

# The Fabulous Fox River

Ensuring the long term health and quality of the Fox River and our experience with the river.





# Issues Facing the Fox River Racine County Drainage District

- Two Permit Requests to WDNR
  - Repeated drawdowns for canal dredging
    - Year 3 of a five-year permitting cycle
    - DNR issues permits to RCDD for maintenance dredging of Wind Lake/Goose Lake Branch Canal
    - RCDD has received permits to drawdown for mechanical dredging for the past 2 years – middle stretch of canal has not yet been dredged (1/3 of canal maintenance).
  - Forever Drawdown? Why is it needed?
    - RCDD also is seeking a permit for a **permanent annual** drawdown each winter beginning October 15 through March 15



# History of interaction on drawdowns

- ▶ Public Meeting held March 23, 2015
  - ▶ Over 100 citizens attend to learn DNR permitting process
  - ▶ RCDD presents their position on the need for drawdowns
  - ▶ Racine County as owner of Rochester Dam also attends
  - ▶ Citizen's Group forms to oppose repeated drawdowns
    - ▶ Group asks Waterford and Rochester Village boards to stand in opposition of permanent annual drawdown;
    - ▶ And to facilitate a meeting with top level DNR officials and state representatives.
    - ▶ Citizens Group, along with officials and staff from both Villages met several times with local DNR staff and RCDD commissioners.



# Meet with legislators

- ▶ June 2015 Meeting in Madison
  - ▶ Attendees
    - ▶ Waterford president, trustees, staff
    - ▶ Rochester president
    - ▶ Citizen's group members
    - ▶ Drainage District commissioners
    - ▶ DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp and DNR Staff
    - ▶ Legislators: David Craig, Van Wanggaard, Mary Lazich, and legislator's staff members including Robin Vos' office
  - ▶ Stepp assigns key DNR staff to draft a Memorandum of Understanding between DNR and RCDD to address issues with Village input.



# Memorandum of Understanding

- ▶ Meetings with DNR staff
- ▶ Some progress made in discussions at initial meeting with all parties
  - ▶ RCCD agrees to raise minimum level of drawdown
- ▶ Village/Citizen Group and RCDD meet separately with DNR
- ▶ July 27, 2016 DNR Staff shares draft and evaluation criteria outline with all parties and asks for comments



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Madison Meeting

- ▶ Village President requests another meeting in Madison
- ▶ Representatives from both villages, citizen's group meet with Stepp, Craig, Rasmussen, and other legislator's staff
  - ▶ Citizen's group shares research on dredging options that would not require drawdowns and now stands opposed to ANY drawdowns – neither permanent annual nor canal maintenance
  - ▶ Meeting also includes brief discussion of proposed legislation giving more power to drainage districts without DNR oversight
    - ▶ AB653 introduced on December 10, 2015 by assembly members, including Rep. Craig.



# Touring the Fox River

## ► Summer 2015

- Joint meeting with DNR staff, RCDD, Village, and Citizens
  - DNR biologists confirmed that drawdowns adversely effect the fishery and ecology of the river
- The Village takes DNR staff and RCDD on tour of Fox River between dams and into canal
- Measurements of water depth were taken all along the river and canal.
  - They note depths of between 4-6 feet along the river

Summer 2015





# River Tour continued

- ▶ Late October 2015 after the drawdown
  - ▶ DNR return to tour river after drawdown
  - ▶ Devastation on river evident
  - ▶ Water depths in the center of the river ranged from just inches to 2 feet at its deepest
  - ▶ Abundance of dead mussels (clams)
  - ▶ No trace of fish
    - ▶ DNR fish biologist confirmed that seasonal drawdowns have devastated the Fox River game fish and that they will not restock as long as there are drawdowns
  - ▶ River reduced to a trickle in areas at middle of the waterway
  - ▶ Kayakers couldn't get to portage around Rochester Dam without trying to get through 30 feet of mud.

October 2015





# Village and Citizen's Group takes stand

- ▶ NO to drawdowns for purpose of dredging drainage canals
  - ▶ Absence of studies on the effect to the river ecology
  - ▶ Year 3 for a five-year permitting cycle: no dredging has taken place
  - ▶ Information collected suggests that hydraulic dredging may be more efficient, cost effective than mechanical and does not require drawdown.
  - ▶ Hydraulic has less impact on the fishery, river ecology, and recreation activities
    - ▶ This can be done any time, without drawdowns.
    - ▶ In most cases, more cost effective method to dredge finer silt

# Mechanical vs Hydraulic



## ► Mechanical

- Requires frozen banks to accommodate large, heavy equipment
  - Mild or wet winters in last five years led to drawdowns with no dredging
- Needs lower water levels

## ► Hydraulic

- Can be done at any time
- Doesn't require drawdowns
- Often more cost effective and efficient

Both require a site to deposit sludge or slurry





# Village and Citizen's Group takes stand

- NO to “Forever” drawdown
  - Permanently draws down every year from October to March
  - No studies has been done that determines the Forever Drawdown is needed
  - No studies assessing the damaging effect of these repeated drawdowns on the fishery and ecology of the river
  - Six months of the year without navigable water in the river



# Economy of the River

- ▶ Historically, residents and visitors have enjoyed year-round use of the river
  - ▶ Fishing
  - ▶ Canoeing, kayaking, motorized boating
  - ▶ Events along the river; relaxation on the riverfront
- ▶ Property values – not just riparian owners effected
- ▶ Fox River Water Trail Development with US National Park Service will make Waterford a recreation destination
  - ▶ \$\$ are spent on gas, dining, shopping, entertainment, and more
  - ▶ Seeking a \$200,000 National Endowment for the Arts matching grant to enhance the riverfront with art

# Property Values

- ▶ Riparian properties are typically valued at 25-30% more than non-riparian properties in this area, according to local realtors
- ▶ Property values for riverfront properties may drop when the river is compromised or with the loss of use





# Lower Riparian Property Values Impact Entire Village

- Taxes on non-riparian properties may rise as riparian property values drop
- Tax bill is determined by assessed value
- Tax rate is determined by Village, funded by your property taxes
- Total income is computed by all taxed properties multiplied by tax rate
- Village revenues that fall by 25-30% will be made up by adjusting tax bill to make up the difference
- Riparian property taxes go down, non-riparian go up



# What Does it Mean to Waterford?

- ▶ Village is working with organizations in Wisconsin, Illinois, and the National Park Service to develop a 220-mile Fox River Water Trail.
  - ▶ Will seek designation as a national water trail
  - ▶ Waterford becomes a recreation destination
  - ▶ Tourist \$\$ come to Waterford
  - ▶ Major economic development initiative for Waterford, Racine County, and Wisconsin
  - ▶ Viable river for paddlers is necessary to maintain status as a recreation destination
- ▶ An NEA grant for art installations along the river will bring tourists and \$\$ to the Village



# Legislation removes DNR oversight

- RCDD has encouraged legislators to pass legislation that would give them broader abilities to dredge drainage waterways, bypassing DNR permitting
- Rep. Dave Craig and Sen. Van Wanggaard have been working on the legislation
- Village concern lies with giving the drainage districts additional broad powers without oversight



# Summary

- ▶ Seeking resolution of RCDD drawdown requests:
  - ▶ Forever Drawdown - MOU between DNR & Drainage District
    - ▶ Discussions held last week with DNR to address our concerns; input considered
  - ▶ Canal Maintenance Dredging
    - ▶ RCDD has permit to dredge canals for the next three years
    - ▶ Must get drawdown permit each year
    - ▶ Hydraulic dredging over mechanical dredging
- ▶ Legislation removing DNR oversight likely be reintroduced next session
  - ▶ Gives drainage districts greater freedom to do maintenance
  - ▶ Removes DNR review and permitting requirement



# What's next?

- ▶ What you can do
  - ▶ Letters and calls to elected representatives on both issues
    - ▶ Hydraulic vs mechanical dredging
    - ▶ Forever drawdown for potential erosion and flood damage
  - ▶ Correspondence to media
    - ▶ Letters to the editor
    - ▶ Social media
  - ▶ Enlist support of your neighbors
  - ▶ Visit the village website for more information
  - ▶ Sign up for NotifyMe to receive updates as we get them.