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| Tuesday, July 18, 2017

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Heavy rain affects recreation on the Rock River

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JAKE MAGEE
Monday, July 17, 2017



ANGELA MAJOR

Dam operator Duane Snow turns a wheel on a governor to adjust the wicker gates of the Centerway Dam on Friday, July 14, 2017, in Janesville. The gates remain fully open to allow maximum water flow due to high water levels.

JANESVILLE—An especially wet summer has taken its toll on the city with sinkholes, loose manhole covers, and flooded streets and yards, but the high amount of rain is impacting water recreation, too.

Residents who live upstream of the Centerway Dam said weeks of heavy rain have raised the Rock



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River's level, preventing them from enjoying the water the way they want.

Lynn Gustafson lives along the river not far downstream from the Highway 14 bridge. She's part of a waterskiing family, but they haven't been able to even take their boat out, she said.

"It's been terrible," she said.

A slow/no-wake order on Gustafson's part of the river means she and her family can't get their boat up to high enough speeds to ski, she said.

"And it's been very frustrating. My boat is still on the trailer," Gustafson said.

Craig Furseth, who lives farther upstream, has a similar story. He can't get his boat into the river because his pier is underwater. The water didn't recede in the fall and winter as it normally does, he said, and above-average precipitation this summer hasn't helped.

"It's really impacted the recreation on the river," Furseth said.

One might think the Centerway Dam could simply allow more water to pass to lower upstream river levels, but that's impossible, said Duane Snow, dam operator.

So far this year, the Centerway Dam's floodgates have been wide open. They're not normally closed until late August or early September when water levels start to recede, Snow said.

About 65 percent of the dam's spillway is controlled by nothing but nature, he said.

"We are passing as much water as we possibly can," he said.

As of Friday, the water level at the dam was 771.2 feet above sea level, which is about 1.8 feet above its average level of 769.4 feet, Snow said.

A few days before that, the water level reached at least 772 feet. It's been going down a bit each day, he said.

08:05AM



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About six or seven years ago, not long after the infamous flood of 2008, extra boards were installed on the Centerway Dam to hold back more water. At the time, water was too low to constantly operate the dam's two hydroelectric turbines, so installing the extra boards was necessary, Snow said.

The impact is higher water levels upstream. Gustafson said it hasn't been unusual over the past five or so years for water levels to be too high to recreate on.

The neighbors had different ideas to solve the problem.

A slow/no-wake order is issued if water levels get too high in Afton. Gustafson said the orders are given earlier than necessary and that changing the requirement would result in fewer orders and more time to enjoy the river.

Furseth said officials in Indianford are considering adding additional gates to the Indianford Dam to allow the passing of more water. That would result in higher water levels between Indianford and Centerway Dam, so Furseth is opposed to such changes, he said.

As far as the Centerway Dam is concerned, there's not much that can be done. Snow has friends who have been flooded out of their homes and knows others who can't enjoy the river because it's too high.

"I understand their frustration because they've got 50, 60, \$70,000 boats that are sitting in their driveway, and they can't use them," Snow said.

Still, Rock River residents should be thankful the Centerway Dam exists because it holds back enough water to make water recreation possible at all, he said.

"Without this dam, they wouldn't have any recreational water," Snow said. "Without this dam, all of the boats and all of the recreation goes away."



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