

## Establishment of Pelican River Watershed District

In 1965 both the Melissa and Sallie Improvement Association and the Lake Detroiters advocated for a governmental unit that would be able to address lake problems. Dr Tom Rogstad, President of Lake Detroiters, led a delegation, including Attorney Robert Irvine and Detroit Lakes City Engineer Winston Larson, to St. Paul to seek enabling legislation that would make it possible to create a local government unit for purposes of "finding causes and solutions for lake eutrophication problems". They brought a draft bill to Senator Norman Walz of Detroit Lakes, but soon learned that a watershed district created under the auspices of the State's 1955 Watershed Act would serve the purpose if that Act was slightly amended to allow lakes and the lands that drained to them, to be defined as a watershed. The necessary amendments were enacted, and the PRWD was the first watershed district to organize under the amended law.

On September 15, 1965 a copy of a petition asking for the creation of the Pelican River Watershed District was filed with the Minnesota Water Resources Board. The petitioners, seeking to slow down the eutrophication of the lakes, among other purposes, were the Becker County Commissioners. After public meetings and discussion where local officials and the business community offered strong support, the petition was amended slightly and submitted by both the Becker County and Otter Tail Commissioners.

The proposed boundaries of the District were subsequently reviewed in detail and modified by the Director of the Division of Waters. This process was based upon existing maps and detailed field surveys in the fall of 1965 and winter of 1966. The Director considered several lakes included in the original petition as having doubtful surface water links to the main chain of lakes; these included Spear, Pearl and Loon lakes, west of Lake Sallie, and Wine, brandy, and several others lying west of highway 59 and North of Highway 10. On the other hand, the Director recommended inclusion of those lakes as well as Mill Lake and Buck's Mills Dam and some additional tributaries to Lake Melissa and Mill Lake, including some in Otter Tail County.

—The first board of directors of the newly-formed Pelican River Watershed District was organized Monday, June 13, at a meeting in the Graystone Manor in Detroit Lakes.

Directors, reading left to right, are: Clem Hagerty; Donald E. Johnson, treasurer; Dr. T. A. Rogstad, president; J. N. (Jack) Given, secretary, and DeWitt Clason. All are from Detroit Lakes.

The men were named to one-year terms by the Minnesota State Water Resources Board,

according to George Loughland of Golden Valley, chairman of the state board.

According to legal description, the general purpose of the watershed district is to "conserve and make provident use of waters and other natural resources, to reduce the pollution of the waters of the Pelican River Chain of lakes, to slow down the eutrophication of the lakes."

"To regulate the water levels in the Pelican River Chain of Lakes, to enhance their rec-

reational facilities, and to protect and improve the scenic beauty thereof.

"To improve the needed drainage, to provide needed soil and water conservation practices on the land; and for other purposes as found in the Minnesota Watershed Act, pursuant to the provisions of Minnesota Laws of 1955, Chapter 799, as amended."

The area involved in the district is about 131 square miles in both Becker county and Otter Tail county.

On March 30, 1966 the Water Resources Board held a hearing at the Becker County Courthouse. The Director's report was presented and oral testimony on it and other matters was heard. At the May 27<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Water Resources Board, the Pelican River Watershed District, as previously defined and delimited by the Director, was ordered. The order specifically noted that addressing pollution would be central to the District's mission. It also noted that navigation, soil erosion, and fish and wildlife enhancements, would be District purposes.

The official order also appointed the Thomas Rogstad, DeWitt Clason, John Given, Clem Hagerty, and Donald Eugene Johnson to one-year terms as managers of the new District.



The board of managers of the Pelican River Watershed District are pictured above. Left to right, are J. N. Given, Clem Hagerty, Donald Johnson, DeWitt Clason and Dr. T. A. Rogstad.

The first Meeting of the Managers of the Pelican River Watershed District took place at the Graystone Manor Hotel in Detroit Lakes at 6 PM on June 13, 1966. The previously mentioned managers were all present. Also present were Erling Weiberg, Administrative Secretary of the Minnesota Water Resources Board, Jim Dixon, of the Melissa Sallie Improvement Association, and Dick Hecock. Officers were elected as follows: T.A. Rogstad, President, J.N. Given, Secretary, D.E. Johnson, Treasurer. There was discussion of the preparation of the District's Overall Plan, the appointment of an Advisory Committee, development of by-laws, and the identification of sources of funds.

The issue of why the PRWD does not include all of the Pelican River watershed, and why, in particular, PRWD was not combined with Cormorant Lakes WD which was created at about the same time and for the same purposes. According to a 1970 letter written to a Pelican Lake resident by Erling M. Weiberg of the Minnesota Water Resources Board, the decision had to do with two main factors:

1. the original petition for establishment of WD was urged by residents of Detroit, Long, Sallie, Melissa, and Floyd; no other area interests were presented by petition, or advocated by testimony at public hearings which were noticed to all residents of Becker and OtterTail Counties. The Water Resources board took the position that they could not define a watershed district to include areas from which no petition was received, especially when the area was in a different county.
2. In fact, the petitioners for Cormorant Lakes and Pelican River watershed districts had been urged by the Water Resources Board to form a single WD; this suggestion was rejected on grounds that the problems were different between the two proposed districts (PRWD was more "urban" vs. and Cormorant Lakes "more rural"); moreover, residents near Lake Eunice and Maud, located between the two proposed districts, were adamantly opposed (in hearings) to inclusion in any Watershed District.