

Cheat Sheet for Lake Odessa for the People Effort

“Lake Odessa for the People”, is a newly formed proactive group organized to communicate a message to our local, state, and federal legislators and selected people who might be able to help revitalize Lake Odessa and thus enhance the quality of life and the economic situation of the area. The message from the group is the need to maintain an adequate minimum water level of 4.75’ in Lake Odessa to enhance fishing, hunting, boating, and recreational activity and to put back the picnic tables and restrooms that were once at Schafer’s access. This can be obtained by drawing the water down less at no cost or dredging.

Visualize over 6,000 acres in the Lake Odessa complex. There is approximately 3,000 acres of land mass which includes the no hunting refuge area on the North end and the islands on the South end of the Lake. Visualize 3,000 acres of water. Over seven hundred of those acres are in the big body of water where the main public access called Schafer’s is located and the rest of the 3000 acres of water is by Sand Run and in the back water. All these areas will still be there. With a minimum depth of to 4.75’, boats and fisherman could access the lake in June, July, and August and they can’t now.

The lake wasn’t created for wildlife habitat as some would lead us to believe. Lake Odessa was created when the levee system was introduced to the Mississippi River blocking the back water chutes. Levees weren’t put there to create the Lake, the levees were put in to keep the Mississippi from flooding farm ground and to allow progressively deeper channels in the Mississippi over the years. None of the Cooperative Agreements exclude hunting, fishing, boating, and recreation.

The lake has been drawn down each summer since the 1954 for the expressed goal to replenish vegetation needed by migratory birds according to Bill Ohde, IDNR. Since then the Lake has gradually gone down hill – less fish, less water fowl, less people. The drawn down has come earlier and more. Terry Feers a previous refuge manager in the 70’s expressed that he only drew the lake down to 4.5 to 5 feet. Keep in mind there will still be 3000 acres of land, part in the no hunting area, and part where there are islands with huge numbers of trees on them.

Some people have said if you don't draw down the water, there won't be enough food. There will be enough food. You plant the food on higher ground. Let the DNR come up with creative alternatives. There are thousands of acres down there to accommodate all uses. There is nothing that says the Lake has to be managed to the exclusion of fisherman and recreational boating. The fisherman and recreational boaters certainly don’t want to exclude the refuge and hunting.

One might consider the negative environmental impact of low water on fish now. There are less fish being caught now at Lake Odessa, there are less ducks and geese observed than in the Pre 1980’s. If there are fish there, you can’t get to them in June, July, and August because the water is too low to launch a boat. The aerial photos show that when the water is at 4.75’ depth at Schafer’s access it does not cover the islands.