
State closes Kickapoo pond

Fri, 09/19/2014 - 7:00am | Tracy Moss (/author/tracy-moss)

OAKWOOD — Runoff into a pond at Kickapoo State Park has prompted state officials to close that body of water to the public and notify the Illinois attorney general's office for possible enforcement action.

A sign, warning the public not to trespass, has been posted on the east end of a bridge that carries a Kickapoo Park road over the Middle Fork River to an area of the park that includes Pond 6, a local fishing hole. Kickapoo site superintendent John Hott said the bridge was originally closed because of its deteriorating condition, but later the closing also became necessary because of a situation with Pond 6. But Hott would not disclose details about the problem.

The pond sits at the east end of a drainage channel where — farther to the west — 380,000 tons of fly ash were dumped on private property over several years, beginning in 1995, by a local trucking business. The Bunge corn-milling plant in Danville had hired the trucking business to haul away the leftover ash from its on-site coal-burning operation.

Officials with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the attorney general's office are not releasing many details about the closure at Kickapoo, except that state natural resources officials are evaluating conditions near Pond 6, including a drainage channel that flows into the pond. The decision to close that body of water relates to sediment buildup in the pond and potential restoration work, said Natural Resources spokesman Chris Young in an email. Young's email stated that Natural Resources has

referred an enforcement case to the attorney general regarding runoff from the Bunge property, and "meetings are being scheduled to discuss problems and identify possible solutions" at Kickapoo and Pond 6.

"Right now we have no timeline for when the pond might be reopened," he said in the email.

In another email, Natalie Bauer with the attorney general's office said "we are in the process of reviewing IDNR's referral and meeting with involved parties to assess appropriate action."

Fly ash is a byproduct of coal combustion. It contains elements such as arsenic, selenium, cadmium, chromium, copper and mercury that can be harmful to the environment and humans in high concentrations. These elements can leach from a disposal site and do damage to plants and animals and contaminate groundwater.

By 2007, the dumping of fly ash into the drainage channel on private property at Grays Siding, a rural subdivision off U.S. 150 east of Oakwood, had been halted, and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency had detected the presence of boron.

IEPA worked with Bunge officials to ensure the agribusiness company headquartered in St. Louis had some of the fly ash removed and hauled to a proper disposal site and the rest capped with dirt, with vegetation planted on top and underground wells sunk to monitor ground water. IEPA also tested water in nearby homes, which rely on underground wells. Some had high levels of lead, but nothing else, and according to IEPA officials, there could be many reasons for high levels of lead.

One of those residents, JoAnn Osterbur, still lives in her home in the Grays Siding area, but to the south of the drainage channel. She said she was not aware of the closing

of Pond 6 at Kickapoo. She said she has always been concerned about her well water since she first learned that the material being dumped in the drainage channel was fly ash and potentially harmful. Osterbur said her well has not been tested since initial testing by the IEPA but believes it should be again.

IEPA officials did not return calls from The News-Gazette seeking updated information on the fly ash dump at Grays Siding and information about the closing of Pond 6.

Login (</user/login?destination=comment/reply/1298444#comment-form>) or register (</user/register?destination=comment/reply/1298444#comment-form>) to post comments