

## Lake district OKs fee hike

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More than 500 property owners within the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District overwhelmingly agreed Saturday to support the district's efforts to raise Lake Koshkonong 7 inches by voting in favor of a \$5 increase in the special assessment fee.

During the lake district's annual meeting at Fort Atkinson High School, residents approved the 2006 budget, including boosting the special tax assessment levied to district residents from \$45 to \$50. As presented, the budget was \$200,000, of which nearly \$140,000 will be expended on accounting and consulting and legal fees related to the district's ongoing battle with the state Department of Natural Resources and local wetlands advocates over the level of the lake.

The district encompasses all 10,460 acres of Lake Koshkonong and portions of Rock, Jefferson and Dane counties along the Rock River from Jefferson downstream to the Indianford dam near Edgerton.

It originally was created in 1999 as a means of giving lakefront property owners a voice in decisions on lake issues, including lake levels and repairs on the Indianford dam, which the district now owns.

Lake district attorney Bill O'Connor explained that during the 2002 annual meeting, district residents had directed the board of commissioners to seek a change in the water level order that would eliminate the winter drawdown and increase the summer maximum by about 7 inches. In early 2003, the lake district formally petitioned the DNR for the change in the water levels.

O'Connor said that the DNR requested that the district provide additional documentation concerning the proposal.

"When we made the request to the DNR, they responded that we conduct several other additional studies to prove the benefits of raising the water levels," Christianson said.

The 7.2-inch increase was drawn from an ordinary high-water mark study.

"It was concluded in that study that a 7.2-inch increase would not infringe on anyone's land," he said.

Much of the district's financial resources have been dedicated to conducting the studies requested by the DNR over the last two years.

Christianson said the studies are intended to confirm and demonstrate to the DNR that the 7.2 inches the district is requesting would not harm the environment or take anyone's land, and actually would benefit the environment as a whole, increase safety and ease navigation.

The district's studies were submitted in 2004 and the DNR's environmental assessment was released in early 2005, rejecting the district's requested summer increase.

He said the lake district, the Rock River-Koshkonong Association and the Lake Koshkonong Recreation Association all requested the DNR to hold a contested case hearing on the proposed order. (The full story appears in the Aug. 1 Daily Union.)

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