

DANE: Summit aims to address Allied problems/3C

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City Editor: Joyce Dehli, (608) 252-6117

Forum held about Rock River

By Richard W. Jaeger
Regional reporter

FORT ATKINSON — Environmental concerns in the Rock River basin are almost as numerous as the number of acres it covers, participants in a day-long forum held here last week were told.

Those concerns range from the quality of water to the use of the economic and environmental resources in the basin that stretches across 11 counties and 3,779 square miles, following the Rock River for 160 miles from its source north of the Horicon Marsh to the Illinois border.

The Thursday forum, sponsored by the Rock River Coalition (RRC), a non-profit organization made up of citizen volunteers, businesses, industries and local and state government agencies, was held to discuss some of the issues being examined

by RRC members.

"Power of Partnership" was the theme for the gathering held in Fort Atkinson, and partnership was apparent as RRC members ticked off their list of goals, accomplishments and needs.

The goal of the RRC is to make the Rock River and its tributaries "more useful, beautiful and enjoyable by increasing cooperation among communities, organizations and individuals to preserve and promote our shared cultural, economic and environmental resources."

Since its inception in 1994, RRC has identified seven areas of concern — groundwater, wetlands, hunting and fishing, stormwater, recreation, residential

development and water quality.

Teams of volunteer members from the various partnerships have formed to address each of those issues, said Cindy Arbiture, RRC president.

Their accomplishments vary from gathering data to putting together an inventory of polluters of the 150 lakes and impoundments and 58 streams that make up the watersheds of the basin, to funding a regional river walkway through downtown Janesville.

Tom Presney, Janesville city parks director and liaison for the RRC Recreation Issues team, said his group is focusing on five areas: tourism, recreation safety, water management and improvement,

Resources in basin discussed

land-based recreation and water-based recreation.

Close to home for him is a river walkway proposal along the Rock River from just north of Janesville's Traxler Park to south of Center Avenue. Like the Rock River, a major portion of the project runs through Janesville's downtown business district.

Along with creating walking and bicycle paths through that area, the project will concentrate on creating open spaces and providing recreational use of the river for canoeing and fishing.

The recreation team also is putting together maps of canoe trails and bicycle trails in the basin, which covers 11 counties.

Meanwhile, the Rural Residential De-

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velopment team has been examining land-use plans and zoning laws in the 26 cities, 42 villages and 111 towns within the basin, said Margaret Burlington, a citizen member.

"Our main concern is preserving and improving the quality of life for the people that live in the basin," Burlington said. That covers the needs of such diverse areas as Madison, which sits along the Yahara River-Lake Mendota watershed, to the tiny community of Mayville in the Horicon Marsh area.

While the day-long forum stressed problem-solving and partnership, member Frank Micale fruitlessly searched for a team discussing one of the problems that is facing the group he represents: the Rock River-Koshkonong Association.

That problem is what to do with the controversial Indianford Dam, which is under state Department of Natural Resources orders to either be repaired or removed.

"The dam is at the heart of the Rock River basin and creates the largest body of water in the basin — Lake Koshkonong. I can't believe that it is not being addressed here," Micale said.

The longtime lake property owner said he feels the dam should be the focus of all seven teams because it has concerns that fall under all of them from recreation to water quality.

Micale remarked that the forum theme "Power of Partnerships" goes right to the heart of the present status of the dam — finding partners that will share in making repairs to the dam, which affects Rock, Jefferson and Dane counties.

Currently, those counties, along with the lake district formed by property owners on Lake Koshkonong, are pursuing creation of a joint commission that will take over ownership and management of the dam.

Micale feels the subject of the dam may be "too big and too controversial" to be on the RRC agenda. "Maybe next year?" he quipped, expressing that the subject will most likely still be around.

