Cameron Davis: The Great Lakes in a Time of Hyper-Change

On Friday evening, August 11, Cameron Davis, natural resource and water quality expert on behalf of the Great Lakes, presented the DCEC Summer Program, “The Great Lakes in a Time of Hyper-Change,” at the Baileys Harbor Town Hall. The program was attended by approximately 70 people.

For more than three decades, Mr. Davis has worked to develop and implement water quality and quantity policy. Appointed by the Obama Administration, Mr. Davis was Senior Advisor to two U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrators in Washington, D.C. Under the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), he coordinated eleven federal departments to manage $2.2 billion in funding to state, municipal, tribal, business and civic stakeholders, and the non-profit community, the largest Great Lakes restoration investment in U.S. history. Funding financed contaminated sediment cleanups, fish contaminant matters, dam removals, wetland and habitat restoration, runoff reduction, invasive species prevention, and other related water resource matters. Mr. Davis also served as a lead negotiator with the U.S. State Department in its development of the 2012 U.S. - Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Mr. Davis was also President Cameron Davis

Photo courtesy of EPA
and CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, Chicago and is lead author of the Great Lakes Legacy Act, which leverages federal-private funding partnerships for cleanups to rehabilitate riverside and coastal property values.

Recently, Mr. Davis received two honors for his work in the Great Lakes region. On June 26, Cameron Davis was recognized for his work managing the Great Lakes Advisory Board (GLAB). He helped establish the GLAB, comprised of business, environmental, municipal, state and academic interests to ensure buy-in for GLRI investments. On the same day, Environment & Climate Change Canada recognized Davis for his “past, present and future contributions” to Great Lakes health with the U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Presently, Cameron Davis is Vice President of Consulting Engineers and Scientists, Inc., one of the nation’s leading geotechnical, environmental, water resources, and ecological science and engineering firms. He is responsible for guiding the firm’s Upper Midwest water quality policy, infrastructure, and other water resources efforts.

Mr. Davis began his presentation with a brief history of the biological linkages of the Great Lakes. This was followed by the need to address the combined political, social, financial, technical, and economical impacts that affect the Great Lakes in order to proactively prevent environmental problems. In addition, Mr. Davis stressed the importance of an informational system that could be used to predict trends affecting the Great Lakes.

A question and answer session followed the presentation and included comments regarding the need for individuals to be proactive, concern about the “manure problem,” entry of Asian carp into the Great Lakes, new regulations and advances in preventing invasive species introduction into the Great Lakes via ship ballast tanks, working with the U.S. Congress and Senate to protect the Great Lakes, the environmental impact of the proposed Foxconn manufacturing complex near Kenosha, Wisconsin, and the Great Lakes Water Compact.

A video recording of the program is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fW5dBA8Czio

By Kaethe Gutierrez and Michael Bahrke

Adapted from articles at www.geiconsultants.com/cameron-davis and www.geiconsultants.com/ges-cameron-davis
Michigan and Canadian Mining Company Poised to Disrupt the Ecology of Green Bay Waters and Beyond

Door County residents were invited to attend an informational meeting concerning a massive open pit sulfide mine being proposed on the banks of the Menominee River by the Aquila Resources’ Back 40 Mine Project of Ontario, Canada.

The meeting was presented by Concerned Citizens to Protect the Menominee River and was held this summer at the Old Opera House in Sturgeon Bay.

Attendees learned that:

- The open pit sulfide mine would be covering 83 acres and extract gold and zinc sulfide metal ores.

- The pit would be 150 feet away from the banks of the Menominee River, which separates Wisconsin from Upper Michigan. The waters of the Menominee River empty into the waters of Green Bay and can mix with the waters of Lake Michigan and all the Great Lakes.

- The pit would be 750 feet deep! The highest bluffs in Door County are about 250 feet tall, for the sake of comparison.

- The metal sulfide ores would be processed on site, expanding the footprint of the operation to over 500 acres.

- Processing the metal ores would include dealing with cyanides and sulfides (sulfide becomes sulfuric acid when mixed with water or humidity). The processing also creates dust that can travel far beyond the boundaries of the mine.

- The extraction process would discharge over 1,000,000 gallons per day of “degraded” water into the Menominee River. The mining process will span more than 16 years with the last 8 years creating lateral mine tunnels that will include tunneling under the river itself.

- The acidic water produced can leach heavy metals like mercury, lead, and arsenic (also known as acid mine drainage, AMD) out of the earth in other places as well.
• The Environmental Protection Agency says mining sulfide ore is America’s most toxic industry. So far, there has yet to be a metallic sulfide mine that has not polluted its waterways.

• 100% of mines studied polluted either surface water or ground water or both 100% of the time. Mines over 100 years old are still producing AMD into America’s waterways.

• The proposed Back 40 Mine has the potential to destroy habitat, kill aquatic life, and affect human health and tourism for decades and probably for centuries after it is closed.

• The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) has already issued three of the four required permits to allow the mine. The mining permit application never says with certainty that the Menominee River, Lake Michigan, or the environment won’t be contaminated by the mine. Vague terms like “minimize,” “could generate acid,” “reduce the potential for environmental impacts,” and “impacts from spills are being minimized” are used throughout the application. They guarantee nothing.

• The MDEQ (the same agency involved with the Flint, Michigan drinking water disaster) is reviewing the permit, as all regulatory authority rests with the state of Michigan.

• Property values around the Back 40 Mine in Michigan and Wisconsin could drop 30%-40% of value. County tax bases could plummet leaving others to make up the loss.

• Tourism could be lost. Businesses could be lost. Any loss to tourist recreation, from such activities as fishing, boating, rafting, kayaking, four-wheeling and hiking, could hurt many businesses. Customers, who normally shop for goods and amenities, could be gone.

The Concerned Citizens to Protect the Menominee River is asking for our help in a call to action to oppose the approval of such a mine.

So far, the Door County Board of Supervisors, and the counties of Marinette and Brown have officially opposed the approval of this mine in the state of Michigan. Also, the cities of Marinette and Peshtigo, Wisconsin have officially opposed the creation of this mine. No Michigan counties or cities have opposed the creation of the Back 40 Mine.

The approval of the Back 40 Mine Project by the state of Michigan has great significance for the environment, the residents, and the businesses of Door County. However, the impact could go far beyond our borders and our lifetimes.

The membership of the Door County Environment Council is being called to action! We need to make the elected officials of Michigan and Wisconsin understand our opposition to this disastrous mine proposal by contacting them by letter or phone call.

Keep the waters pure. Water is the new gold! Save it and protect it!

By Paul Leline

For more information go to: menomineeriver.com, savethewildup.org, wrpc.net, or contact Guy Reiter at (715) 853-2776
Emerald Ash Borer Update

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection has updated the list of Wisconsin communities where presence of the Emerald Ash Borer has been confirmed. Fifteen new communities, in previously quarantined counties, have been added since the last update:

- Columbia County -- Town of Caledonia and villages of Poynette and Rio
- Fond du Lac County -- Village of Campbellsport
- Grant County -- City of Boscobel
- Green County -- Town of Sylvester
- Sheboygan County -- Village of Howards Grove, towns of Rhine, Russell, Mosel
- Crawford County -- Village of Soldiers Grove
- Dodge County -- Towns of Herman and Theresa
- La Crosse County -- City of West Salem
- Manitowoc County -- City of Manitowoc

Apparently, no new findings of the EAB have been reported in Door County. However, more findings of the EAB, within the quarantined counties, are expected. The department will continue to issue news releases when new counties are quarantined. The complete list with an interactive map is available at emeraldashborer.wi.gov.

By Michael Bahrke

DO YOU LIKE WHAT YOU READ? SEND US YOUR OWN MATERIAL.

To be a newsletter contributor, log on to www.dcec-wi.org for details.
Water Worries

Why do tourists come to Door County? Why do residents love to live here? Although there are many reasons when asked, almost everyone would mention the beautiful waters that surround the county. But what if that picturesque water was polluted? What if the Bay was so contaminated that it was undrinkable, unswimmable, and unable to support game fish? What if dead zones, areas of no oxygen, were prevalent in our waters. What if there were various types of foul smelling, brown and green algae in our water and on our shores? What would become of Door County’s uniquely beautiful environment and our tourism-based economy? Well you’re probably thinking, that’s just not going to happen. Unfortunately, the most current scientific data says otherwise.

In a recent in-depth study financed, in part, by the Wisconsin DNR, a large percentage of the sampled wells in Kewaunee County contained some fecal microbes, many capable of making people sick. Dr. Mark Borchardt, a microbiologist with the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and Dr. Maureen Muldoon, a geology professor from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, completed the testing and presented some preliminary findings at a meeting in Kewaunee County on June 7, 2017.

Borchardt reported they randomly selected 621 wells to sample. The test results were shocking. They will be released in a formal report later this year. Borchardt noted that the concentration of bovine (cow) specific Rotavirus A was extremely high. He stated there were thousands of “bugs per quart” compared with the human specific ones. Many other pathogens were also found including E-coli, Salmonella, Rotavirus C, and microorganism Cryptosporidium.

Borchardt said in an interview, “We’ve never seen these results in ground water before.”

Rotavirus C can transfer between animals and humans. It can cause diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration, and even death. Borchardt said, “If I were a Rotavirus C and I wanted to retire, I would move to Kewaunee County!” The problem in Kewaunee County is very thin soil, fractured bedrock, and 97,000 cattle, outnumbering people five to one. Door County’s soils are even thinner and contain more fractured karst rock than Kewaunee County.

Muldoon, a Doctor of Hydrogeology and Environmental Geology and an expert on Door County’s geology, echoed Borchardt’s remarks. She stated, “I cannot think of a worse place than Northeast Wisconsin to put a lot of cows.” It seems concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) with more than 1,000 animals are allowed to spread manure on land with only two feet of soil covering the bedrock.

There are approximately 97,000 cows in Kewaunee County producing around 700 million gallons of manure annually, most of which is simply spread on the ground.
Humans in Kewaunee County produce around 200 million gallons of septic effluent including human waste and water from laundry machines, showers, dishwashers, etc. This human waste water, however, goes through septic systems, but obviously it can also find its way into subsurface cracks and leach into the aquifer.

CAFOs are not the only source of this pollution; they are just one of the main sources. When asked whether dispensing less liquid manure would reduce the well contamination, Borchardt answered, “You don’t have to be a scientist for that one. If you remove the fecal source you remove the contamination.” What’s happening in Kewaunee County is literally and figuratively coming to Door County. Our surface and ground water are indeed connected. Kewaunee County’s water conditions are a preview if what’s coming here if changes are not made.

The study only tested ground water. However, this contamination is also prevalent in surface water as well, only in higher concentrations. All three Kewaunee County rivers have been declared “impaired” by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Likewise, significant dead zones are now growing in the bay. Once again, you don’t have to be a scientist to understand that 700 million gallons of liquified manure spread on shallow soil and fractured rock is going to negatively impact the aquifer, wells, streams, rivers, and the relatively shallow Bay of Green Bay, and it has. Significant dead zones in the bay are migrating north, and reaching Door County. Yes indeed, big CAFOs are coming here, too. A large expansion to 10,000 animals was approved by the DNR in April for an existing CAFO near Forestville.

There was much public opposition to this CAFO expansion, but to date, the DNR has never denied a CAFO expansion permit, and of course, they approved this one. If not stopped, more CAFOs, more cows, and more pollution are coming to Door County. This will significantly impact both our ground and surface water.

I believe Door County tourism, property values, the environment, and quality of life depend on clean water. I am not anti-farming, or even anti-CAFO, but I am anti-CAFO in Northeastern Wisconsin. I believe, as do the experts, that our area is one of the worst places in the entire country for this type of CAFO operation. The study data adds indisputable scientific evidence to support that concept.

So, what do we do? We all love Door County, and now it’s time to get involved and help save our water. Indeed, it is time for us to call on our county board to declare a Door County CAFO moratorium. We need to stop CAFO expansion until this huge manure pollution issue is resolved. Please contact county board members and make your feelings known. The study shows that Northeastern Wisconsin is simply not the place for future CAFO expansion.

By Steve Eatough

Cartoon by Susan C. Marks
DCEC Supports Sustainable Agriculture

Even though the Door County Environmental Council actively opposes concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in areas such as Door and Kewaunee Counties where soil layers are thin and the underlying geological structure is karst dolomite, DCEC is certainly not opposed to local agriculture. This was recently demonstrated by the well-received Sustainable Agriculture Tour arranged by DCEC. Door County Trolleys transported two groups from a parking lot in Sturgeon Bay first to Waseda Farms, then to the Peninsular Agricultural Research Station, and finally to Emerald Acres Farm with a box lunch at Otumba Park provided by Get Real Cafe. The trolley portion was narrated by Ron Schweigert, farmer/owner of Flying Tractor Farm. Ron is familiar with the farms using organic and sustainable methods around Door County and pointed out some of the organic fields along the route.

Waseda Farms tour was narrated by Jeff Lutsey, farmer/owner. Participants walked short distances to view the gardens and pastures as well as the Temple Grandin facility, which they use to inspect each cow or steer with the least stress to the animal. The same facility is used to load the animals onto trucks for their final ride to a place where they are slaughtered humanely. Waseda Farms produces and sells organic fruits, vegetables, meats and eggs. They do purchase certified organic produce to sell during the times of year when they are unable to grow the food locally.

The next stop was the Peninsular Agricultural Research Station where the group boarded a tractor-drawn wagon after learning about the potato germ bank which supplies research materials around the world. From the wagon, Matt Stasiak showed grain fields and fruit orchards and explained how research is applied to make farming and orchard growing as sustainable as possible with a minimum use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

Waseda Farms produces and sells organic fruits, vegetables, meats and eggs. They do purchase certified organic produce to sell during the times of year when they are unable to grow the food locally.

The shelter at Otumba Park provided shade and a bay breeze while the group enjoyed sandwiches or wraps from Get Real Cafe, which prides itself in offering organic fare.

The final stop was Emerald Acres, a family owned and operated sustainable farm which employs organic practices to the maximum of their ability, although the farm is not certified organic at this time. The group observed a variety of practices including succession planting, companion crops, compact planting, and minimal tillage. A greenhouse extends their season. The goats were a big hit! Emerald Acres markets its produce largely through its CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) contracts.

Consumers can support sustainable agriculture by buying from local farmers who use these practices and by buying organic varieties where possible. However,
beware of claims that say food is organic. Look up information on brands. For example, eggs from a certain brand are certified organic although they are raised in a CAFO which provides “porches” for their hens to get around the requirement that they have access to the outdoors.

By John Beck

Door County Dairy Breakfast 2017

The 36th Annual Dairy Breakfast was hosted at the Wilke R Organic Farm. This is the first organic farm to be featured in the Door County Dairy Breakfast. The Sevastopol FFA Alumni oversees the event, and money raised goes to college scholarships in Door County. It takes over a hundred volunteers to run this event. Many of the volunteers and participants this year were engaged and willing to be a part of the organic experience.

The Wilke farm on Hwy 42 is a fourth generation farm with many family members living within the area. Being so close to family means help is readily available. When asked why the Wilke’s decided to go organic, Kevin replied “Our farming practices were already similar to organic farming.” It took the 2009 milk prices and fellow organic farm neighbors for the Wilke’s to really make the change. Kevin and Tricia Wilke both agree that the organic way has instilled some morals in their three children, morals that they can use in their adult careers.

The organic title in farming means that farmers are proactive rather than reactive to changes. If a cow’s habits change or a weather storm occurs, they have to act or the problem will only get worse. Being attentive to these signs is critical. In traditional farming, if a cow was sick, a farmer would give it a penicillin shot. Or if a crop was plagued by insects, the field would be sprayed with pesticides. Tricia and Kevin study and constantly review tasks to be sure that the option chosen is both sustainable and the right choice. Absolutely no pesticides or antibiotics are used in their farm. MOSA (Midwest Organic Services Association) helps the Wilke’s maintain their organic status and conducts a visit once a year. To find products with the Organic Valley label, see Walmart, Pick ‘n Save, and Econo Foods in Sturgeon Bay.

While some say that the Wilke’s farm isn’t a large one, Kevin and Tricia both agree for them it’s not about quantity, it’s about quality. The crops are planted with multiple species in mind so that one planting can yield three harvests. Also, the crops are not planted in traditional rows; spacing between each plant is much smaller. Combining more than one species allows the farmer to use topsoil along with the underground soil. Fields that have multiple species of crops will deter water erosion, gain higher nutrient value, and hold manure fertilizer better. For the longest time, dairy animals were fed three main crops: corn, grain, and alfalfa. Kevin says that he grows many more types of forage and the cattle respond better to the new diet.

The benefits they have seen are being able to use less farm equipment, lower fuel costs, and better crops. Farmers that work with nature see the soil less compacted with increased organic matter, which leads to better water retention.

By Renee McAllister
DCEC Welcomes Two New Board Members

Two new board members joined the Door County Environmental Council, Renee McAllister and Susan Marks, both of Sturgeon Bay.

Renee McAllister has lived in Sturgeon Bay for the past 18 years with her husband and four children. She is active in many non-profit organizations such as Heritage Village at Big Creek and Door County Time Exchange. Renee works at Boys & Girls Club of Door County as a Youth Development Professional and also the YMCA as a swim instructor.

Keeping Door County undeveloped by tourism has made Renee realize her path in environmentalism. She believes in renewable practices that reduce our carbon footprint on the environment, focusing on reusing materials, recycling and sustainable living. Gardening, camping and reading are her favorite passtimes.

Susan Marks states, “Door County became my home in 2014 when I moved to Sturgeon Bay to escape the devastation of the frac sand mines in the Driftless Area, which was my home for 22 years. I became an environmental activist when a frac sand mine was given a permit next door to my small, organic goat farm.

“It’s my love of the natural world and the Great Lakes that keeps me engaged in the work of advocating for the protection of nature, clean water, and the wild places. I’m encouraged by the large number of people in this county who care about the environment and are doing all they can to preserve the original beauty and character of the unique landscape here and beyond.”

Upcoming Environmental Events

August 27-Sept 1: World Water Week
September 16: International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer
September 5: Protect Your Groundwater Day
September 17-23: Pollution Prevention Week
September 18-22: Septic Smart Week
September 22: World «Car-free» Day
October: National Energy Awareness Month
October: Walk to School Month
October 1-30: Project Green Challenge
October 5: National Solar Tour Day
October 16: World Food Day
Last week of October: Lead Poisoning Prevention Week
October 27: Energy Star Day
November 15: America Recycles Day

WHAT’S YOUR OPINION?
DCEC wants to hear from you. How are we doing? What environmental issues do you want more involvement in?
Contact us: phone: 920-743-6003
e-mail: adm.dcec@gmail.com
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