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Increase denied for dam modifications

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Posted: Wednesday, August 2, 2017 11:34 am

By [Kim McDarison](#) Correspondent | **0 comments**

Rock Koshkonong Lake District (RKLD) constituents voted overwhelmingly against a \$20 increase to an existing \$45 special district property tax.

The additional proceeds could have been used for Indianford Dam modifications, said RKLD Chairman Brian Christianson explaining the proposed budget item presented during the district's board of commissioners annual meeting Saturday in Fort Atkinson.

Some 100 electors, residents and landowners within the district, were in attendance.

The proposed "special charge" increase was put on the agenda as a result of conversations between Christianson and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officials, he said. Some suggested the money, coupled potentially with grants, could be used to replace aging wicket gates associated with the now-defunct powerhouse along the west bank of the Rock River at Indianford.

The grant was projected to be worth \$150,000, Christianson said. With 4,000 taxable parcels within the district, at \$20 per parcel, the increase was expected to net \$80,000. He said DNR officials had suggested that area hunting and wetlands clubs had signaled to them a willingness to contribute to the cost of wicket gate upgrades, which had been estimated at \$250,000, Christianson said. The estimate was reestablished at \$300,000.



Kim McDarison photo

Rock Koshkonong Lake District

Rock Koshkonong Lake District Chairman Brian Christianson uses a rake to remove debris lifted from trash racks attached to the Indianford Dam. Area resident George Wellenkotter, kneeling, hunts for more debris.

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When DNR officials asked him how much he thought wetlands and hunting clubs should contribute, Christianson said he offered a suggestion of \$100,000.

While the station is dormant, the powerhouse wicket gates still function as one of three pieces used to control waterflow from the lake. The other two pieces, as defined by Cottage Grove-based Montgomery Associates

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Resource Solutions principal Robert Montgomery, include a set of six slide gates situated on the river's east side and an overflow spillway that spans the river between the powerhouse and the slide gates.

The Indianford Dam impounds Lake Koshkonong and, through its operating order, controls seasonal maximum water levels. The dam is located about five miles downstream of the lake.

With last month's DNR adoption of a new Indianford Dam operating order, water levels in Lake Koshkonong have been allowed to increase by 2.5 inches this summer.

Annual budget

RKLD treasurer Ray Lunder of Milton gave constituents an overview of the proposed 2018 budget, showing total revenues of \$265,000, which included an \$80,000 total increase in the special charge, bringing it to \$260,000. Total costs were estimated at \$265,000, with a line item expenditure labeled "Indianford Dam Modifications," set at \$80,000.

The budget passed overwhelmingly by show of raised ballot cards with an amendment removing both the \$80,000 special fee increase and the corresponding dam modification expenditure, leaving an approved budgetary total of \$185,000.

The budget further showed positive year-end balances in each of three separate funds, including: a general fund, showing a year-end total of \$10,000; a lake restoration fund, with a balance of \$106,000; and an Indianford Dam fund with a balance of \$682,000.

Christianson said the Indianford Dam fund was established through resources given over a 10-year period by Rock and Jefferson counties. The money was issued as an insurance policy against catastrophic damage to the dam, like a 500-year flood. It has, since its inception, been kept whole and continues to collect interest, he said.

'The eagle has landed'

With a new DNR Indianford Dam operating order signed last week, RKLD's attorney Bill O'Connor reminded electors of the negotiated compromise presented to them by DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp, which they and the board approved.

Last August, area wetlands and sports clubs, too, voted to accept the measure. A public hearing on June 22 in Edgerton, presented the new operating order to the public.

The new order gives the lake district the authority to raise the maximum summer water level on Lake Koshkonong by 2.5 inches, in two stages, for a total of five inches by 2019. The lake district asked DNR to allow for an increase to the summer maximum water level on the lake by 7 inches 14 years ago, but was denied. Litigation ensued, resulting in the compromise brokered by Stepp.

While O'Connor cited the compromise as "a very important step," he noted the new order came with conditions, the first of which related to the second 2.5-inch increase scheduled for 2019.

O'Connor said the DNR had retained the authority to suspend the second stage of the order if it determined impacts from the first stage had "significantly contributed to severe adverse impacts to wetlands."

He said: "The department needs to know what the condition of the wetlands is before the modest increase is authorized in the first stage ... and then, a couple of years later, they need to determine whether those conditions deteriorated in a severe way."

To make those determinations, he said DNR staff had proposed to conduct "a baseline study," describing the process as one in which they would conduct field studies this year, documenting the condition of area wetlands, to be used later as a point of comparison. O'Connor said the DNR and RKLD determined members from both would be included in the fieldwork.

"Two things that the district expected to happen, that we were essentially assured by DNR would happen, did not happen," he said, citing a provision allowing the district to review the DNR plan for scope of the study. O'Connor said a plan of study for wetland impacts has not been shared with the district.

A second disappointment came when the district learned baseline assessment field study work had been conducted by DNR staff without them, he said.



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"We understand that that happened in part because some of the owners of the private wetlands adjacent to Lake Koshkonong declined to permit DNR field staff from going on their property to do this evaluation if any representative of the RKLD was also in attendance," O'Connor said.

Another disappointment came, he said, when the district learned DNR had "apparently chose to do all the wetland impact studies ... on privately owned wetlands and that none of those sites were on public wetlands."

Also stipulated within Stepp's proposal, O'Connor said, were two initiatives to be undertaken by the lake district, including a comprehensive lake management planning process that would focus on ways, other than raising water levels, to develop recreational opportunities while maintaining options that would address the health of wetlands, as well as submit a plan for the operations of the dam.

A plan for dam operations was submitted earlier this summer, O'Connor said.

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