



*Working to protect the Mississippi River
and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.*

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September 9, 2020

Ramsey County Parks and Recreation
Attn: Scott Yonke

RE: Pigs Eye Lake 45-day review comments

To whom it may concern,

Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) is a local non-profit community-based organization that works to protect and enhance the natural and cultural assets of the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities. We have 2,700 active members, more than 3,000 volunteers and 1,600 advocates who care deeply about the river's unique resources. FMR has long been an active and ongoing participant in environmental review processes occurring in and along the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities.

We are writing today with brief comments on the proposed Pigs Eye Master Plan Amendment.

FMR is generally in support of the Pigs Eye Master Plan Amendment. The stated project objectives are in line with FMR's mission to protect, restore, and enhance habitat along the Mississippi River. Invasive species removal, revegetation of shorelines, enhancement of wetlands, and restoration of floodplain forest are all vitally important to ensuring that the area provides diverse, healthy habitat that benefits wildlife, water quality, and people. The draft amendment does not include details on how these objectives will be achieved. Implementation of the plan will therefore need to carefully consider the methods that best protect the investment in these goals, and ensure that they do not degrade over time. However, we also believe that this project presents an important opportunity to build-in consideration of and experimentation with climate resilience, which is not currently presented in the plan.

Creation of new habitat in any given area must take into account historical, current, and potential future conditions of that area. Facing an uncertain climate future, one in which the state of Minnesota is expected to experience increases in temperature and subsequent range shifts of both plant and animal species, any project creating new habitat would be wise to consider the implications of these changes.

The proposed islands in Pigs Eye Lake present an opportunity for a living laboratory of sorts, in which different combinations of plant communities or plant ecotypes on each island could provide important insights into how shoreline and wetland communities will respond to a changing climate. This idea also builds resilience into the overall project itself, preventing a large

loss of investment if a particular island or plant community were to fail due to pests, disease, climate change, or other related stressors.

We propose that the county and the US Army Corps of Engineers consider using this Pigs Eye habitat project as a study site, in partnership with organizations like FMR and the University of Minnesota, to experiment with plant community assembly questions in the face of a changing climate. By monitoring these changes in the long-term, we could gain important insights that could influence how non-profit, local, state, and federal agencies approach the field of habitat restoration. At the very least, the islands should be planted with different assemblages of species, including utilizing climate-adapted tree and shrub species.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. I would be happy to discuss these further – please do not hesitate to contact me at 651-222-2193 x 33, or aroth@fmr.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alex M. Roth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alex Roth, PhD
FMR Ecologist