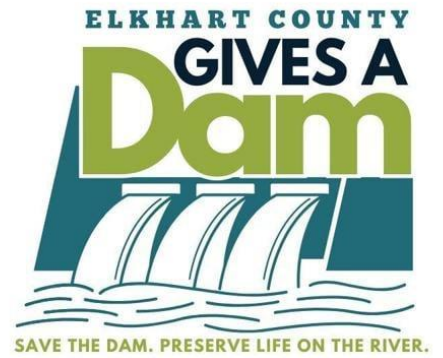


Committee aims to protect Johnson Street dam

By CLAYTON SIDENBENDER csidenbender@elkharttruth.com Apr 22, 2025



ELKHART — A committee made up of local residents, elected officials and members of the St. Joseph River Association Inc. will focus on protecting the future of the Johnson Street dam.

The Johnson Street Dam has long served as a stabilizing force for the St. Joseph River, supporting everything from property values and outdoor recreation to environmental stewardship and community events, the committee said Monday in announcing its formation. The committee formed to ensure residents are informed and prepared as decisions unfold, with the regulatory process now underway.

“This isn’t just about energy or infrastructure – it’s about protecting our way of life,” said Elkhart County Commissioner Suzie Weirick. “The Johnson Street Dam helps preserve the natural beauty and recreational opportunities along the St. Joseph River. Losing it would affect not only our environment and economy, but the day-to-day experiences that make living in Elkhart County special.”

Indiana Michigan Power (I&M) announced in July it was exploring the best long-term options for the aging hydroelectric dams at Elkhart and Mottville and held two meetings for the public to learn more about the process. The utility company said options might include relicensing the facilities and continuing full operations in the decades ahead, or removing them and restoring a free-flowing river.

The Elkhart County Gives A Dam Committee is a community-led effort focused on protecting the Elkhart dam, organizers said.

Dallas Bergl, president and CEO of INOVA Credit Union and a committee member, said Weirick reached out in December about forming an ad hoc committee. After months of behind-the-scenes coordination, research and outreach, the committee is stepping forward with the launch of a website to educate, engage, and empower the community around the future of the dam.

“I think economically it would have a draconian effect on the economy of the city,” Bergl said, if the dam was decommissioned. “A lot of people that live up and down the river would likely relocate somewhere else where they can be on a resource where they can ski, boat and all the things that they do. And that would obviously have downstream effects on everything from charitable giving to who is living in and around the community and local businesses.”

The newly launched website provides information about the licensing timeline, outlines the dam’s environmental and community benefits, and includes a sign-up form for updates.

The committee is closely following the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission permitting process, organizers said. It is remaining in communication with American Electric Power (AEP), the parent of I&M, and working alongside local and state officials to explore all options that preserve the dam’s legacy and continued impact.

“This is not just Elkhart,” Weirick said. “This is all of the northern part of Elkhart County specifically and then others who use and come to the river. It’s a pretty big deal.”

For more information about the committee, residents can visit www.ElkhartCountyGivesADam.com. Residents are also encouraged to share their personal connections to the river on social media using the hashtag **#ElkhartCountyGivesADam**