

Rock County wants help with Indianford Dam

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By Catherine W. Idzerda/The Janesville Gazette Staff

We've got the dam, but they've got the lake.

A review of the Indianford Dam economic impact study has strengthened the resolve of Rock County officials to seek a financial commitment from Jefferson County to help repair the dam.

A UW Extension study made public Tuesday estimates that about \$23 million would be lost in local property values if the Indianford Dam was removed. The dam backs up the Rock River and creates Lake Koshkonong, which at 10,400 acres is the state's eighth-largest lake.

Lakefront properties average about \$150,000, the study's authors estimated.

"About 84 percent of the estimated decline in local property values will occur in Jefferson County," UW Extension Community Development Joe Moskal told the Rock County Board on Thursday. "Another 11 percent will occur in Rock County, and about 5 percent will occur in Dane County."

An overhead map clearly illustrated Moskal's point: More than 75 percent of Lake Koshkonong is in Jefferson County.

A drop in property values would translate into big money for towns.

About \$469,322 in property taxes would be lost if the dam was taken out.

--The town of Milton would lose about \$50,336.

--The towns of Sumner and Koshkonong in Jefferson County would lose \$314,589 and \$85,972, respectively.

--The town of Albion in Dane County would lose about \$18,603.

Removing the dam would lower Lake Koshkonong's water level by 3 feet, Moskal said.

Along with a steep decline in property values, more than 1,500 jobs would be lost, many businesses would close, and the region's economy would have to adjust, the study said.

For many Rock County Board members, the report confirmed what they have said all along: Repairing the dam is as important--or even more so--to Jefferson County.

After Moskal's presentation, Rock County Corporation Counsel Tom Schroeder told the group that, to the best of his knowledge, the dam was not on any Jefferson County Board agendas.

"Now there's a surprise," Evansville Supervisor Scott Feldt said in an audible undertone.

Other board members appeared to share Feldt's sentiments, laughing and shaking their heads.

Jefferson County Board Chairman Wendell Wilson said officials in his county are concerned about the dam, but they aren't willing to commit to a payment until they know how much it will cost.

"Rock County Chair Terry Maybee has been to our board a couple of times to talk about it," Wilson said in an interview Thursday afternoon. " But we need a number, something that's concrete. I can't go to my county board and ask for 25 percent or 75 percent of repair costs. My board's going to say: '25 percent of what?'"

At a meeting Tuesday, Dane County officials said they would make a one-time payment of \$3,000 toward the dam's repair.

Jefferson County would only be interested in a one-time payment as well, Wilson said.

"Most of our county doesn't benefit," said Wilson. "We've got a township up here that doesn't even have a creek running through it. Why should they have to pay?"

Yearly upkeep on the dam could cost between \$50,000 and \$75,000, Rock County Parks Director Tom Kautz said.

Estimates are that repairing the dam would cost more than \$600,000, and about \$90,000 of that work has been done. Removing the dam would cost more than \$800,000, according to a 1999 study.

Watertown businessman Tom Reiss said he would reimburse the county \$75,000 if he receives the necessary federal permits to generate electricity at the dam.

Later this month, attorneys from Jefferson and Rock counties and the Rock Koshkonong Lake District will meet to hammer out a financial settlement and discuss future ownership of the dam.

Jefferson County's response will help Rock County officials decide what to do with the dam.

Early in 1999, Rock County received three official notices from the Department of Natural Resources: fix or remove the dam or pay fines up to \$1,000 a day.

Jammed wicket gates, structural damages to the dam and an aging powerhouse needed to be repaired to bring the dam into compliance, the DNR said.

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