

## OUR VIEWS

# Lake district wise to stay the course on Koshkonong

The Rock-Koshkonong Lake District has been in the news in recent days for issues that deserve comment.

First, district residents earn applause for approving a small dredging project at Saturday's annual meeting. The experimental project would clear silt from a canal and improve boater access to two bays. It could be a precursor to a larger project that, if approved by residents and state and federal agencies, could dredge more shoreline areas and create islands to help control erosion and silting.

The approved project still needs an environmental review. The district would spend about \$200,000 and pay in part with a \$50 per-parcel fee that residents approved Saturday.

Residents also made another wise move in agreeing to use money from a maintenance fund so the Indianford Dam might again generate electricity. The district owns the dam, and if it can upgrade it without modifying stream flow, the district could use profits from electrical generation to fund lake projects.

Finally, on July 21, an appeals court ruled against the district's demands for increasing the lake's water level. The district wants to raise the state's sixth largest lake during summer and eliminate winter drawdowns to improve recreational value of properties and buoy area business.

District Chairman Brian Christianson vows to take the case to the state Supreme Court. At this point, that would be a sensible idea.

In 2006, after an administrative law judge sided with the state Department of Natural Resources and against the district's desires, we urged both sides to put this longstanding dispute behind them, move on and work together. But in 2008, after Rock County Judge Daniel Dillon again sided with the DNR, we reversed course and urged the district to appeal.

Why?

First, at the district's 2008 annual meeting, residents favored taking this legal battle all the way to the high court, if need be.

Second, the district has already sunk hundreds of thousands of dollars in this fight. Why abandon that investment now?

Third, Dillon's interpretation seemed to suggest that the DNR perhaps is being unreasonable and opened a window to further appeals.

Finally, if the district doesn't appeal, advocates of higher water will never put their frustrations to rest. They always will wonder what might have been.

This battle has raged more than two decades and pits neighbor against neighbor. Duck hunters support the DNR and fear damage to wetlands and other waterfowl habitat. The Indianford Dam creates this shallow lake by backing up the Rock River. Some residents look out at docks on dry land and wish they could use their boats. They wonder why they must pay high property taxes for waterfront land on a lake they can seldom enjoy. Businesses bemoan the loss of revenue when summer residents stay away because of low water.

We hope that when court proceedings are exhausted, the two sides haven't become so bitter that they can't set sail together on other projects to improve the lake.