



**DENR**  
SOUTH DAKOTA

**DEPARTMENT of ENVIRONMENT  
and NATURAL RESOURCES**

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### **DENR Responds to Keloland Article on Lake Thompson Flooding**

PIERRE, S.D. – On May 12, 2020, Keloland News published an article titled *Homes, roads still flooded at Lake Thompson, why so long for the fix?* The article is available online at <https://www.keloland.com/news/investigates/homes-roads-still-flooded-at-lake-thompson-why-so-long-for-the-fix/>.

The South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) reviewed the article and has the following comments.

Flooding at Lake Thompson is not a new issue. Water levels have been fluctuating above the natural outlet for many years (please see the attached chart Lake Thompson water level data) and are tied to natural wet and dry cycles. High water levels in the lake are not a man-made problem. However, any flood mitigation efforts done at Lake Thompson will have impacts on downstream landowners, counties, and communities. These impacts must be considered before mitigation actions are taken.

In 2012, Kingsbury County requested the South Dakota Water Management Board determine an outlet elevation for Lake Thompson. Following a contested case hearing and the adoption of a stipulation agreement between parties (Kingsbury County and the four downstream counties) the Board set the outlet elevation at 1687.5 feet mean sea level. The agreement was finalized in 2013 and represents a good faith effort by all the parties to ensure the downstream counties are protected.

In 2019, in response to flooding at Lake Thompson, the state advised Kingsbury County and other local officials on the South Dakota Water Management process and potential mitigation efforts that the Board could consider to minimize flooding impacts. In addition, Governor Noem toured the area and worked with impacted parties to set-up a special Water Management Board meeting to address the issue. The Board met in September 2019 and granted approval for maintenance of the outlet structure ([https://denr.sd.gov/wrimage/wrinfo/wr\\_div3/707-3.pdf](https://denr.sd.gov/wrimage/wrinfo/wr_div3/707-3.pdf)). The Board approved maintenance activities included removing vegetation from the outlet area, but excavation of silt from the channel could only be performed if a detailed engineering study was completed and approved by DENR. DENR approval was required to guarantee no structural changes to the outlet or hard bottom would occur. As mentioned above, the reason the Board required an engineering study was to ensure the outlet configuration would not be changed, the channel bottom would not be disturbed, and, most importantly, downstream landowners, counties, and communities would not be impacted.

Below is a timeline of correspondence DENR has had on this issue since the September 11, 2019, special board meeting. Note – these records are available for public review at the link provided above.

October 8, 2019 – Kingsbury County filed an outlet maintenance plan with DENR

October 11, 2019 – DENR responded to the County informing them the plan did not provide the necessary engineering plans and safeguards to ensure the channel bottom would not be disturbed

November 8, 2019 – Kingsbury County filed an amended outlet maintenance plan with DENR

November 20, 2019 – DENR responded to the County informing them that the plan lacked the proper safeguards and engineering controls to ensure the contractor could execute the plan without impacting the channel bottom

December 4, 2019 – Kingsbury County filed a letter with DENR requesting permission to conduct only vegetation removal from the outlet

December 5, 2019 – DENR sent a letter to the County approving the vegetation removal plan

To DENR's knowledge, Kingsbury County has not executed the approved vegetation removal plan.

Flooding at Lake Thompson is a complicated issue with no easy solutions. However, DENR has been and will continue to be responsive to the impacted parties and work to ensure the requirements imposed by the Water Management Board are upheld.

# Lake Thompson Lake Levels

