

Indianford Dam transferred to lake district

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By Dan Hinkel/The Janesville Gazette Staff

Thomas Schroeder followed a first-housewarming tradition Wednesday night.

The Rock County Corporation Counsel gave the Rock Koshkonong Lake District a bottle of champagne along with the Indianford Dam.

"I figured this might be the first dam you've ever bought," Schroeder said.

The county passed the dam outside of Edgerton on County F to the lake district in a ceremony in the old brick powerhouse. Actually, the county is paying the lake district to take the dam.

"It's been a long time coming," said Richard Towns, the area's county board supervisor.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources inspected the dam six miles down the Rock River from Lake Koshkonong .the Rock River from Lake Koshkonong in 1997 and asked the county to make repairs. The department told the county in 1999 to make the repairs, remove the dam or pay fines of up to \$1,000 a day.

After \$515,459 in repairs, some pitched in by Jefferson County, Rock County passed the dam over to the district with a first payment of \$100,000, and the promise of \$50,000 per year for 10 years for dam upkeep.

The district wanted to buy the dam to be sure it couldn't be destroyed, said Brian Christianson, chair of the Rock Koshkonong Lake District.

"This was playing defense all the way," he said.

Locals didn't want the dam ripped out because it keeps lake water levels high, Christianson said. Some Koshkonong property owners who want the lake's water level higher have clashed with the Department of Natural Resources and other groups who prefer it lower.

"Without the Indianford Dam, Koshkonong would be a mud flat," he said.

The DNR is expected to release a report on water levels soon.

While keeping water levels high is a priority, the district would like to turn the dam into a working hydroelectric generator again.

"That's sort of the icing on the cake," Christianson said.

The district will pay power producer North American Hydro to maintain the dam and study the possibility of generating power at Indianford. North American Hydro owns or maintains dozens of dams, including dams in Janesville, Beloit and Rockton.

Indianford's powerhouse has two metal craters where generators used to sit. Filling those holes with power equipment is a real possibility, said Rich Foreman, of North American Hydro.

"If we decided today to have hydroelectric power we could have it here in six months," he said.

The plant could generate between 400 and 600 kilowatts, he said.

The dam was built around 1850. The Janesville Electric Company enlarged the dam in 1917, and it dam was remodeled again in the 1930s.

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