

# Battle won to pull Lake Thompson's plug

By Kerry Drager

Movement was made on Sept. 11 between the Kingsbury County Board of Commissioners and the South Dakota Water Management Board regarding the ever-increasing water levels of Lake Thompson. The county may now streamline their plans in the removal of vegetation and sediment buildups along the lake's outlet, but these plans must first be discussed and approved with the DENR (Department of Environment and Natural Resources).

Currently, there are three options planned in hopes of reducing the lake's water level including:

- The removal of 400 feet of vegetation from the sides of the outlet that feeds into the Vermillion River.
- The removal of sediment from the channel down the same outlet.
- The removal of weeds a half-mile up the lake from the outlet while dredging sediment along the bottom of the lake.



**Many people within Kingsbury County cannot easily access their homes or their property due to the barricades and rising water. (Times photo by Kerry Drager)**

Members of the water board and the DENR have concerns about the perseverance and integrity of the outlet's structure and the lake's natural hardpan, the dense soil layer just below the topsoil of the lake. The removal of sediment will

require more cost, finer details to be given, and formal review and approval through the DENR.

The easiest and cheapest course appears to be the removal of vegetation.

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**Culverts under the roads that cross over Lake Thompson's outlet cannot keep up with the rising water and 223rd Street has turned into a wetland where waterfowl swim peacefully across the road. (Times photo by Kerry Drager)**

## Lake Thompson

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"I think we should first do a vegetation cleanout between 224th and 225th Street. We can monitor the effect this has on the downstream water flow and do a little at a time," said James Knight a lake resident who conducted his own engineering study of the lake and was present at the Water Board meeting Sept. 11.

Knight is working on finding the most cost-efficient way of removing the vegetation. Once the cost is agreed upon, the county commissioners will be able to go ahead with the project after informing the DENR of their plans.

"One thing to consider, if they can remove the vegetation, it will only get the water down one day faster than if they were to do nothing," said Kingsbury County Commission chairperson Shelley Nelson. "We have to get the cost ratios. Do we spend x amount of dollars to gain one day and where does that money come from?"

Nelson stated that the funds needed for any maintenance on the lake's outlet are coming from taxpayers from the entire county, not just the individuals living along the lake. Though the health of the surrounding community certainly does benefit from the recreational aspects of Lake Thompson, if the county continues to be the only entity responsible for funding the

maintenance of the lake everyone in the county will need to pay more taxes to keep lakeside community members from sinking underwater.

Nelson explained that if the necessary continued maintenance of the lake is to be funded, there needs to be a water project district and a lake association started. This is currently how other lakeside communities throughout the state maintain both the lake and the homes and businesses alongside it.

For now, Nelson has assured that the county commissioners are going to do what is necessary to alleviate the water levels for Lake Thompson residents.

The biggest concerns with any action taken on the maintenance of the lake's basin are how the communities downstream will be affected. Clay and Turner counties have both voiced oppositions against the action of increased water into their watersheds.

Whatever action is taken, the county must move slowly and carefully to ensure that all entities involved are being considered.

Knight stated that a lot of water can be moved, but as hard as it is, the community must be patient.

"We don't want to create a problem that might shut us down," said Knight.

**PROUD**