

Fox River Locks Open for Season

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APPLETON – The symbols of the boating season are here. Mild temperatures. The Memorial Day weekend. And the opening of some Fox River locks.

Eight of the 17 locks opened for the season Friday. That means boaters can travel on the river between the Neenah-Menasha area and Little Chute. And between Wrightstown and Green Bay.

Doug Jones kicked off his Memorial Day weekend with a little time on the water. “Out fishing for the first time this year. Brought a buddy up from Janesville, Wisconsin,” said Jones. Jones’ voyage involved using the Menasha lock to get to Lake Winnebago. The Appleton man says he’s excited about the historic system opening for the season. “Gives us some entertainment with the family, as well as getting where we want to go as far as up and down the river,” Jones said.

Locktenders say it feels great to be back manning the 150-year-old locks.

“I really like to interact with the boaters, they’re so much fun, and there’s no big hurry,” said locktender Neil Frassetto.

The Menasha lock is one of eight that opened Friday. Eight others are shut down until next season for restoration.

The Rapid Croche lock in Wrightstown is also closed. It was sealed in 1988 to prevent a direct path for sea lamprey and other exotic invasive species now in Green Bay. But this lock will eventually open to boaters.

“Rapid Croche is a project that is on the authority’s radar,” said Bob Stark, COO of the Fox River Navigational System Authority.

The authority oversees the management of the locks.

Stark says a lot of preliminary work has been done to get boats through the Wrightstown area using a boat transfer system.

“The plan includes using a forklift that’s made to move boats such as at dry stack marina or a traditional marine travel lift,” Stark explained.

Stark estimates the project at around \$4 million.

Fundraisers and money awarded to the authority when it took over the lock system will help pay for the work.

A timeline is still up in the air.

Until the final piece of the puzzle is in place, boaters are limited to areas on either side. But that won’t stop them traveling up and down the Fox.

“The weekend looks like it’s going to be warmer. And it’s the first holiday weekend and I think everybody’s going to be out,” said Frassetto.

Using the locks costs \$6 and up per day. The price depends on your boat size.

Several hundred boats are expected to pass through the locks over the Memorial Day weekend.

An estimated 5,000 boaters will use the locks during the season.