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DNR tours Lake Koshkonong, collects input on water level

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Rock-Koshkonong Lake District Chairman Brian Christianson, center in red, shows Department of Natural Resources officials, lake business owners and other stakeholders the Indianford Dam powerhouse during a tour Tuesday.

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NEWVILLE—When it comes to Lake Koshkonong's water level, members of the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District Board wish the Department of Natural Resources would make a decision one way or the other.

“We want to put the water level decision behind us,” Chairman Brian Christianson said.

For years, the lake district and the DNR have been

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locked in a **legal battle**. The lake district wants to raise the summer water level 7.2 inches to **increase boating and economically boost the area**. Wetland and hunting club stakeholders side with the DNR in wanting to keep the water level where it's at to preserve wildlife habitat.

The issue eventually reached the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and in 2014, the DNR was ordered to consider the economic impacts of

raising the water level.

On Tuesday, lake district board members took two DNR officials, lake business owners and others on a tour around the lake. One stop was at a public boat launch on Ellendale Road.

Christianson said a final decision by the DNR would allow the two sides to work together on a list of projects the lake district wants to tackle. One of the district's ideas is to expand parking at the launch by buying nearby DNR-owned buildings, which the district could demolish. That would allow more boaters to launch in summer, Christianson said.

Right now, the Anchor Inn in Newville launches 100 boats on busy summer weekends. When the Anchor Inn runs out of room, owner John Kinnett said he directs boaters to the Ellendale Road launch.

The parking lot fits up to 50 vehicles, so it fills up quickly, board member Jim Bowers said.

“You know what people do? They go to different lakes,” Kinnett said.

Another idea is to work with the DNR to riprap wetlands and “armor” them to protect them from flooding and erosion. The lake district could coordinate with the DNR and Rock County to work on projects for multiple interest groups, Christianson said.

Both DNR representatives on the tour—Susan Josheff and Russ Rasmussen—also toured the Carcajou Shooting Club grounds along the lake at the end of October.

That tour was led by Rick Persson, a member of the shooting club and Lake Koshkonong Wetland Association. Persson declined to

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comment on that tour or his opinion about the lake level.

Josheff said Persson showed her and Rasmussen lake wetland footprints and photos of what the wetlands looked like before the water level was raised over time. He discussed the value of natural habitats, as the area is used from everything from hunting to skiing to nature walks.

“Their concern is the habitat will be compromised,” she said.

Josheff shares their fear.

“Probably the area of most concern is wetland loss,” she said. “Now that the water level's been raised, there's a lot more open water, and the wetlands around the lake continue to erode.”

Attorney Buck Sweeney, who represents the Thiebeau Hunting Club and wetland association, said raising the water level would be pointless. Sediment from the wetlands would fill the lake, and it would be shin-deep instead of ankle-deep as it is now, he said.

“We have no intention to compromise. Carcajou would lose all their wetlands,” he said.

The lake district did an experimental project years ago and dredged the windiest side of the lake. Officials were told sediment would refill it in three years. It took longer than that, but the dredged areas are filling back in, Christianson said.

One concern of those opposed to raising the summer water level is flooding. The lake district says flooding is often outside the Indianford Dam's control. Josheff agreed that's true, but she said wetlands need a growing season that would be restricted by increasing the summer water level.

“If it's up permanently on the wetlands, those plants won't grow. If it's up and down and up and down (as it is now), that's what they thrive on,” she said.

The tour stopped at the dam and shoreline along businesses and homes. At one stop in the backyard of a lakefront home, tour participants saw 300 feet of dock piled up against a house. The long dock cost the homeowners about \$30,000, said Bowers, lake district board member.

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“In my mind, we shouldn't have to have people having that long of a dock for navigation,” Bowers said. “That's a large chunk of money to go boating.”

Raising the water level could reduce dock length by about 100 feet, he said.

Buckhorn Supper Club owner Chico Pope has 200 feet of pier that sit in water barely 2 feet deep. The supper club's revenue comes mainly from tourists in July and August, when water is typically low, he said.

“We sure don't want to chase them away to another lake,” he said. “It should be a no-brainer.”

Josheff and Rasmussen said they will factor what they learned on the tours into the DNR's final decision on the summer water level.

The department is still gathering facts and data, so there's no timeline for a decision, Josheff said.



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