

Water level fall in Kleinstuck poses mystery

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Where has all the water gone?

That's the question being asked by many of the people who frequent the popular Kleinstuck Preserve in Kalamazoo.

A large pond and marshland on the Western Michigan University-owned property has nearly dried up — reportedly all within the past few months.

But nobody seems to know why.

"We've not been able to come up with any logical explanation for it," said Richard Phippen, chairman of the WMU Biology and Biomedical Sciences Department.

Richard Passero, a WMU geology professor, said he and fellow WMU geologist Thomas Straw planned to visit the site Thursday evening to see whether they could determine the source of the problem. It would likely take a few days to evaluate their findings, however, he said.

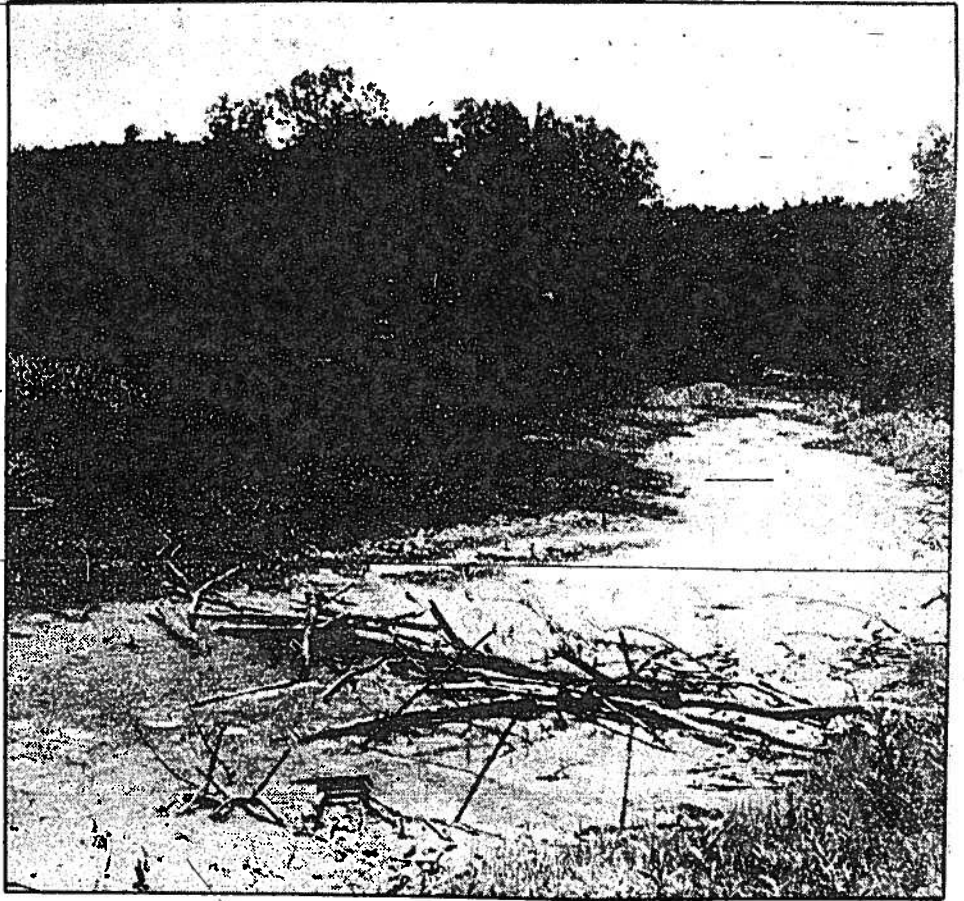
"The thing that is difficult to understand," Passero said, "is that all other lakes are up. That's obviously a response to precipitation. The whole system responds the same. (Lakes and ponds) go through very large fluctuations, but why the Kleinstuck marsh is going down when everything else is going up is a puzzle."

Orlin Loen, director of public utilities for the city, said no excessive pumping has occurred at a nearby city well field.

"Right now, I can't give you a good answer," said Loen. "I really don't know. . . . The pressures on that well field are the same as they were last year. We don't think there's any connection."

William Nelson, the city's public works director,

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GAZETTE PHOTO / PHIL MITCHELL

Pond and marshland area of Kleinstuck Preserve as it looked Thursday.

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said there has been no sewer work or other construction projects in the area that would have had any effect on the water level.

"I have no kind of explanation," he said.

Similarly, officials at the Michigan Department of Natural Resources district headquarters in Plainwell were somewhat baffled. A DNR spokeswoman said officials there weren't previously aware of the situation, but were concerned about any drainage of a wetland and would likely investigate.

Raymond Adams at the Kalamazoo Nature Center said he first noticed the troubling situation while observing birds at Kleinstuck in March. Adams said he checked with city officials, as well as a university biologist and some local residents, but could not solve the mystery.

"It's obvious something has happened," Adams said. "We've had a tremendous amount of rain. . . . Normally an area like that would recharge itself."

Adams said it is possible "a natural seal went out," causing the water to drain away.

"It could have been a natural circumstance, for whatever reason," Adams said, "but I don't know how likely that is. It happens in other places, but I don't think it is that common in southwestern Michi-

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— Richard Phippen, WMU Biology Department.

gan."

Passero said lakes and ponds normally represent the intersection of the ground-water level and the surface of the ground. What happens to the lake usually reflects what is happening in the ground, he said.

There are, however, some lakes with "impermeable bottoms" and levels there could fluctuate independent of the ground water, he said.

"It's possible that (the bottom of the Kleinstuck pond) was breached in some way," Passero said, "but that is a very remote possibility."

The preserve, located in an area east of Oakland Drive, west of Bronson Boulevard, south of Cherry Street and north of Edgemoor Avenue, is a popular retreat for joggers, walkers, bird watchers, photographers and other outdoor enthusiasts.