

1966 study provided options for Koshkonong

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The Janesville Gazette Staff

A 1966 study of Lake Koshkonong as part of planning efforts in Jefferson County listed serious problems at the lake and presented a unique solution.

The study by Candeub, Fleissig and Associates, planning and community consultants, gave five alternatives to resolve serious environmental and economic problems at the lake.

The first solution was to do nothing, which the consultant concluded was untenable and illegal.

The second solution: "Remove the dam, drain the lake and begin development anew on the resulting riverbanks."

Candeub and Fleissig rejected that solution as unworkable.

"Records show the Indianford Dam raises the water level only 18 inches," they concluded. "Hence removing the dam would have little effect. In fact, weed growth, pollution and muck would present a far greater problem in a shallower lake than at present. Boating, fishing and swimming would be drastically reduced, and the lake would revert to a duck-nesting ground as it was when the pioneers found it."

The fifth solution was "The Atoll Plan."

"Under the Atoll Plan, a large private or private-public corporation would be empowered to dredge Lake Koshkonong and create a large circular island."

The dredging would rectify the shallowness of the lake, and the island would have homes, stores and public uses, in the view of the consultants. It would be reachable by a causeway from the mainland.

"The atoll in effect would enclose a spring-fed pollution-free swimming lake, to which property owners would have access rights. ... Boats could enter from the main body of Lake Koshkonong by means of a railway tram."

The consultants envisioned a restaurant, marina and a "boatel"--a motel for boaters.

Yet another alternative proposed a string of islands created by dredging. The islands would serve as picnic areas and fishing points.

These solutions were proposed to solve what the consultants saw as serious

problems:

--Serious water pollution resulting from effluent from septic tanks and treatment plants, raw sewage, agricultural runoff and road salt and oils.

--Excess fertility. Plant life that chokes bays, stagnation, abundant carp. The lake smells during the summer, and farmers fence dairy herds away from it because of the danger of pollution.

--Siltation and shallowing. The average depth is 4 feet, whereas the original average depth was 13 or 14 feet. Silt clogs the artesian springs in the lake bottom, depriving the lake of natural cold water.

And development along the lake had happened without the benefit of planning, the consultants reported.

"The lake area's development to date has proceeded largely in an unplanned, haphazard and unregulated manner."

The result was septic tank problems and a depressed real estate market.

"It is difficult to sell properties around Lake Koshkonong in the summertime. Local sources report that winter sales are most common, when the lake is snow-covered and the evidence of its numerous problems are not as apparent.

"Temporary, seasonal shelters such as travel and house trailers have been permitted to take up permanent residence at various points around the lake."

"Squatters," with no titles or claims, settled in, and tax collection became muddled.

"The location of Lake Koshkonong in three counties ... has hindered coordinated planning and problem-solving. ... A factor of some legal implications is that Lake Koshkonong, being merely a widening of the Rock River raised by the dam, is still seeking its natural shoreline, particularly on the east shore. Jurisdictional battles regarding lake levels have been numerous, dating back to the 1840s, when the Indianford Dam was constructed and shoreline damage around the lake resulted."

None of the solutions was enacted. A sanitary district, created in the early 1970s, relieved some septic tank problems. By all accounts, Lake Koshkonong water, though murky much of the year, is relatively clean.

The conditions cited in the study resulted from heavy agricultural runoff in the 1940s and 1950s, said Jerry Richardson, who owns a marina at Newville. Richardson's father was among those pushing the island idea.

One of the key purposes for the island idea was to set up a wind break in the lake, Richardson said. Heavy wave action makes the shallow lake dangerous at times and adds to erosion problems along the shores.

A nuclear power plant was also proposed for the shore of the lake in the 1960s.

"I went to the meetings," said Leon Moore, who has owned a house on Carcajou Point for many years. "They wanted to take water out of the lake. They admitted

the water would still be boiling when it entered the river.

"It would have destroyed it."

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