

## Lake District considering charge hike

*By Raymond T. Rhoad  
Special to the Reporter*

*Rock-Koshkonong Lake District annual meeting Saturday in Fort Atkinson*

When the Rock Koshkonong Lake District Board of Commissioners (RKLD) opens its annual meeting, scheduled for Saturday, July 29, at Fort Atkinson High School, the most anticipated agenda item will focus on a proposed \$20 hike to members' annual assessments, a tax increase on area property owners being proposed to help cover the cost of repairs to the Indianford Dam.

Lake district chairman Brian Christianson said the additional charge is needed to help RKLD replace the wicket gates and trash racks with slide gates at the dam - a move that will improve management of the water flow through the dam, especially during the summer months.

Christianson, in a story published in the July 5 edition of this newspaper, argued for approval of the charge increase, saying, "For the past year, the private Wetlands Club has lobbied the DNR to remove the wicket gates and trash rack at the powerhouse and replace them with slide gates. They

have suggested their duck hunting clubs would help fund installing new slide gates, which could discharge a greater amount of water during high flow periods."

He went on to say that if the Wetlands Club would help fund the project, which could cost upwards of \$250,000, then the RKLD would pursue DNR grants.

But these changes can't come soon enough for George Wellenkotter, a longtime resident who said the high water levels of late along the Rock River between Newville and Indianford have hamstrung businesses relying on river cus-

tomers and have constrained property owners from their right to utilize their property and enjoy the river because of the "slow no-wake" designations imposed on that stretch of waterway.

For Rob Davis, a Department of Natural Resources water management engineer, it's a situation that needs to be resolved, but it's an issue that has many moving parts that will only be fixed through cooperation and time.

But the fix to the problem could start with the replacement of the wicket gates and trash racks, which have been the bone of contention.

Wellenkotter, the concerned citizen, said the RKLD has enough money in its coffers already to cover the cost of the dam fix and district leadership hasn't done enough to keep the trash racks clean on a consistent basis.

He also said the DNR hasn't done enough to enforce the regulations that say the trash racks should be cleaned out on a consistent basis.

"What concerns me is Brian Christiansen's one-side [July 5 article] on the water levels. When the lake district took over the dam, the DNR had

# LAKE DISTRICT

regulations on how it is to be operated. In the regulations, it states that every day the wicket gates, which are the gates in front of the powerhouse, are to be cleaned of trash, trees, brush ... everything. There was a man ... who was doing it. He had a rake on a 12-foot pole and when [it was] cleaned out [recently by a contracted business] ... they took 10 quad-axles of debris out from the front because I was complaining the water would never go down. You couldn't get rid of the no-wake."

For much of this year, slow no-wake has been imposed on the stretch of the Rock River running from Newville south to Indianford. When the designation is imposed because of the high water levels, Wellenkotter said it takes a boat nearly 90 minutes to travel from the mouth of Lake Koshkonong to the dam at Indianford.

"When we finally got the DNR to push Brian Christianson [chairman of the Rock Koshkonong Lake District] to remove the debris in front of the wicket gates, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the wicket gates were opened and dropped Lake Koshkonong eight-tenths of one foot until 7 a.m. the next morning," Wellenkotter said. "That's how much water these two wicket gates let through ... they let one-fourth more water through than the six flood gates. That's how big they are ... that side of the river is 12 feet deep because that's the side they used to generate power through the power house, so there's more water that goes through there."

Wellenkotter also said that when the former dam operator resigned 18 months ago, he did so because, "all the leaves and debris were building up from the bottom and he needed an air compressor ... or at least something besides a rake on a 12-foot pole. He couldn't clean it out. He ... did what the DNR regulations said ... he cleaned the wicket gates every single day ... five or six years he did it."

The contention by Wellenkotter is that because the wicket gates and trash racks haven't been cleaned on a consistent basis, high water conditions behind the dam have required the county to impose the slow no wake designation ... a designation, he said, is hurting the economy of the area.

"What happens now is that the wicket gates are plugged again," Wellenkotter said. "I

told Rob Davis of the DNR two weeks ago that I was going to take pictures every single day and document that they're not being cleaned. What happens is the floating debris in front of these wicket gates ... ends up getting waterlogged and then it goes under the water level and it plugs from the bottom up. Now they're over 50 percent plugged ...

"Without these wicket gates being opened and cleaned, we've been under a no-wake since February all the way until two weeks in June. Memorial Day weekend there was one boat that came down to Indianford over the three days. The businesses down there - Off the Hook, Showboat ... they get no river business. Nobody wants to spend that much time to come and do nothing."

Davis understands Wellenkotter's frustrations, but also takes issue with his accusations.

"If George [Wellenkotter] is saying debris in the trash racks is causing a no-wake ... the truth is the extremely high flows is what's causing the no-wake," Davis said. "It's the high amount of rain. The dam's been fully open since last September ... maybe longer. It's just the extreme high flow and the Rock River is extremely flat. This is a huge drainage area with a huge amount of water flowing through it. These high flows take a long time to get through."

While both Wellenkotter and Davis agree that the debris building up near the trash racks and wicket gates are an issue that needs fixing, Wellenkotter contends the lake district officials have been dragging their feet, while the DNR hasn't done enough to provide motivation to get the repairs implemented.

For instance, Wellenkotter said the state agency could use fines against the lake district to encourage a regular routine for cleaning out the trash racks.

Davis said the agency has the authority to fine, but that in his 10 years on the job, he has never done so.

"Here's how it goes down," Davis said about the current situation. "George calls me and says, 'Rob, they haven't been cleaning the trash racks.' And I say, 'OK, let me check on it for you.' So, I reach out to the lake district and I say, 'will you please either confirm they are cleaned or clean them?' Basically I pass along the complaint

## If you go...

### Annual meeting of RKLD electors

Saturday, July 29

Fort Atkinson High School  
925 Lexington Blvd  
Fort Atkinson, 53538

Registration/doors open at  
8:30 a.m.

Program starts at 9 a.m.

and then they either get their guy out there to clean them if they haven't been cleaned that day, or they confirm they've been cleaned.

"Yes, we have the authority to fine the lake district, if they weren't cleaning it. If I would reach out to them and say that there is a complaint the trash racks are not being cleaned and they would say, 'take a hike,' yeah, absolutely we have authority to give them a citation. But they've been cooperative. We certainly have someone like George who lives in the area and informs us. But we've got staff in the area, we've got wardens that drive by - these people are passing pictures along to me ..."

Wellenkotter didn't agree with Davis's assessment.

"If I was caught taking too many fish or for a hunting violation, I would get fined immediately," Wellenkotter said. "They know what's going on here, yet there are no citations issued. They are impacting hundreds of landowners - there are over 100 landowners on the river from Newville to Indianford."

Christianson told The Reporter in a voicemail received this past weekend that the district board was not going to provide a statement about the issue prior to the annual meeting.

"We're not going to do anything with the media ahead of this Saturday's annual meeting," he said.

Christianson also went on to say, "I'm not going to get into a 'he said-she said' conversation with people who are just expressing their opinions ... and have no practical knowledge of how that dam operates. I'm going to leave it to the experts."

The expert to which Christianson refers is Rob Montgomery, PE, D.WRE, a professor of practice at UW Madison's Civil and Environ-

mental Engineering Department.

Montgomery will be on hand at Saturday's meeting to present a full explanation of the hydraulic data for the Indianford Dam and its impact on the lake level at Lake Koshkonong.

In his article last week, Christianson wrote: "Because the spillway at the Indianford Dam is lower than the elevation of Lake Koshkonong, the lake and Rock River is always in a state of discharge, even when all gates are fully closed. Mother Nature's rain and snow is to blame for high water. Rob [Montgomery] will explain how the dam can only slow down the draining of the lake when dry and drought conditions hit the area, usually during July and August."

However, Wellenkotter is more concerned with the here and now and the impact on the area residents being caused by the current high water levels.

"I told the DNR that I don't mind giving somebody 2.6 inches more water. But when they can't get rid of the water we have, it puts us that much closer to a no-wake every time it rains. Now the way it looks, we're not going to be able to use the river all of July and all of August because of the height right now.

"So, you're taking all the property owners from Newville to Indianford who have water skis, [personal watercraft], and pleasure boats and basically, they can't use them. [There's] a huge impact on the economics of all these people that want to vacation on their property.

"I just feel somebody has to step up and bring the other side ... if there's money available and you know there's a problem - let's fix it. I've lived in Indianford for 66 years. I know how it should operate and I just think it's unfair for a property owner or anyone who wants recreation to be limited ..."

Davis said he is hoping for resolution to the issue.

"Whether as a DNR employee or as a person or a citizen, nobody wants to see 'slow no-wake.' You want to see people be able to recreate how they choose and when you get times of high flows, which cause higher elevations, people can't do what they like to do. They can't get out there and boat because it takes [a long time] ... to go five or six miles in a boat in a slow no-wake speed ... The purpose of the slow no-wake is to protect the shorelines and property. It's unfortunate, but there is a reason for it."