

Lake level battle to continue

Lake district board receives voter "mandate"

8-3-05

By Jason Francis
Reporter Staff

A strong majority of Rock-Koshkonong Lake District residents registered a vote of confidence in the district board Saturday by approving the district's 2006 budget at the annual meeting.

The message was sent that residents want the board to continue battling the Department of Natural Resources over its refusal to grant the district's request to raise Lake Koshkonong's water level by about 7 inches, even if the fight means higher special assessments on dis-

trict property owners.

"There is no other way to look at this then as an overwhelming mandate for us to see this through to the end," said lake district board chairman Brian Christianson.

Assessments made on the district's approximately 4,000 parcels will increase \$5, from \$45 up to \$50. The increase will generate an additional \$20,000 for legal fees and other costs associated with the battle against the DNR.

Last year, the special assessment per parcel was raised from \$25 to \$45 due to legal and other costs associated with the district's request to

the DNR.

In April, the DNR denied the request and the lake district filed a formal request for a contested case hearing on May 16. The petition was granted June 3, but no hearing date has been set.

An estimated 500-plus people attended Saturday morning's meeting at Fort Atkinson High School.

Agenda items included the annual audit report, an environmental report from Rob Montgomery of Montgomery Associates, an operational report on the transfer of the Indianford Dam, a report on water level proceedings and a budget pre-

sentation.

The 2006 lake district budget, passed by an overwhelming show of hands, totals \$200,000. It includes \$29,350 for consulting fees, \$10,000 for legal fees, \$35,000 for Indianford Dam maintenance and \$94,000 for water level proceedings. General government expenses, including office expense, rent and utilities, insurance and printing, total \$18,470.

Christianson said a little less than \$100,000 will be used from the budget in support of the lake district's case for raising the water level.

(Continued on page 5)

Lake district

Continued from page 1

The lake district board hopes to return the annual special assessment to \$25 per parcel once the legal wranglings are completed, reads a lake district publication.

Some property owners in attendance Saturday spoke in opposition to the continuation of the battle between the lake district and the DNR, but no motions were made to alter the district's budget as a result.

One motion was made to add \$10,000 to the budget for a dredging study. The motion, which would have added an additional \$2.50 to the parcel assessments, was denied by the crowd.

The meeting also featured the election of two pro-higher water level candidates to serve terms on the lake district board expiring in 2008. Incumbent Frank Micale won another term with 475 votes. Newcomer Jeff Folk won the other seat with 507 votes.

The third candidate, Norbert Johnson, received 112 votes.

The board's other incumbent, Jerry Richardson, has stepped down from the district board. Richardson was a founding member of the lake district and served as treasurer.

According to the lake district,

increasing the summer lake levels would increase the navigable area of the lake by 50 to 100 acres.

However, Christianson has said that the increased depths would not lead to boats traveling into new areas of the lake. Instead, the change was proposed to address boat safety issues and allow some piers to be shortened.

According to the DNR's environmental assessment (EA) regarding the district's request, many negative impacts would likely occur if water levels were raised, including reduced aerial coverage and diversity of the emergent aquatic plant community, increased wave erosion on unprotected wetland shorelines, more rough-fish access to shallow marshes, reduced emergent aquatic life and reduced aquatic insect populations.

However, while compiling the EA, the lake district accused the DNR of cherry-picking statistics from an environmental impact report (EIR) that was commissioned by the lake district, ignoring data in the EIR that might aid the case for the lake district's request.

Christianson maintains that the data is on the side of the lake district.