

Jefferson Co. OKs money for Indianford Dam

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JEFFERSON--After years of threats from the state, months of wrangling between counties and weeks of negotiations, it looks as though the Indianford Dam will stay put.

The Jefferson County Board voted 19-9 Tuesday night to contribute to the repairs of the Indianford Dam in neighboring Rock County.

The board vote, which came at its annual budget meeting, set aside \$75,000 toward the repair, which has been estimated at \$500,000, County Administrator Willard Hausen said.

The board also passed a provision to contribute \$10,000 annually to operate and maintain the nearly 150-year-old former power generating dam.

The Jefferson County vote is what many Rock County supervisors have been waiting for.

"I'm happy with the results," Rock County Board Chairman Terry Maybee said. "It's been a long drawn-out battle, and it's good to have it over and done with. Now we need the lake district to step forward and do their part."

Jerry Richardson, treasurer of the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District, said he also was satisfied with the vote.

"They didn't get to the level we originally thought would be required, but this was a negotiated amount," Richardson said. "We got a good number of people to turn out and contribute to the meetings and the public hearings. That was very gratifying. I think the board understood the seriousness of the issue and what it meant to people."

Total costs for the dam--including maintenance, water-level monitoring and a fund to save for repairs--are estimated to be between \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year.

It's unknown at this time what Rock County's annual share will be because it still has to negotiate that sum with the lake district.

Possibilities include having the lake district take over the dam completely or entering into a shared ownership contract.

In the 2001 budget, however, the county approved \$49,320 for dam operations and repairs.

The dam is owned by Rock County and forms Lake Koshkonong, most of which is in Jefferson County. The state Department of Natural Resources has ordered Rock County to repair or remove the dam.

At Tuesday night's meeting, some Jefferson County supervisors expressed concern about making an ongoing contribution for the next 10 years.

They said the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District, made up of property owners on the lake, should cover those costs because they benefit the most from the lake, which would revert to marshland if the dam were removed.

Jefferson County Corporation Counsel Phil Ristow said earlier that the county's contribution could be reduced if Rock County receives any grants toward the repair or any funds from the private operator who plans to generate electric power from the dam.

The vote is good news for dam supporters. Some Rock County supervisors, tired of waiting for Jefferson County supervisors to ante up for a lake that primarily is in their county, wanted to move forward with dam removal.

Earlier this year, Rock County Supervisor Scott Feldt asked Corporation Counsel Tom Schroeder to draft a resolution approving the removal of the dam if no decision could be reached by Dec. 31.

"I told people at a Jefferson County public hearing last Thursday that I wasn't interested in yanking the dam, per se," Feldt said in a interview Tuesday. "I want the two counties and the lake district to work together to keep the dam so it may be enjoyed by current residents and the generations to come. Shared benefits should mean shared responsibilities."

Feldt believes Tuesday night's vote represents a good starting point.

Earlier this year, Jefferson County rejected a proposal to share ownership of the dam with Rock County and the lake district. Under that plan, the lake district would have paid 25 percent of total costs. Of the remaining amount, Rock County would have paid 50 percent; Jefferson County, 40 percent; and Dane County 10 percent.

Dane County also rejected the proposal, saying it might consider donating a one-time sum of \$3,000.

Material from The Associated Press was used in this story.

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