

“I haven’t sat on my beach in 3-4 years. It has been just too depressing. There’s been no water in the lake, and nothing to look at for several years. It is true that this year the lake has water - although we are still a long ways from the previous average depth of 6 foot. The lake has water because we have had excessive rainfall this spring, and many days of cloud cover that have reduced evaporation. But we’ll see what happens to the lake’s water when the big farms and dairies start pumping water again this summer.”

These comments are from Brian Wolf, a property owner on Long Lake in western Waushara County, one of the Central Sands counties in central Wisconsin. Brian is a PhD psychologist who practices in eight southeastern Wisconsin counties. His wife Susan worked as a registered nurse in a Cancer Treatment Center of America facility in northern Illinois until her recent retirement. When the Wolfs bought their property in 2005, Long Lake was known as a trophy bass lake. But the lake started to dry up in 2006, and in 2007 the property was assessed at 60% below its 2005 purchase value because the lake was disappearing. By the end of 2007, the lake was essentially gone, and virtually all of the fish had died.

It was apparent to Brian and other Long Lake District members that agricultural pumping of water was responsible for the lake’s disappearance. Other lakes in the area also had problems of declining water levels and receding shorelines. Brian became involved with corporate farm organizations and lobbying groups to explore ways that lake residents and farmers could work together to use water without exploiting the rights of others. But the response of the farm organizations and lobbying groups was that declining lake levels were caused by weather fluctuations and climate change, and not by agricultural water use. Farmers only pumped water during the summer months, and then extracted only the water needed by the plants. Besides, farmers in the Central Sands region were charged with “feeding the world”, which was certainly more important than using water for recreational purposes. So the discussions with the farming and lobbying organizations went nowhere. Brian and others from Long Lake also met with representatives of the Department of Natural Resources, state legislature, and various conservation groups, but any concerns about Long Lake expressed by these individuals were not sustained.

Brian and his family still have their Long Lake property where they hike, birdwatch, and enjoy the quiet and solitude of central Wisconsin. But they know that their lake will never return to its pristine condition when they purchased their property. Like several other lakes in the Central Sands region, corporate farming has changed Long Lake forever.