

Opposing sides see different futures for lake

By STACY VOGEL

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Both sides of the debate over water levels on Lake Koshkonong have ideas to improve the lake, but those ideas might start a whole new fight over the manmade lake.

About one-third of the 7,000 Rock Koshkonong Lake District residents seem to favor ending the court battle against the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and instead invest money into improving the lake's water quality, said Brian Christianson, district chairman.

The district has been working with the U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers since 2001 on a plan to put larger break walls in bays around the lake to protect sensitive wetlands, Christianson said.

The engineers have run into problems because some areas won't hold the heavy break walls, he said. So engineers have also discussed dredging parts of the lake to create manmade islands.

The plan could improve fish habitats and provide nesting areas for migratory birds, Christianson said.

But at least one member of the Lake Koshkonong Wetlands Association, an organization that supports lower water levels, would like to go a step further. Linn Duesterbeck said he would like the lake district to get a grant to study drawing down the lake in summer every eight to 10 years.

"Wetlands, it's good for them to drain out and dry up every so many years to actually improve the overall quality of the wetland," he said.

Occasional drawdowns would regenerate vegetation and allow the district to eliminate unwanted species of fish and repair damaged shoreline, Duesterbeck said.

It could also increase the depth of the lake by compacting the mud at the bottom, he said.

But Duesterbeck's view isn't shared by the whole wetland association, Chairman Rick Persson said.

“As a group, we’re not advocating (summer drawdowns) at this time,” Persson said.
“There’s not enough study and enough evidence to support that’s what we want to do.”

Christianson called summer drawdowns “completely unacceptable.”

“This lake really only gets used from Memorial Day to Labor Day from a recreation, boating, navigation standpoint, and here you’re going to take critical summer months and you’re going to drain the lake,” he said.

Summer drawdowns would create untold damage to recreation, public enjoyment and fish habitat on the lake, Christianson said.

In fact, one argument for continuing to appeal the case is to not give ground to the wetlands association, he said.

“We know that the minute we lay down, the next step will be for the wetlands owners to call for a summer drawdown.”

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