

Lake district residents OK tax hike

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FORT ATKINSON

Double your money.

On Saturday, members of the Rock Koshkonong Lake District agreed to do just that.

With no discussion-and very little dissent-members of the district agreed to raise their own special assessment from \$50 to \$100 a parcel.

"I think any time you put all of the facts in front of the voters, the right decision will be reached," said Brian Christianson, district chairman. "We were completely transparent with all the research; we were completely transparent with all the data. I think the voters understand that this is a one-time increase in the special charge."

Much of the money will pay for the district's legal battle against the state Department of Natural Resources.

Of the \$400,000 raised by the special assessment, \$342,000 will be earmarked for legal bills.

The district wants to raise the water levels in Lake Koshkonong by 7.2 inches and eliminate the winter draw-down rules.

In 1982, the DNR suggested adding 6-inch flashboards to the top of the dam to increase the water level in the lake. That suggestion was contested in court and later settled by the DNR. The flashboards were eliminated and the current water levels established.

In 2005, however, the DNR rejected the lake district's request for a water increase. The case then went to an administrative law judge.

At Saturday's meeting, attorneys for the lake district said the DNR's current criteria for water levels considers wetland preservation but almost no other uses of the lake.

"I was frankly shocked by the assessment-boating, navigation and property values were treated as minor and incidental things," said lake district attorney William O'Connor.

When will the legal wrangling end?

The lake district has to submit a summary brief to the judge; the DNR has one last chance to reply to the summary brief.

Then the hearing examiner will look at the testimony and make a final decision.

"His decision could be one of three options," Christianson explained. "He could grant our request; he can reject it entirely, which would be ruling in favor of the DNR; or he could split the baby in half."

Would a partial increase be acceptable to the lake district?

"Right now, anything would be better than nothing, but we'd have to discuss it with the board," Christianson

said. "We'll hope for the best and prepare for the worst."

A decision is expected in October or November.

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