

Exploratory dredge at Koshkonong to boost boat access, habitat

By NEIL JOHNSON

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KOSHKONONG — This is one time when low water won't be a problem at Lake Koshkonong.

In fact, it's the big break that state, federal and Rock-Koshkonong Lake District officials say they have been waiting for.

Lake district Chairman Brian Christianson says this year's drought has lowered shoreline water levels at Lake Koshkonong to near-historic lows of two feet or less.

If the winter brings a hard freeze, Christianson said conditions will be ideal for the lake district to begin an "exploratory" dredge project at the lake's far northeast end.

The project, which could start as early as mid-January, would include dredging to clear out a silted-in boat landing at the end of North Shore Road and construction of a 500-foot rock breakwater farther south to armor a fragile shoreline that divides Lake Koshkonong and Mud Lake.

Mud Lake is a wetland east of the lake that officials consider a premier fish hatchery for walleye and northern pike.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have been working with the lake district the last two years to plan and write permits for the project, which the district plans to pay for.

Now, the district is meeting with townships around the lake to galvanize road agreements to allow excavating traffic to access lakefront roads. It likely will choose a contractor for the project by Jan. 10.

Depending on weather conditions, it could cost anywhere from \$200,000 to \$400,000 for the project, Christianson said.

"We need the lake to freeze and stay frozen. Trucks will be over two feet of water, with two feet of muck below it. We need a good solid freeze for scrapers and dump trucks to get out there and move around on a trail," Christianson said.

The purpose of the project is to improve boating access and safety and to protect wildlife and the ecosystem along the fragile shoreline at Lake Koshkonong.

"This project has created quite a buzz around the lake," Christianson said. "It really has brought all the user groups together in support from the duck hunters, ice fisherman and recreational boaters."

A key part of the project, Christianson said, will be to dump spoils from the dredged boat landing behind the rock breakwater, which is about two-thirds of a mile south of the boat landing.

Christianson said officials hope that the breakwater and dredge spoils will slow wave erosion of the fragile shore between the Lake Koshkonong and Mud Lake and help to regenerate protective aquatic plant growth and habitat alongshore.

The project could become a model for future dredges and breakwaters around the lake, Christianson said.

"If we can demonstrate that this dredged area does not fill back in, or it fills back in at a slower rate that makes it cost effective, then we could later do breakwalls in other spots to keep sediment from floating around and refilling in. It would be a 'one and done' deal," he said.

Christianson said earlier public hearings on the project helped the lake district to designate other residential shoreline areas, such as the Vine Ha Ha subdivision on the southeast end of the lake, for future dredges.

The project also included a grant-funded project to fix carp gates at a creek that connects Mud Lake to Lake Koshkonong. That work is grant-funded, and could cost about 100,000, Christianson said.

The whole project's poised even as the Lake District and the DNR await the state Supreme Court's ruling on water levels at Lake Koshkonong. The DNR and the district are in disagreement over how to use the downstream Indianford Dam to maintain water levels at the lake.

Christianson said the dredge project should show the public the lake district and the DNR can cooperate.

"This is a necessary step to demonstrate that the lake district can work with the Wisconsin DNR and the Army Corps in a cooperative, fruitful way," Christianson said.

Christianson said summer boaters and sportsmen alike seem excited about the project.

"I know when they see trucks out on the ice, they'll say, 'We're finally doing something other than going to the next level of court challenges,'" he said.