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By Mike VanBuren

## WMU geologist says plug pulled on Kleinstuck three years ago

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The mysterious force responsible for siphoning nearly all the surface water from a marsh at Kalamazoo's popular Kleinstuck Preserve may have been at work for up to three years.

But it is still not known why the water disappeared. Thomas Straw, a Western Michigan University geology professor investigating the problem, said witnesses have reported that they first noticed the water level receding about two years ago.

Water in a pond-like area of the marsh at one time was up to five feet higher than now, Straw was told.

"That's not something that is gauged, so it's not a matter of record," Straw said. "But certainly those people are valid witnesses that the water stood much higher."

Straw said the problem apparently did not reach "a critical stage" until this year, when users of the preserve noticed that most of the water was gone.

"This is not a 1986 phenomenon," Straw said, "which gives nature a better chance of masking what took place. That means we'll have to do a little more detective work."

One possibility is that water flowing into the basin was unwittingly diverted by a construction project, Straw said.

"I don't have any evidence that that has taken place," he said, "but that's what I will look for."

Straw said he has walked around the preserve and driven nearby roads looking for anything that could have affected the water level.

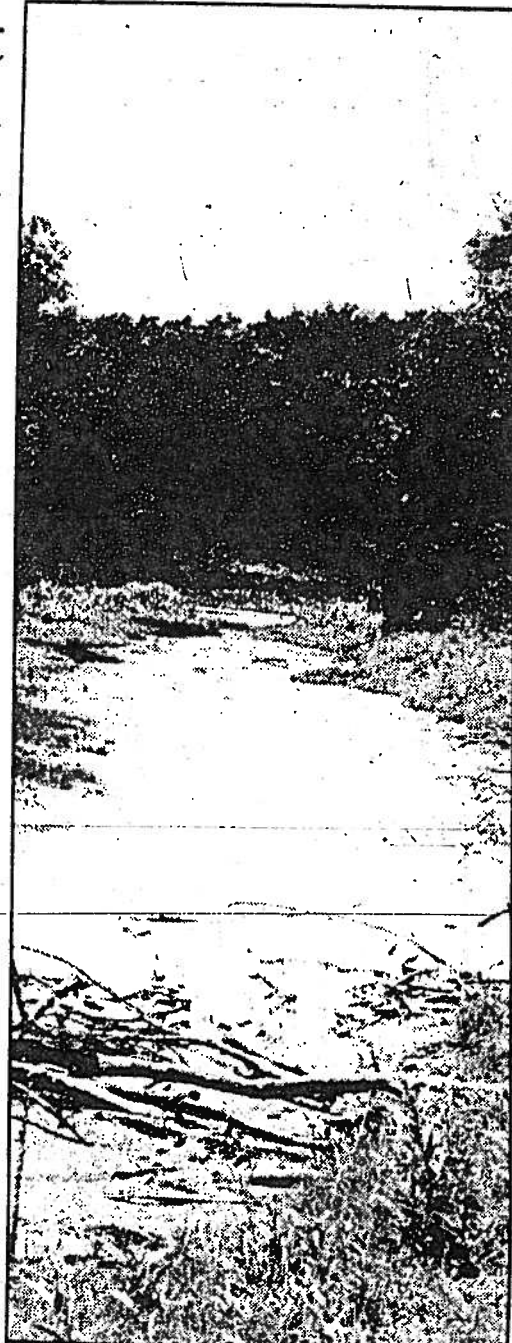
"The search goes on," Straw said. "We just really don't have a good feel yet for all the things that have taken place in the area."

Straw is being assisted in the sleuthing by WMU geology student Sunny Thiessen, who checked rainfall recorded at a climatological station of the National Weather Service at the Kalamazoo Regional Psychiatric Hospital.

As expected, the records confirm that rainfall in recent years has been above average, Straw said.

"We're not in a period where (the water levels) should be shrinking," Straw said. "That suggests, but doesn't prove, that water has been diverted from there in some manner."

Straw said he planned to continue collecting data, including aerial photographs of the area.



GAZETTE PHOTO / PHIL MITCHELL

Where has all the water gone?