

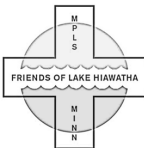


Lake Hiawatha

MYTHS VS. REALITY

There has been a lot of misinformation about Lake Hiawatha, the Hiawatha Golf Course, and the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board's master plan for the area.

Want to separate fact from fiction? This booklet is for you.



Before dredging & filling, 1929



After dredging & filling, 1934



Myth: “Lake Hiawatha was originally a swamp.”

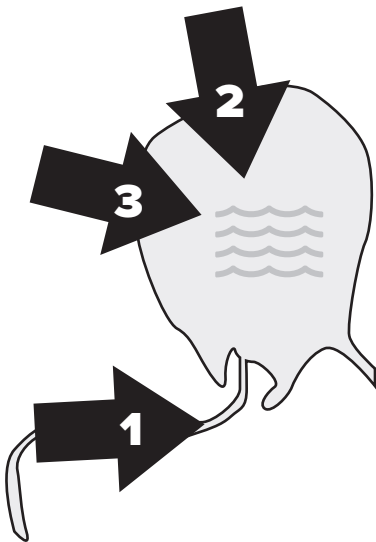
Reality: Lake Hiawatha is **naturally a lake**.

It was noted for **wild rice production** by Native peoples (maps show it as Rice Lake into the 20th century) and numerous photographs document it. It was dredged and its wetland delta area was filled between 1929 and 1934 in order to create Hiawatha Golf Course.

Myth: “Lake Hiawatha’s bad water quality is caused by Lake Minnetonka.”

Reality: There are **three major sources of pollution** in Lake Hiawatha.

1. Minnehaha Creek, including water from both Lake Minnetonka and Minneapolis storm sewers that drain into the creek
2. Storm sewers that **drain directly into the lake** from 920 acres of South Minneapolis
3. Pumping of 400 million gallons per year of groundwater and golf course runoff



Myth: “The Hiawatha Golf Course, and the history of Black golf at the club, is threatened by the MPRB’s proposed master plan.”

Reality: The proposed Master Plan would **retain & preserve Hiawatha Golf Course.**

It also proposes to keep and renovate the clubhouse, create an exhibit educating visitors about both Black golf and Dakota histories on the site, and reinvest in inclusive golf education. Going from 18 to 9 holes would allow the course to be raised and protect it from future flooding — **ensuring the continued viability of golf at Hiawatha.**

- Creating a destination golf facility focused on learning the sport and increasing opportunities for new players, including a 9-hole golf course, driving range, and practice facilities.
- Celebrating the history of Black golfers at the course and supporting and providing an introduction to golf for people of color.

Master Plan executive summary, page 2

Myth: “The Bronze golf tournament needs 18 holes of golf at Hiawatha, which is central to its history.”

Reality: The tournament has been held at **many different golf courses.**

The tournament has been held **more often at other courses than at Hiawatha.** From its inception in 1939 through 1967 — an era of shameful discrimination in golf — the tournament wasn’t held at Hiawatha, and was instead held at primarily at Wirth. And when the tournament was restarted in 2016 it was held at 3 other courses before it was held at Hiawatha.

The tournament has often played multiple rounds, an approach that would continue to be available.

	Year	Location
1	1939	Armour(Gross)
2	1940	Wirth
3	1941	Wirth?
4	1946	Wirth
5	1947	Wirth
6	1948	Wirth
7	1949	Wirth
8	1950	Wirth
9	1951	Wirth
10	1952	Wirth
11	1953	Wirth
12	1954	Wirth
13	1955	Wirth
14	1956	Wirth
15	1957	Wirth
16	1958	Wirth
17	1959	Wirth

From savehiawatha18.com

21	1963	Wirth?
22	1964	Wirth
23	1965	Wirth?
24	1966	Wirth

Myth: “We could preserve the current 18 hole course if the DNR lets us keep pumping and we continue as we are today.”

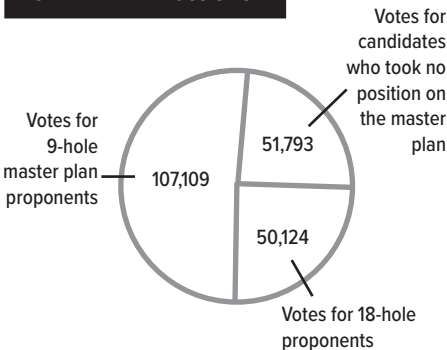
Reality: The course — and Minneapolis taxpayers — **remain vulnerable** to the next major flood.

As we saw in 2014, **pumping will not prevent a severe flood.** As time goes on, climate change will cause more heavy rainstorms, and the course will continue to sink, increasing the likelihood of serious flooding. Continued pumping also does not remove the city and park board’s obligations to clean up the lake, and it doesn’t satisfy Minneapolis residents who wish to enjoy the lake without untreated pollution.



Myth: “Minneapolis residents are deeply divided.”

**First Choice Votes,
2021 MPRB Elections**



Reality: Minneapolis residents **strongly favor the master plan.**

In the 2021 park board election, in which Hiawatha was one of the most prominent issues, all vocal 18-hole golf proponents were soundly defeated. In our conversations with residents, while some desire an 18 hole course regardless of feasibility and environmental concerns, the large majority consider master plan a reasonable compromise.

Myth: *“The Master Plan is expensive.”*

Reality: We’re playing **decades of catch-up**, and **inaction is expensive** too.

Since the '90s the MPRB and city have invested many millions of dollars to help the lakes in wealthier portions of Minneapolis recover from previous decades of environmental damage and neglect. Over that same time period Lake Hiawatha has seen virtually **zero financial investment in its water quality or habitat**. The investments proposed in the master plan are making up for decades of neglect. And with no action, **multimillion dollar flood damages** are very likely to recur.

In addition, the master plan offers a number of opportunities to defray costs, including concessions, wetland restoration credits, and city, state, and regional funding.

Myth: *“Hiawatha isn’t as nice as other lakes in Minneapolis.”*

Reality: That’s not true if you are a heron, beaver, walleye, turtle, loon, or any of the other **250+ species at the lake**.

Even given the very real pollution affecting it today, Hiawatha is the most biodiverse lake in the city. Many Minneapolis residents love **boating on it, watching sunsets across it, and fishing at it**. The Master Plan would rectify the major recreational and environmental issues currently at the lake, adding a trail around it and improving its water quality, and build on these natural assets, restoring its historical wetlands to create a unique outdoor classroom and wildlife haven.



**River otter at Lake Hiawatha.
Photo: Marilyn Miller**

Myth: *“The Lehman Bronze alternative proposal shows we can retain 18 holes of golf at Hiawatha.”*

Reality: The alternative proposal is not feasible, according to an analysis by Barr Engineering commissioned by the MPRB.

The golfers’ own experts, focused solely on the goal of preserving 18 holes, were unable to produce a plan that would prevent flooding of the course or be legal under state or federal law. MPRB staff tried and were also unsuccessful at crafting a feasible 18 hole plan. It seems **sadly clear** that there is no realistic way to continue 18 holes at the site.

“...there are several components of [the 18 hole concept] that would typically not be allowed/permitted by the technical review agencies and are explicitly prohibited by state statute.”
—Barr Engineering, *Review of “Lower Minnehaha Basin Solution Alternative 6”*

“What can we do...to fix these waterways and to have wild rice growing again? Ways to restore these landscapes rather than harm it? And I am here personally because I think the golf course is a harm to this area and is related to cold water spring. Dakota people, we don’t just put places as a dot on a map, this whole area is a part of Bdote...”
— Dakota history focus session participant

Myth: *“The only way to deliver social justice at Hiawatha is to retain 18 holes of golf.”*

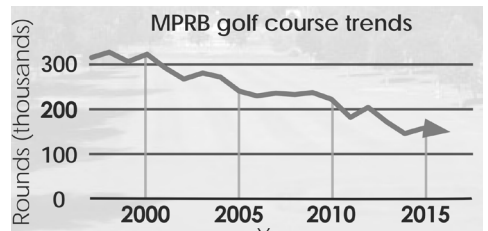
Reality: The MPRB must balance **many social justice considerations** to arrive at a truly equitable solution.

The claims of Black golf history at Hiawatha are valid and strong. So are demands of Dakota people to roll back the despoilment of this Native land. As are the questions of neighbors who wonder why the least-economically-privileged major neighborhood lake in Minneapolis (per Minnesota Compass data) is the only one lacking water quality remediation and full public access. **Compromise is critical**, and is the cornerstone of the Master Plan.

Myth: “Golf contributes to the MPRB bottom line.”

Reality: The MPRB golf courses **require our tax dollars to stay afloat.**

Minneapolis golf has had significant loss of revenue in recent decades, reflecting nationwide trends in outdoor recreation. 10 years of audited financials for the Minneapolis golf courses show that they lost over \$8 million, and **Hiawatha lost almost \$2 million.**



From the 2017 MPRB Alternatives Assessment

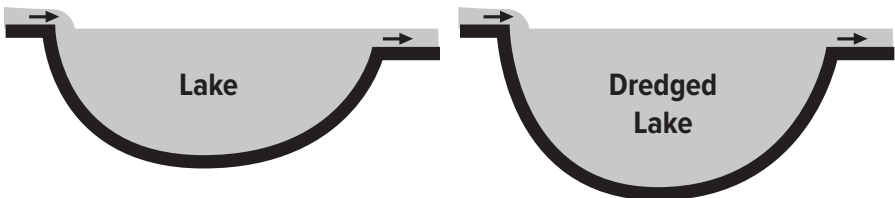
Relying on golf to balance MPRB finances — or even pay its way — is not a realistic budgeting plan.

By contrast, the Hiawatha master plan diversifies the finances of the park, enabling several non-golf sources of revenue such as concessions and credits for wetland restoration and carbon sequestration.

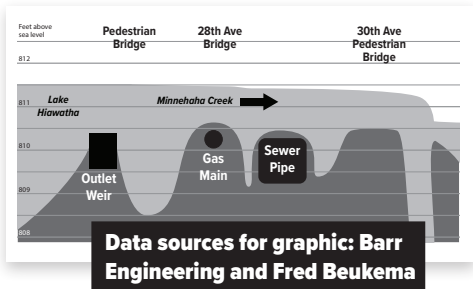
Myth: “Dredging Lake Hiawatha will solve the flooding and pumping issues.”

Reality: Dredging the lake **cannot affect the water level of the top of the lake.**

The level of the lake is determined by groundwater levels and the level of the downstream bodies of water. A dredged lake may be deeper and hold more water, but **the surface of the water remains at the same level.**



Myth: “Dredging the creek or removing the weirs will solve the flooding and pumping issues”



Reality: This would be prohibitively expensive & wouldn't solve the issues.

None of the weirs downstream of Lake Hiawatha are high enough to impact the water level of the lake. Dredging the creek could lower the level of the lake,

but due to sanitary sewer crossings under the creek, the most we could lower the creek is about 1 foot. This would have only a slight impact on pumping and flooding, and would require a cost-prohibitive amount of reconstruction, permitting, and coordination with other agencies.

Learn More

Footnotes containing in-depth sources for all information presented in this document: hiawatha4all.com/footnotes

Shareable Myths page: hiawatha4all.com/myths

Friends of Lake Hiawatha: friendsoflakehiawatha.org

Hiawatha For All: hiawatha4all.com

Hiawatha Golf Course Area Master Plan: hiawatha4all.com/masterplan

Get Involved!

1. Contact your MPRB commissioners and tell them you support the Hiawatha Master Plan: hiawatha4all.com/take-action

2. Follow Friends of Lake Hiawatha on Facebook: facebook.com/HiawathaMpls/

3. Follow Hiawatha4All on Twitter: twitter.com/hiawatha4all

4. Join our cleanup events on Saturday mornings: friendsoflakehiawatha.org