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Fox River locks group pushing for lift station support; plan opponents stand ground



By Bill Mison
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TOWN OF KAUKAUNA – As dipping temperatures form ice sheets on the Fox River near Wrieststown, you probably don't want to take a dip in the frigid water below. A hot tub or a hot shower seems like a better choice, right? That's what boats could get just up the river at the Rapide Croche lock, if Bob Stark has his way. "We're talking about a controlled access point that is going to be operated by trained monitored operators, this is not something that's haphazard," said Stark, Fox River Navigational System Authority's Chief Operating Officer.

The group takes care of the river's locks.

It is doubling down on its plans that would allow for boat travel between Lake Winnebago and Green Bay, around the now-closed Fox River lock. The lock has been closed since the 1980s to help keep invasive species out. Its plan would take boats out of the water, power wash them and soak them in hot water. Water, Stark says, is hot enough to kill unseen invasive species. The boat would then be put back in the water upstream. Boats going downstream wouldn't have to be cleaned. "The facts are that this whole project was developed upon the best science available," said Stark.

But some environmental groups continue to contend the plan is a risky venture, despite admitting that invasives are likely getting around the closed lock via boats and trailers being trucked from other waterways. "We should not be adding to that risk for a relatively small benefit to boaters," said George Meyer, executive director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and a former Wisconsin DNR secretary. Meyer says the \$3.8 million plan is too expensive and he questions whether it will keep invasives out.

"The fishing is too important to the average sport fisherman to put additional risks into that system," said Meyer, referring to the estimated \$234 million fishing industry on the Lake Winnebago system.

"I'm not sure that's a fair assessment," said Stark of the increased risk. "To say it's possible that it creates a venue, I think that would be a fair assessment."

Stark says the plan is with DNR for review. If approved, Stark says, the lift station could be completed by 2017 at the earliest.

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