

Town of Dunkirk

# Dunkirk teams up to protect more riverfront

Town adds 1.64 acres to increase public access to Yahara

- Published on Mar 13, 2023 – Stoughton Courier Hub



A joint effort between the Town of Dunkirk, Groundswell Conservancy and the Dunkirk Dam Lake District will allow more people to safely access the Lower Yahara River for recreation.

According to a March 3 news release from the Dunkirk Dam Lake District, Groundswell Conservancy purchased 1.64 acres south of the Dunkirk Dam adjacent to property owned by the Lake District and to

the Town's Charlie H. Lyon Memorial Park. Funding was provided by the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and the Dane County Conservation Fund.

Immediately after the acquisition, Groundswell transferred the parcel to the Town of Dunkirk.

The property had been in the Hansen family since 1945, when Otto Hansen purchased it. His son, Rollin, fished from the property and cleared about an acre of the land for a vegetable garden. The current landowners are third and fourth generations who chose to preserve the property rather than sell it to a developer.

“We want the public to be able to enjoy this land next to the Yahara River for years to come,” said Judy Adler, Otto's granddaughter. “Public access will enhance the town's park lands.”

According to the news release, there is no safe public access for boaters to portage the Dunkirk Dam due to turbulent water immediately below the dam. This acquisition, just below the dam, will allow the public to use canoes and kayaks on this segment of the Yahara Chain Water Trail, while an existing parking lot at the Lyon Memorial Park will connect with the riverside improvements by a planned footpath.

“This purchase makes possible safer and accessible access to the Yahara River, while protecting the fragile shoreline,” said Laura Davis, Chair of the Dunkirk Dam Lake District. “Right now people who want to fish must access the water on brushy, steep, and sometimes muddy trails. Our plans are to construct a safe, accessible trail that leads to an accessible fishing pier and an accessible boat launch.”

According to the news release, a stewardship committee comprising Dunkirk residents and Lake District members will formulate a plan on land use, preservation, and protection with future projects and funding, as river usage in this area is expected to increase with the City of Stoughton's planned River Park just two miles upstream.

Current plans include an ADA-accessible path, an accessible canoe and kayak put-in/take-out, and an accessible fishing pier. The Lake District is preparing grant applications to state and county DNRs for grant funding to build the facilities. If funded, boat slips and piers will be constructed in 2024.

Dunkirk Town Chair Norm Monsen termed the acquisition "a landmark day for our township."

"We look forward to working with the Lake District to increase and improve public access to our beautiful section of the Yahara River," he said.

Contact editor Scott De Laruelle @sdelaruelle@wisconsinmediagroup.com