

July 19, 2017

To: Chairman Joe Oswald
Chairman Jon Zirkelbach
Vice Chairman Lloyd Eaken
Supervisor Wayne Manternach
Supervisor Ned Rohwedder

Dear Members of the Board of Supervisors:

I am an attorney, a retired administrative law judge for the State of Iowa and a former resident of Jones County. I grew up about 1.5 miles east of Monticello on Highway 151. My dad, Chuck Bohlken, ran Chuck's Repair Shop. My mom was a nurse at John McDonald Hospital. The Maquoketa River flowed through our property which was immediately downstream of Monticello Canoe Rental, near the Monticello Maquoketa Dam. During my life, I have canoed the river, and hiked or hunted along it, many times.

For some time, I have been aware of a controversial proposal to destroy, in whole or in part, the Monticello Maquoketa Dam. There now seems to be a concerted effort, by some members of the Jones County Conservation Board, to perpetrate this act of destruction at a time when there is growing public opposition to it.

On February 11, 2016, I wrote the following letter, which was published in the Monticello Express:

"I see that the taxpayers are being asked to spend \$1 million dollars to destroy a thing of beauty, the Maquoketa River Dam. One must wonder if the alleged benefits are worth the cost. Will upstream fishing actually be improved \$1 million worth? Is a very short portage from upstream that much of a hindrance to canoeists? If safety is a concern, why not post a warning upstream? Also post a warning and explanation of the dangers of the dam at the overlook.

"Who has determined that there is majority public support for the dam? Is this based on that poll, reported several years ago, where the majority of respondents were not taxpayers, but high school students?

"If we really have to spend \$1 million on improved habitat, why not partner with Pheasants Forever, and spend it so that today's young hunters can have the same wonderful experiences hunting pheasants and quail that I had in my youth?

"Remember, once the dam is destroyed, it is gone forever. It's beauty will only be a memory."

At or about the same time that my letter was published, I remember that the following points were made by other writers:

1. The fishing editor for the Cedar Rapids Gazette had pointed out that the area immediately downstream of dams often provides excellent fishing. He must know what he is talking about as I have seen people fishing below the Monticello dam on numerous occasions.
2. The Monticello dam aerates the water. By adding oxygen to the water, the dam counters pollution, particularly pollution coming from legacy sewer systems upstream.
3. A letter writer took an informal poll of taxpayers, not high school students, who were overwhelmingly opposed to the dam's destruction or modification.

4. One writer's father had given a very substantial sum of money, I believe it was \$10,000, for the preservation of the dam.

Another writer, in last week's Express, pointed out that the dam's destruction will lower the water level by 13 feet, making the boat ramp upstream of the dam useless.

I have never seen one letter in the Express supporting the destruction or modification of the dam. In my experience, if there is support for a proposal, and a letter in opposition appears in the paper, the supporters will soon respond with a letter of their own.

A few weeks ago, the Express covered a meeting on the dam. It appeared, from the article, that public sentiment was overwhelmingly opposed to the dam.

Last Monday, there was a meeting of the Jones County Conservation Board to discuss, "Mon-Maq Dam Project: Project Direction Determination". I was not able to attend, as I did not find out until the day of the meeting. My understanding is that again, public sentiment at the meeting was overwhelmingly opposed to the dam's destruction or modification. Many of those attending lived on the Maquoketa River.

It appears that a number of people left because they were not going to be allowed to talk at the meeting. (Or at least they had that impression). Some were, however, able to present their views. Information was also presented by the Board.

If my understanding is correct, some of the major points made were:

1. There was a professionally conducted survey in July on public sentiment toward modification or destruction of the dam by the Jones County Historic Preservation Commission. **405 OF 436 RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY WANTED TO "KEEP THE DAM"** in preference to all other named alternatives. The survey states, "if it is assumed that the survey is representative, the Jones County results can be generalized (with 99% certainty) to all county residents, with a margin of error of [plus or minus] 3.3%." A copy of the survey is attached.

2. Farmers and others who have made significant financial investment in ponds and wetlands along the Maquoketa would see those areas dry up. When this brought up at the meeting they were told they could "plant trees". With all due respect, a more nonsensical response has not occurred since Marie Antoinette, when told that the poor did not have bread, said "Let them eat cake". Are the waterfowl and fish going to live in "trees"?

3. The Maquoketa would become a wider and shallower river. It's depth, at least at points, would vary from 6 inches to 13 inches. I had the experience of "canoeing" the Maquoketa from Monticello to Picture Rocks during a drought or period of low rain many years ago. This consisted of a little floating and a lot of dragging the canoe over shallow sandbars. A significant lowering of the downstream depth of the Maquoketa River would destroy or deplete the level of canoeing now done. This would not only hurt the Monticello canoe rental business, but the many many people who take their own canoes, kayaks, inflatables, and even flat bottom boats, to float down the river. The dollars those people spend in the Monticello area, and other areas of Jones County, would never be spent.

4. While there was past talk of turning the dam area into "whitewater", the determination has now been made that the area is not suitable for such modification.

5. A member of the public had consulted with a construction firm or similar entity on what it would take to repair the dam. The figure provided was \$200,000, far below the \$1 million to \$2.3 million cost estimates for destruction.

6. When the audience was told that there was a “dangerous crack” in the dam, a member of the public retorted that crack had been there since 1965.

If I have made mistakes in my rendition of what occurred at the meeting, I apologize. But, the upshot of the meeting is that the Board delayed its decision, but only until this Friday. I fear this may not allow the local press, particularly the Monticello Express or Anamosa Journal-Eureka, time to publish an account of this meeting or the notice of the new meeting. I would also note that the meeting is rescheduled for Friday night of the Great Jones County Fair, meaning you can rest assured that fewer members of the public will attend. The postponement was appropriate, but should have at least been long enough to allow 2 or 3 business days to pass after the publication of an account of the meeting in either the Monticello Express or the Anamosa Journal-Eureka, to allow the public to be informed.

I request that any decision by the Jones County Conservation Board supporting the dam’s destruction or modification should be carefully reviewed and rejected by the Board of Supervisors.

I would also note that the Jones County Conservation Board’s notice of its next meeting states: “This agenda is tentative and may be amended or changed at the Board Meeting. Conservation Board meetings are subject to Iowa Open Meetings Law, Code of Iowa – Chapter 21. Anyone wishing to address the Board or listen is welcome and encouraged to attend. Please call or contact the Director at 563-487-3541 ext. 2, at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting, if you wish to be added on the agenda”

It is unclear from this wording if one needs to contact the JCCB only if you wish to have your name formally added to the agenda, or whether you must contact them in advance if you wish to speak at all. I hope the Board will allow the public to speak even if they have not formally contacted the JCCB in advance.

I would like to note that all members of the JCCB are undoubtedly hard-working, public spirited individuals, but I think those favoring this project are mistaken. We need to remember that “free” money from Federal grants is never really free. It comes from Federal taxpayers, including taxpayers in Jones County. How will we ever get the national budget under control unless we realize there is no free lunch?

I recall a number of years ago, a Japanese Bell was built in Des Moines as a monument to friendship between Iowa and Japan. There was a beautiful walkway, crossing a bridge, leading from the state capitol building to the Bell. The bridge was dismantled because it was supposed to be a safety hazard. But, it was so soundly built, that it was very difficult to tear down. After the bridge was destroyed became very inconvenient to get to the Bell memorial. When I did make the effort one summer, I noticed that this once beautiful memorial was littered with hypodermics and other drug-related items. I think there is a lesson there.

Please forward this to the JCCB, as they have no email address or phone numbers on their webpage.

I also ask that the JCCB include this document in the record of their hearing as a submission from a taxpayer for their consideration.

Sincerely,

Donald W. Bohlken
9792 Inwood Street
Indianola, IA 50125
Cell: 319-430-4519
Email: donbohlken@hotmail.com