

County, lake dwellers must share dam costs

Without the Indianford Dam, Lake Koshkonong ceases to exist. If the lake turns into a mere widening of the river, tourism dries up.

The people who live near the lake appreciate its aesthetics and its lure for cash-carrying tourists. Those residents have made major investments in the region, and they need the lake to protect their interests.

Some taxpayers, faced with a threat involving real estate, might lean on the government to fix things. The people who live near Lake Koshkonong are taking a more realistic and less selfish approach.

Two years ago, the state warned the county that Indianford wasn't going to be worth a damn without extensive repairs. Rock County owns the dam, but the lake stretches across Rock, Jefferson and even a little bit of Dane counties. We've said all along that those who benefit directly from the lake should help with the cost of fixing and maintaining the dam.

Rather than assume the dam was solely the government's responsibility, lake residents have stepped forward and agreed to share the financial burden. True, they didn't have much wiggle room. The county could have decided to take down the dam and let nature take its course. Most people realize, however, that the lake is a gem and should be protected.

Residents have formed a lake district, which has the authority to tax those who live within its boundaries. The district will pay \$30,000 per year for the next decade to help maintain the dam. Rock County will fund the repairs—expected to cost about \$500,000—and will put \$20,000 a year into maintenance.

It's proper that tax dollars from all county residents be used for a portion of the repairs. Many people may not actually use the lake, but it is a source of revenue that trickles through the whole region. Tourism creates jobs, and a decline in tourism means an increase in unemployment.

Jefferson County, which has agreed to contribute to the repair and upkeep of the dam, hasn't sent the check yet. We urge Rock and Jefferson county officials to work out the details quickly and get those papers signed.

Lake Koshkonong is a gem and should be protected.
