

# Lake Koshkonong can become

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## our lake of dreams

By Brian Christianson  
Guest Columnist

Twenty-five years ago, I learned how to water ski on Lake Koshkonong. Growing up in Janesville, we would fish and tube and swim on the big lake just minutes from our house near Washington Elementary School. Sometimes, if we all behaved, the adults would buy us cheeseburgers and Sundrops at the Anchor Inn to help wash down the grease and river water. That was some kind of living for a youngster. Now, as a new father and a new homeowner on Lake Koshkonong, something significant occurred to me as I looked around from the end of my pier. Nothing has changed.

Lake Koshkonong and the Rock River are hidden treasures tucked quietly into the back yards of Rock, Jefferson and to a small degree, Dane counties. Some of the prettiest sunsets this side of the Rockies occur above this 10,000-acre lake. Yet people who see only as far as the end of their street will decide the lake's future.

The mission of the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District is crucial: to improve the vision of those people who will ultimately decide the fate of a great natural resource.

County board supervisors in Jefferson and Rock counties share a huge responsibility. They must ease the property tax burden on their constituents while meeting demand for services such as health care centers and sheriff facilities.

Repairing and improving the Indianford Dam should be a no-brainer for the supervisors caught between raising taxes or cutting services.

In the movie "Field of Dreams," Kevin Costner's character hears a voice tell him, "If you build it, and they will come." Lake Koshkonong can become our lake of dreams. The Indianford Dam is an engine that could drive prosperity for all county taxpayers. If we explore ways to improve the dam, rather than abandoning its value, it will prove to be an investment in our future. Today, the real-life location of that baseball field is among Iowa's top tourist attractions.

But tragically, Rock and Jefferson county board supervisors appear to be wearing blinders when it comes to the Indianford Dam. For 40 years, the dam has fought back against all that Mother Nature could throw at her, without the defense of basic maintenance from her owners.

Imagine the condition of our county roads if county government neglected their maintenance. The Indianford Dam should share the same countywide attention as our roads.

The answer is a cooperative effort among all government regulators and lawmakers. The lake district happens to be the largest one in Wisconsin and serves to lobby and inform residents in three counties of the economic importance and natural beauty of Lake Koshkonong. Every school board, town and village board, city council and all three county boards ought to place the district on their agendas to allow for a public discussion over the vital economic role the Indianford Dam plays in our quality of life.

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Our common rally call needs to be make the lake work for us. No one would argue the economic benefits of Madison's Tenny Park lock and dam. The ability to navigate Madison's chain of lakes has increased home values and subsequently raised revenue. Perhaps if the Rock and Jefferson county boards began to explore a similar structure at Indianford, the ability to navigate from Janesville's Traxler Park to Fort Atkinson would prove to be a windfall for county tax coffers. New businesses would sprout up and home values and sale tax revenue would increase.

Resistance is coming from those who feel a certain romance for how things used to be and from those who fail to understand that this a basic pocketbook issue for all county taxpayers. Nostalgia is nice, but does anyone feel nostalgic for the rickety old Neville Bridge that rose from the green water like a rusting dinosaur trapped in a tar pit? The bridge was not replaced with a drawbridge to keep newcomers out but with a safe, wider bridge that invited people to our treasure and to spend their money here in southern Wisconsin.

Millions of tourism and hospitality dollars are flying by at 65 mph. Those taxable dollars could be funding under-funded county services, promoting local TIF districts and improving our environment. Support the lake district and contact your local county board supervisor and say no to new taxes and yes to promoting and investing in our existing resources.

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