



Local News

DNR, lake district meet over Koshkonong's future

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In an ideal world, Lake Koshkonong would be deep enough for boats and anglers and shallow enough to encourage water clarity and the growth of wetland plants.

Until that time, however, the debate between the state Department of Natural Resources and the Rock Koshkonong Lake District about winter lake water levels will continue.

After a daylong meeting this week, the two groups agreed on one thing: It was a good first step, but plenty still needs to be done.

The meeting was a follow-up session to a Feb. 17 tour of Lake Koshkonong. The goal was to collect the scientific opinions of biologists, botanists and engineers regarding the water level management of the lake and its impacts on property owners and recreational users such as boaters, anglers and hunters.

The DNR has lowered the water level in the 10,400-acre lake every winter since 1982. The purpose is to mimic the natural conditions that existed before the Indianford Dam was built at the southern tip of the lake.

This year, some residents complained that the draw down was simply too much and exposed huge amounts of shoreline in front of their homes. They worry that woodland plants will creep into the lakebed and aquatic plants will die off.

The DNR says it doesn't happen that way.

Ken Johnson, DNR water leader for the Lower Rock River Basin, said this year's draw down was more noticeable because this is the first time the dam's wicket gates have been fully functioning.

At the meeting, the group looked at the impact of the water levels during the winter and summer months, and how an alternative levels would work.

Both the DNR and the lake district had technical experts at the meeting.

"It was very positive," Johnson said. "There was a good discussion between all of the experts."

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Jim Folk, chairman of the lake district agreed, saying that the meeting was a good start.

"It was more or less a starting point for what the best management plan for the lake should be," Folk said. "But it's a huge undertaking."

The biggest challenge is trying to balance the interests of everyone involved, Folk said.

"People have wish lists," Folk said. "There are people with property rights, hunting users, boaters, fishermen. We have to consider them all."

The lake district is in the information-gathering phase, and it will take time to wade through it all.

"We're going to try to keep a dialogue going with the DNR," Folk said. "We want to come to some sort of conclusion."

And if the two sides can't agree?

"Then we take the hard route, which is to formally request a change in operating order," Folk said.

The lake district will begin sifting through the information this week, Folk said. Another meeting between the two groups has not yet been scheduled.