

Study regarding lake level released by DNR

By Jason Francis
Reporter Staff

A state study on Lake Koshkonong offers little hope for advocates of higher water levels on the lake.

In April 2003, the Rock Koshkonong Lake District requested that the lake be raised seven inches and that the annual winter drawdown be cancelled.

The increased depth would improve boating and recreation but others are concerned about possible negative consequences, such as increased erosion and the loss of wetlands.

The Department of Natural Resources released an environmental assessment (EA) last Monday, detailing what it sees as the impact the changes proposed by the lake district would have on the 10,460-acre lake. The report seems to provide much

evidence against raising the level of the lake.

Some of the findings of the DNR include:

- Increasing the lake level could harm some fish species and would not greatly improve the overall fish habitat.

- Increasing the water level would result in continued loss of emergent and forested wetlands along the shoreline due to erosion and increased areas of open water. An estimated 3,080 acres of wetlands adjoin Lake Koshkonong. Since 1950, there has already been a loss of 133 acres of shallow water wetlands, reads the report. The DNR also touted the advantages of implementing a summer drawdown to reverse the trends related to the wetland losses.

- If the lake level is raised, there will be no change in water clarity or turbidity. The lake has a maximum

depth of only 7 feet and mean depth of 5.33 feet.

- Raising the lake's water level could result in unforeseen effects on connected waterways such as Saunders Creek.

- The proposed depth increase would add approximately 50 acres of boating surface to the lake, representing less than .5 percent of the lake's total surface area.

- The raising of the lake level could lead to substantial erosion of significant archaeological deposits. There are 27 archaeological sites recorded on the shores of the lake, including one on Carcajou Point that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"Our expectations are that our request will be denied," said Brian Christianson, chairman of the lake district.

Christianson said the DNR's study did not take into account some of the findings in an environmental impact report (EIR) commissioned by the lake district and given to the DNR earlier this spring.

The EIR took several years to complete and cost the district several hundred thousand dollars.

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"The DNR cherry-picked data on the EIR and didn't include data at refutes what the DNR says in the EA. The EA is full of unfinished findings," Christianson said.

"Our hope is the DNR will take a closer look at what was left out (of EA)."

In order to complete its findings on Lake Koshkonong, the DNR used too heavily on established data found in textbooks and studies regarding other lakes, Christianson said.

"They relied on comparing Lake Koshkonong to other lakes around the country and world," he said. "It's a better and more accurate way to the source of the information, the lake itself."

Christianson said the district is

turning the study over to an "independent team of experts" to review.

"We have a team of scientists, each with a specific area of expertise," he said.

The EA also speculates that if the winter drawdown is eliminated, there would be an increase in erosion and damage to shoreline structures as a result of ice jacking.

The DNR has granted residents 45 days to study its report before issuing a verdict on the lake district's requests.

A public meeting on the document has been scheduled for Jan. 19 from 4:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Fort Atkinson High School Auditorium. A formal presentation will be held at 6 p.m., after which the public will be invited to make comments.

Christianson figures the controversy will not end with the DNR's final decision, given that it appears the ruling will not favor the lake district.

"I suspect this may end up in front of a judge," he said.

The public can view the EA on the DNR's website www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/koshkonong or at the Edgerton Public Library.

Public comments on the document can be made by calling Ken Johnson of the DNR at 608-275-3243 or writing to Johnson at Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 3911 Fish Hatchery Rd., Fitchburg, WI, 53711.

Johnson was not available for comment Monday.

Lake study controversial

By Jason Francis
Reporter Staff

The Lake Koshkonong Recreation Association says it intends to hire an attorney to oppose a recent Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources study regarding Lake Koshkonong.

In response to a 2003 request from the Rock Koshkonong Lake District that the lake be raised seven inches and that the annual winter drawdown be cancelled, the environmental assessment (EA) details what it sees as the impact the proposed changes would have on the 10,460-acre lake.

The report provides much evidence against raising the level of the lake, saying increased erosion and loss of wetlands would result.

In a Dec. 31 press release, the

LKRA states its opposition to what it sees as the DNR's advocacy in the study of the lowering of the lake's summer water levels.

Gordon Millar, LKRA president and retired constable for the Town of Fulton, said his group feels betrayed by the DNR after years of LKRA annual fundraisers that netted several hundred thousand dollars for the DNR's Bark River Hatchery near Fort Atkinson.

"We cannot, in good conscience, continue to ask for donations to improve fishing and recreation on lake Koshkonong at a time when the DNR says they want to simulate summer drought conditions," said Millar.

"We are shocked that after accepting our donations year after year, the DNR would contradict our joint

efforts to improve the hatchery."

The DNR's Ken Johnson said Monday, however, that the DNR does not have plans to propose a summer drawdown.

"It's not in the scope of opportunities. We are not going to propose it," Johnson said.

While summer drawdowns have been shown to improve other lakes, enacting one on Lake Koshkonong would have some drawbacks, such as "lost recreational opportunities," Johnson said.

He said the DNR would not propose a summer drawdown unless it had the support of the lake district.

Johnson also responded to accusations by lake district chairman Brian Christianson, who said recently that

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The Edgerton Reporter, Edgerton, WI 53534, Wednesday, January 5, 2005

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the EA was a biased document.

In putting together the EA, Christianson said the DNR "cherry picked" statistics from an environmental impact report (EIR) that was commissioned by the lake district, ignoring parts in the EIR that might aid the case for raising water levels.

"We used the information that was relevant and that we believed in," said Johnson.

While it's likely the DNR will not authorize higher water levels, the lake district's request to eliminate the winter drawdown is more debatable at this point, said Johnson.

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Christianson thinks the controversy will not end with the DNR's final decision, given that it appears the ruling will not favor the lake district. He also said the district is turning the study over to an "independent team of experts" to review.

Johnson said if the DNR sided with the lake district, other lake-related groups - which support current lake levels - would likely appeal the decision.

The public can view the EA on the DNR's website www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/koshkonong or at the Edgerton Public Library.

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