improved habitat in the fall of 2023. Fishing opportunities will quickly follow with fish reaching catchable sizes two years after stocking.

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