

2024 Dam Committee Report

By Larry Clark

Rains came with unusual frequency last summer. Even with the Dam sluice fully open for much of the summer, water levels stayed near or over our target into late August. At which time conditions returned to normal for water levels through the fall. Conditions typically get wetter in November and December when plants draw little water and cold temperatures greatly reduce evaporation. So the Lake level usually rises in late fall. One week before Christmas really turned wet with 5" of rain plus melting snow in 24 hours bringing the Lake way up so water was going over the low side of the dam.

The Lake normally freezes in December. This year after starting to freeze and skimming over rising temperatures or high winds would break up the ice. After New Years temperatures turned a little more winter like. The Lake finally froze over during the first week of January. As we moved into winter below freezing temps locked up most surface water in ice. The little brooks slowed way down and the Lake dropped back to normal levels. In early March unusually warm temps, rain and melting snow got the brooks flowing again and the Lake has come back to a very high level as of the first day of spring.

Despite snow storms the week of March 17th this must have been one of the shortest winters on record. I don't think the snow pack or ice on the Lake ever exceeded 12 inches, very unusual. The local deer herd must have benefited from the shallow snow depth, half what it was last year. Some other creatures must have benefited also, maybe some others, not.

A related observation: the wet summer last year probably benefited our white pine trees. Why? White Pine seeds require two years to mature, pollinated one year and mature into cones the next. In addition White Pines have very big "cone years" roughly six or seven years apart and most of the trees in an area are in sync. Remember the early summer of 2022 saw unusually large quantities of pollen in the Lake. The late summer of 2023 saw the branches of many White Pines bowed under the weight of new green cones, a "cone year".

This spring those of us with White Pines nearby are seeing many fallen spent cones. One consequence of this “feast or famine” cycle is that the creatures that rely on pine seeds maintain a population that consumes much of the between “cone years” crop. But they are overwhelmed on the big “cone years” so that many more seeds survive. We should see more tiny White Pines sprouting this summer of 2024. White Pines like sun light, so won’t do well or even sprout in heavily shaded areas. Producing a big cone crop is stressful for the trees. So plentiful water last summer was undoubtedly helpful to them.

What will Mother Nature bring this year?