

Sunday, April 9, 2000

OUR OPINION

Indianford Dam plan sound

The debate over how, and even if, to save the Indianford Dam in northern Rock County is a reminder that while the shape of most lakes is round, the borders of most governments are square. Managing the water quality of lakes usually requires intergovernmental cooperation, and the latest plan to save the dam is an excellent example of how to make a round lake fit a square governmental hole.

The Indianford Dam is located on the Rock River south and west of Lake Koshkonong, which is largely located in Jefferson County but which also has shoreline in Dane and Rock counties. The dam is deteriorating slowly and needs an estimated \$400,000 in repairs.

Some people say the dam should be removed, either to return the environment to a more original state or to save money on rebuilding and maintaining the dam.

- Others argue convincingly that removing the dam would be a penny wise, pound-foolish approach. First, removing the dam would cost more than repairing it - about \$1 million.

Without the dam, water levels on Lake Koshkonong would drop a stunning three feet. That would affect hundreds of millions of dollars of shoreline property and cost the area millions in lost tourism dollars.

A recent University of Wisconsin study estimated that removal of the dam would reduce the value of the lake property affected by the dam by more than \$23 million. Municipalities and school districts surrounding the lake could not afford the loss in tax revenue that would come with that.

The solution lies in a cooperative management plan for the dam, proposed by the citizen-based Rock-Koshkonong Lake District. Under the plan, the district would share responsibility for the dam with Jefferson, Rock and Dane counties, with proportional contributions based on shoreline values. A quarter of all costs would be borne by district

residents themselves. Of the remaining three-quarters, a 50 percent share would be paid by Rock, 40 percent by Jefferson and 10 percent by Dane.

The plan makes sense. The environmental damage that would be caused by removing the dam outweighs any benefits. Also, the fiscal effects of removing the dam make saving it a sound investment.

The plan being advanced by the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District equitably shares benefits and costs. It should get favorable treatment from the square counties that surround that special round lake.