

# On record-high lakes, cabin owners' dreams underwater

[Kirsti Marohn](#) · Motley, Minn. · Jun 13, 2019



Homes and cabins on Lake Shamineau near Motley are threatened by rising lake waters. Buildings, boat lifts and docks have sustained damage, and some properties have been abandoned.

When Pat Held walks out to what used to be the beach at the lakefront home he's owned for 28 years, he's now standing ankle-deep in water.

Every year, the waters of Lake Shamineau keep rising, and his beach keeps disappearing.

"I'm paying taxes on land that's under water right now," he said.

Held relies on a cement dike and eight sump pumps to keep the lake water out of his house. He said he's spent about \$30,000 on the effort to prevent flooding in the summer and ice jacking from pushing up the shoreline in the winter.

"What happens every year now is the lake plateaus at a higher level," Held said. "It keeps going up and up and up every year."



### Lake Shamineau, Morrison

county *William Lager* | *MPR News*

Most Minnesota rivers that flooded this spring after snow melt and heavy rains have returned to more normal levels. But some lakes around the state remain historically high, causing property damage, eroding shorelines and frustrating lake property owners.

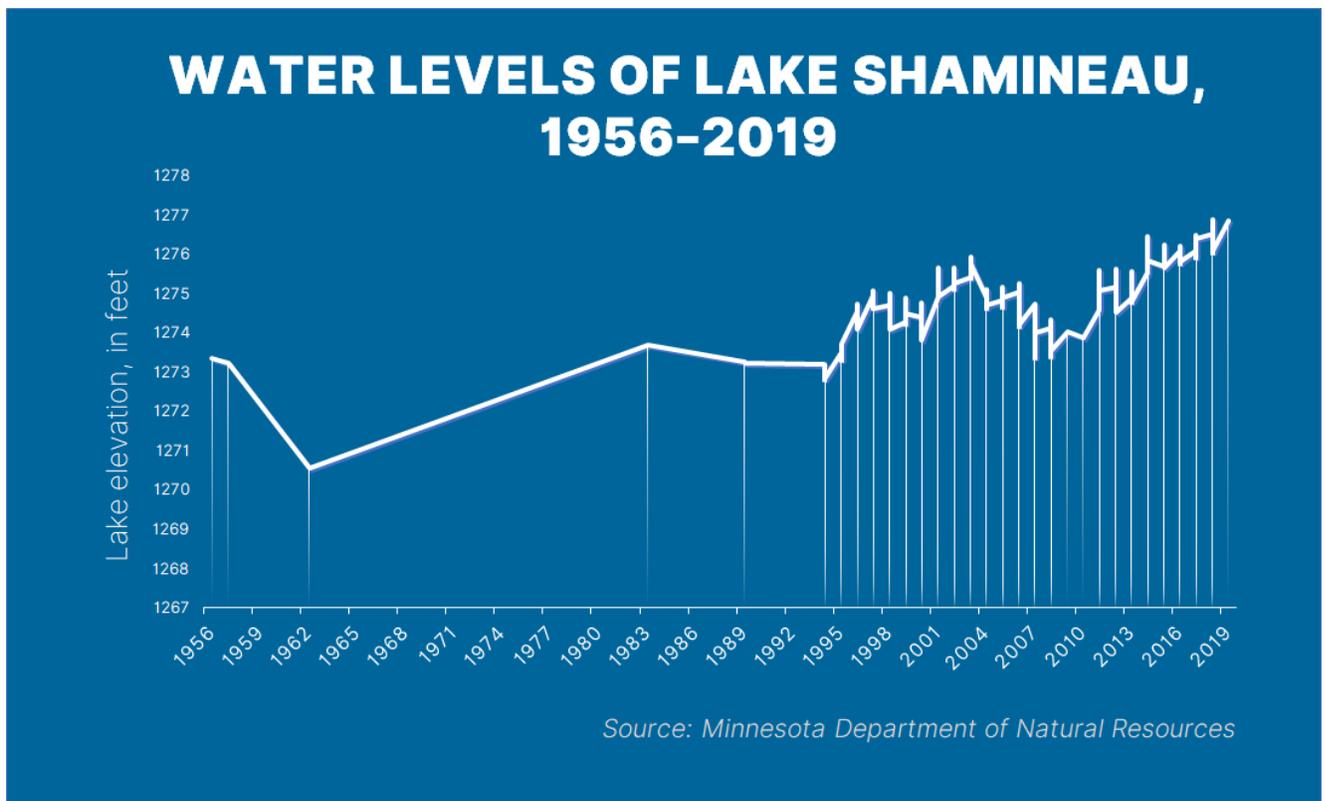
The last several years of above-average precipitation have posed a particular challenge to landlocked lakes like Shamineau, which has no natural outlet. Lakes fed by rivers tend to rise in the spring, but they generally go back down when the river level falls.

When there's a lot of rain, landlocked lakes keep filling up — like a bathtub, said DNR hydrologist Tim Crocker, who is based in Little Falls.

"If it doesn't have that release valve, you're going to see those get higher than normal," Crocker said.

It takes a stretch of hot, dry days for the lake water to evaporate. But Minnesota has been experiencing a trend of wetter summers and winters for the past decade.

"We haven't had a real serious drought in the state since 2013, and even a moderate drought since 2015," said state climatologist Pete Boulay. "Overall, we've had very wet years."



The water levels of landlocked Lake Shamineau have been steadily rising in recent years. Since 2010 the level has increased by three feet. *William Lager | MPR News*

Record levels

Lake Shamineau is a peaceful oasis in central Minnesota, ringed by century-old pine trees, family cabins and a Bible camp.

The lake's level has been climbing steadily — up about 3 feet over the past nine years. Waves splash right up to the edge of homes. Tangled boat lifts and docks are strewn along the shore. Some cabins have become uninhabitable.

"We're at the highest it's ever been right now," said Cindy Kevern, a member of the Lake Shamineau Lake Improvement District, which has taxing authority to protect water quality and address the high water problem.

"In everybody's head, they keep thinking it's going to go down," Kevern said. "It's been really difficult to get everyone to accept that it's really not going down, that we're in a wet climate cycle, and our water just keeps going up and up."

Lacking a stream or river to carry the water away, landlocked lake basins continues to fill swallowing beaches and the usual shoreline. Above average precipitation in recent years has increased the water buildup. *William Lager | MPR News*

Lake Shamineau residents want a solution. The lake improvement district is proposing to lower the lake level by a couple of feet by pumping some of its water into a nearby gravel pit.

That would require a permit from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and about \$1.5 million, either from state grants or by assessing lake property owners.

Not everyone on the lake wants to help pay for it. But the project's supporters say they're already paying, in costly property repairs and the loss of enjoyment of the lake.

"We know it's in the millions," Kevern said.

Relief for Lake Shamineau isn't expected to come this summer. Residents will vote on the lake improvement district's budget and long-range plans at its annual meeting in August. If the DNR signs off on the plan, construction would start sometime next year.



Pat Held stands on a rock that used to be on land, but is now underwater at his Lake Shamineau home. Held has been dealing with rising water eroding his lakeshore and threatening his home. *Kirsti Marohn | MPR News*

Statewide problem

Shamineau isn't the only Minnesota lake where residents are coping with record-high water levels.

In a typical wet year, the DNR gets two or three applications for permits to pump lakes. This year — one of the wettest on record — it's received a dozen, mostly for lakes and ponds in the Twin Cities metro area.

Among them are Indianhead Lake in Edina, Crystal Lake in Robbinsdale and Shady Oak Lake in Minnetonka, where excess water is being pumped into nearby Nine Mile Creek.

"We've been permitted to pump the lake down approximately 2 feet, so we're pumping as much as we can," said Minnetonka city engineer Will Manchester.

Pumping can be costly — and tricky, as communities also need to avoid causing problems for another lake or river, or spreading invasive species.

It's also not a quick fix. Manchester said it will likely be months before they see any progress on Shady Oak Lake.



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Keeping it natural

One factor that can exacerbate a lake's tendency to flood: overdevelopment. When rain falls on roofs and paved driveways, it runs more quickly into the lake because there's nowhere for it to soak into the ground.

Minnesota has had regulations that protect lakeshore in place since 1969. But on many lakes like Shamineau, homes and cabins built long before then are closer to the water's edge than today's rules would allow.

Lake experts say one step property owners can take to help reduce flooding is to keep their shoreline natural, instead of mowing right up to the water. Adding rain gardens with deep-rooted native plants also helps to hold water longer and reduce erosion.

Crocker said it's important to keep in mind that anytime humans alter the land, they're also affecting water's natural drainage patterns.

"All that changes how the water runs on the landscape, and how it can handle heavy storm events," he said.