

## OUR VIEWS

# Lake dredging should proceed despite concerns

It's not surprising that environmental concerns are muddying the waters of a dredging plan on Lake Koshkonong that seemingly had widespread support.

After all, a dispute over summer lake levels has been raging for decades and awaits a state Supreme Court decision.

"This project has created quite a buzz around the state," Rock-Koshkonong Lake District Chairman Brian Christianson said of the dredging plan in a Gazette story Dec. 30. "It really has brought all the user groups together in support, from the duck hunters, ice fishermen and recreational boaters."

Not so fast. The Gazette fielded calls from two readers alarmed that the winter drawdown coupled with last year's drought is bringing the water to near historic lows. While that would ease dredging, it might kill aquatic species, these callers suggested. In a story Wednesday, DNR biologist Kurt Welke confirmed that the drawdown could have frozen turtles, frogs, salamanders and insects that winter along muddy shores.

Still, the drawdown is within DNR limits, and the agency can't delay the dredge because it issued permits, DNR engineer Sue Joseph told The Gazette.

Wednesday's story irked Christianson, who responded in an email to The Gazette. He argued there's no dispute between the district and DNR because "it is their permit, for crying out loud."

During an annual meeting last August, district residents approved the project, which could cost up to \$200,000. It involves dredging silt from a boat landing at the end of North Shore Road and using it to reinforce a breakwater to the south that divides Koshkonong from Mud Lake. The project also will fix carp gates at a creek connecting Mud Lake from Koshkonong.

The DNR, noted Christianson, awarded a \$100,000 grant to this project, which could be a model for other dredging ideas. Though the DNR wanted a higher winter level, that demand can't be enacted while the court case is pending. On Friday, Christianson forwarded an email from the DNR confirming that the winter drawdown limit remains at the previous lower level. It's ironic that those resisting higher summer water also fear winter levels being too low, and Christianson said the current concerns reinforce the district's argument for higher summer water.

Yes, this winter drawdown might have killed some creatures, though Christianson believes none are among endangered species and says "there's no massive die-off of critters." Overall, the dredging seems like it would be good for the lake and various users in the long run. Not only will it improve access for

boaters but the enhanced berm at Mud Lake should protect species using and reproducing in those shallows.

Koshkonong is a flowage of the Rock River backed up by the Indianford Dam. The dispute over lake levels that awaits the state high court decision is generally between boaters who want higher summer water and duck hunters who support DNR fears of damage to wetlands.

The dredging could happen this month if this week's thaw didn't leave the ground too soft and ice too unstable for the heavy equipment involved. We hope that when this project is completed and the court issues its long-awaited ruling, those who love Koshkonong for various reasons can find ways to work together.

22

