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TOP STORY

River drops nearly 2 feet after Monterey dam removal

By Neil Johnson and Jim Dayton Gazette staff 13 hrs ago



Above: A man peers over the river wall at the Rock River in downtown Janesville on Monday. Since the city started removing the Monterey Dam last week, river levels downtown have fallen 18 inches, and water downstream has receded 2 feet in the lagoon near the dam. **Below:** Water has stopped flowing over Janesville's Monterey Dam after crews began tearing it out last week.

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JANESVILLE

A nearly 2-foot drop in water levels in the Rock River downtown over the weekend had little to do with the city tearing out part of the Monterey Dam last week, Janesville Public Works Director Paul Woodard said.

A stretch of river downtown has dropped 18 inches since the city began tearing out the Monterey Dam, according to measurements supplied to The Gazette on Monday by a dam tender at the Centerway hydroelectric dam.

In some sections of downtown, the base of the river wall and the riverbed are exposed. Those areas typically aren't visible except during low-water conditions in summer.

Some downtown business operators said water marks on the river wall show the river dropped almost 2 feet after city crews knocked out a portion of the Monterey Dam on Friday.

In an interview Monday, Woodard said water levels in the lagoon upstream of the Monterey Dam have dropped 2 feet since crews removed part of the dam. If the city resumes demolition later this week, water in the lagoon area could drop another 2 feet, he said.

However, city officials believe the partial removal of the dam was not the main culprit for the sudden drop in water levels downtown, Woodard said.

As the dam tear out began, he said, the river's flow upstream at Lake Koshkonong had slowed from about 3,000 cubic feet per second to about 1,500 cubic feet per second. Over the last two weeks, the river at Koshkonong has dropped a foot, according to U.S. Geological Survey river gauge readings.

Woodard said he can understand why observers might link an 18-inch dip over the weekend to the Monterey Dam demolition, but he called it "more a result of the (upstream) river flow being about half what it was."

"Even if the dam wasn't removed, what you'd see downtown would not be much different," Woodard said. "We didn't know until late Friday; we were surprised that flows had gone down. They just lifted the slow/no-wake (orders on the Rock River) less than a week ago."

The stretch of river downtown is more than a mile upstream of the Monterey Dam. City officials have said the dam's removal would have a lesser effect on river levels downtown compared to the sections near the dam.

The city has estimated that the dam's removal could permanently draw down the river 5 to 7 inches downtown. That's far less than the 18-inch drop Centerway Dam operator Duane Snow said he has recorded since Friday.

Like Woodard, Snow said a "lack of rain" and a slowing of water from upstream contributed to the river's drop downtown.

Snow said the Indianford Dam's tenders last week closed off some gates to maintain water levels at Lake Koshkonong. Snow said water was low enough north of the Centerway Dam that on Sunday he

needed to close the dam's gates to continue to power the hydroelectric turbines. That further slowed the flow of water downtown, he said.

Snow believes the Monterey Dam's removal also is a factor in the river's drop downtown.

"To say that all of it is attributed to the lack of water coming into the (Centerway) dam would be incorrect," he said. "To say that all of it is attributed to them taking the (Monterey) dam out would be incorrect. It's a combination of the two.

"But of course, taking that dam out significantly impacts that water level."

The city planned Monday afternoon to begin taking out a piling wall next to the Monterey Dam, but Woodard said that work wouldn't cause "much of a drawdown" to the river. He said the city plans to remove more of the dam Wednesday.

Meanwhile, city officials are headed to Rock County Court today for a hearing that could determine whether the dam's demolition moves forward in the coming days.

The hearing focuses on an injunction the Monterey Dam Association filed Thursday. The association wants to halt the dam's tear out until the group can contest it in front of the state Department of Natural Resources.

The association questions whether the city properly reviewed potential effects of the dam's removal, including the possible release of sediment the group thinks might be contaminated. A DNR hearing on the matter is slated for January.

Dave Brummond of the Monterey Dam Association said he believes the city "circumvented" the legal process by starting demolition after his group filed the injunction last week.

Jim Chesmore, dam association president, said the group's goal is still to preserve the dam, despite part of it being removed.

Glen Loyd, a blogger for The Gazette, stood quietly near the Monterey Dam on Monday. Loyd said he's concerned the river could continue to shrink.

"I still question in my mind how it's going to work out," Loyd said. "It's going to be even more shallow now. What's that going to do to somebody that has a boat and wants to put a boat in the water? I don't know. It's just a question. I hope it works out nicely."

Upstream, the Monterey lagoon's water levels already have dropped enough to expose the river bed. Only the northern edges of the lagoon were still mostly covered with water. The exposed mud had caked and dried. Whitish gray streaks along the outer concrete basin showed where water had been only a few days ago, like a fossil record in progress.

Dave Sheedy of Janesville saw the muddy lagoon as a reset button. A new shoreline could restore the area to its natural beauty, he said.

"The only thing that I'm apprehensive about is that in the past this was a picturesque, beautiful place," Sheedy said. "As long as that can be maintained, it will be fine."

Neil Johnson
Reporter - Business

Jim Dayton
Reporter - Janesville city government

