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Rock-Lake Koshkonong electors nix modifying dam

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By Kim McDarison Special to the Union

Rock-Koshkonong Lake District electors voted overwhelmingly against a \$20 per-parcel increase to cover proposed modifications at the Indianford Dam during the district's annual meeting Saturday.

The proposed increase would have raised the district property tax from \$45 to \$65 per parcel to cover \$80,000 toward dam modifications including removal of the dam wicket gates, replacement of mechanized slide gates and removal of trash racks.

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The total estimate for the proposed modifications was \$300,000.

Water levels, in part, are controlled by operation of the Indianford Dam which is controlled by the district with oversight by the Department of Natural Resources.

The dam is located some 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.

Board chairman Brian Christianson explained that the proposal came as a result of conversations between he and state DNR officials.

He said the DNR officials suggested the proposed increase, coupled with resources that potentially are available via a \$150,000 matching-funds grant, to replace aging wicket gates associated with the now defunct powerhouse.

In addition, Christianson noted that additional funding would be sought from the hunting and wetlands clubs.

Prior to the vote by the about 100 electors present for the meeting, Robert Montgomery, principal of the Cottage

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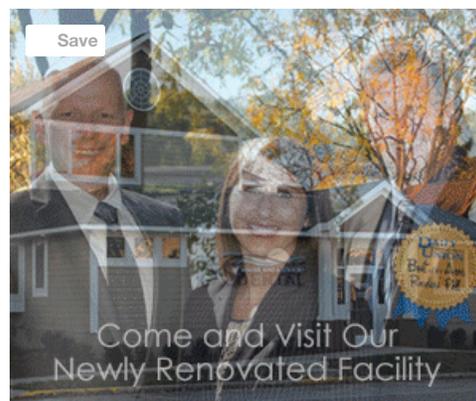
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Grove-based Montgomery Associates Resource Solutions, shared a hydrological review and analysis with focus upon surface level outcomes as they relate to water passing through the dam, and, more specifically, the wicket gates.

Montgomery sought to trace water levels and their drawdown trajectories within each condition under three types of circumstances: wicket gates shut, open, and removed. Under each condition, he said, the chart showed that water surface levels were at their highest when the wicket gates were shut, and at their lowest when the gates were removed, but the difference between the three water levels — even under current conditions — was modest, at about six inches, and that margin narrowed as the trajectory moved away from the dam, creating an even smaller impact on surface levels in the lake.

Further, he said, as water flow increased, looking at the 10-year and 100-year flood examples, the difference between the surface levels created by the three conditions — wicket gates shut, open and removed — became even less significant. As a matter of background, he said, current conditions were out of the ordinary, describing large amounts of precipitation, which created area flooding.

Water began accumulating in January and continued throughout the year, Montgomery said, noting that, from a global warming standpoint, it was concerning. Relative to the way the dam functions, he said, most of the dam's capacity is in the spillway, which is not dependent on the difference in the upstream and downstream elevations.

The opposite is true of the wicket gates, he said, noting that the difference in elevation drives the water through the gates.

Montgomery noted that trash racks had been dredged and cleaned in 2015. An RKLD website posting described the racks as "completely cleaned from top to bottom and about 20 feet upstream from the powerhouse." A debris barrier had been installed last year, he added.

Earlier in the meeting, recently contracted gate cleaner Todd Westby said he had been routinely monitoring and cleaning the powerhouse trash racks for eight months.

"There are no logs at the bottom and there is nothing plugging the dam," he said. Westby is contracted in the amount of \$6,000 annually.

Ongoing rack cleaning is a manual process performed using tools such as rakes. Longtime Edgerton and river resident George Wellenkotter disagreed with Westby's assessment, saying that he had photographic evidence, some of which he had shared with DNR officials, showing floating trees and debris in and around the racks, claiming documentation over a period as long as 16 days.

"One guy's saying it's not clean, another is saying it is — let's put a camera on it 24-7," a district resident suggested.

Christianson suggested that it comes down to an issue of trust.

"I think it's misplaced," Christianson said. "We (RKLD) have to abide by the DNR operating orders, and when we report to the DNR and say our racks are clean and our wicket gates are fully open, they are indeed clean and fully open."

Continuing, he pointed out that the board is entirely supportive of recreation and fishing on the lake.

"Why would we intentionally keep the gates closed and keep that 'slow-no wake' order on the river longer than we absolutely have to?" Christianson asked.

Countering Wellenkotter's remarks, the board chairman offered to go down to the dam and clean it out with a rake.

The transaction led to the assemblage of some 30 people on Sunday whom, after receiving a short, impromptu powerhouse tour, watched Christianson and Wellenkotter clean the racks.

RKLD treasurer Ray Lunder gave constituents an overview of the proposed 2018 budget, calculated initially showing total revenues of \$265,000 which included the proposed \$80,000 total increase in the special charge, bringing it to \$260,000. Likewise, 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.



The Indianford Dam fund, Christianson said, 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.

In addition to the budget, electors voted on an election of board members.

Three candidates ran for two seats, each carrying three-year terms, including incumbents Steve Proud of Fort Atkinson and Jim Bowers of Edgerton.

A write-in candidate, George Wellenkotter of Edgerton, was nominated from the floor.

The two incumbents won, with each receiving 85 votes. Wellenkotter received 25 votes.

A regular board meeting of the RKLD was held immediately after the annual meeting, at which time officers were installed, with all holders remaining the same: Proud as secretary, Lunder as treasurer and Christianson as board chairman.

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