

OUR VIEWS

Lake district deserves applause for decisive vote

Choppy seas roll across shallow lakes when winds blow. The waves erode shorelines.

That's the case on Lake Koshkonong. The lake, which you can see to your east as you cross the Interstate 90/39 bridge over the Rock River at Newville, is a massive flowage created by a downstream dam. It's one of Wisconsin's largest lakes, but its average depth is only between 5 and 8 feet.

State and federal officials are studying the lake to determine the viability of a proposal that could solve two problems. Dredging would add depth to parts of the lake, while the material dug out could create islands that would ease erosion.

That takes money, of course. We appreciate the decisive step forward that Rock-Koshkonong Lake District property owners took Saturday when they voted unanimously at their annual meeting to boost by \$15 each parcel's special project fee. The money will help cover the study's expected \$40,000 shortfall.

For years, interest groups have sparred over the value of winter drawdowns. Boaters and anglers want more water, particularly those who've seen mudflats emerge around piers where water once stood. Duck hunters and others argue that raising the lake's level will hurt wetland ecology.



All parties, however, seemingly see eye to eye on the value of dredging.

"We have widespread agreement that if we do nothing at all, then the lake will continue to degenerate over the next 20 years," district Chairman Brian Christianson said in a news release Monday. "We will see more shoreline erosion, more sedimentation, more invasive species and more rough fish infestation."

The \$15 extra paid by each property owner will cover preliminary engineering costs that haven't already been funded by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state Department of Natural Resources.

The study was supposed to be done by October but now likely won't be finished until year's end, Christianson said. The entire study was expected to cost \$400,000 and use various funding sources, but budget squeezes including DNR staffing and service cutbacks are causing the shortfall.

"We didn't want to shut the engineering projects down and try to restart it in the spring," Christianson told the Gazette. "We asked our taxpayers if we want to see this thing all the way through to the end..."

Unanimity on the fee increase was the result.

The dredging itself could cost between \$4 million and \$6 million. Funding is uncertain, but Christianson hopes district taxpayers agree to invest money into a pool that also could include state and federal dollars.

Even experimental dredging to create a test island can't happen until the study is finished. District residents obviously envision the improved recreational opportunities and property values that dredging could provide.

Whether they'll so easily swallow the price tag for that is unknown. We applaud, however, their united willingness to absorb the study's funding shortfall.