

 URL:

[http://www.gazetteextra.com/20160730/rock\\_koshkonong\\_lake\\_district\\_accepts\\_dnrs\\_proposal\\_to\\_raise\\_water\\_level](http://www.gazetteextra.com/20160730/rock_koshkonong_lake_district_accepts_dnrs_proposal_to_raise_water_level)

# Rock-Koshkonong Lake District accepts DNR's proposal to raise water level

By [Jake Magee](#)

July 30, 2016

FORT ATKINSON—On what Chairman Brian Christianson called the “biggest day” in Lake Koshkonong's history, the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District voted Saturday to accept a proposal to raise the water level 5 inches.

Since 2003, the district has battled the Department of Natural Resources to raise the lake's water level by 7.2 inches in summer to improve boating and the local economy.

Various hunting clubs and wetland associations want to keep the water level where it's at to protect the environment and wildlife.

The state Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that the DNR had to consider economic impacts when determining the lake's summer water level. The DNR then came up with the compromise unveiled Saturday at the lake district's annual meeting.

It calls for:

-- Raising the summer water level 3 inches starting June 15, 2017. The summer water level will be in effect June 15 through Sept. 28 each year.

-- The DNR examining wetlands for “dramatic injury” every two years for 10 years starting in 2017. If it finds none, the summer water level would be raised another 2 inches in 2019 for a total of 5 inches.

-- The district developing a comprehensive plan to protect wetlands, including armoring wetlands and shorelines and possibly dredging parts of the lake. Much of the plan has already been completed, Christianson said.

-- The district presenting a detailed plan for how it will operate and maintain the Indianford Dam.

The proposal is a compromise the DNR devised to avoid another 10 or 15 years of litigation. That money can instead be used to improve the lake, department officials said.

“I think this is the best idea to move forward,” said Cathy Stepp, DNR secretary. “I think this is the best deal we can put together.”

Some of the dozens of district residents who attended Saturday questioned DNR officials about the proposal. One woman asked if the DNR will use objective standards to measure injury to wetlands.

Russ Rasmussen, a policy adviser to the DNR secretary, said objective measures will be in place when the department evaluates wetlands. If the DNR finds that a higher water level damaged wetlands, it won't raise the lake level another 2 inches.

Another resident asked why the proposed raise is capped at 5 inches when 7.2 inches is a compromise for the lake district.

If raising the lake level by 7.2 inches were part of the proposal, the department would face more lawsuits, Rasmussen said. Five inches is a “fair number,” he said.

“Why go there? Why not try some compromise?” he said. “Let's try it. Let's see what actually happens first.”

Other attendees supported the proposal and called for the district and DNR to take steps to raise the water level. Such comments often drew applause.

Only a few voters opposed accepting the department's proposal.

Stepp will meet with hunting club and wetland association stakeholders in two weeks to present and discuss the compromise.

Attorney Charles “Buck” Sweeney, who represents the Lake Koshkonong Wetland Association and at least one hunting club, told The Gazette they have asked the DNR for clarification on parts of the compromise.

If Sweeney's clients don't sign off on it, the DNR can still make whatever decision it wants, Sweeney said, noting that could lead to more litigation.

Even if Sweeney's clients agree to the proposal, the department can still face litigation from other parties who believe raising the water level harms their property, Sweeney said.