

# Walker clears way for locks visitor center

DUKE BEHNKE  
USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

APPLETON - Gov. Scott Walker on Thursday signed into law a bill that enables the Fox River Navigational System Authority to develop and manage property adjacent to the Fox locks system.

The law clears the way for FRNSA to build a \$1.8 million visitor center to showcase the history of the locks system. The two-story, 4,800-square-foot center would be located next to Appleton Lock 3 at the northeast corner of South Lawe Street and the Newberry Trail.

According to plan, it would be coupled with a private townhouse development and the reuse of a nearby lockmaster house as part of the revitalization of the Appleton industrial flats.

Walker described the visitor center as a wonderful attraction and tourism opportunity for the Fox River corridor.

"It will add to all of the great things that are happening in Appleton and here along the river," Walker said during a ceremony at Appleton Lock 3.

Fourth-graders from Nicolet Elementary School in Menasha attended the ceremony, and FRNSA made Walker an honorary lock tender for the day.

Walker said the state Department of Administration would sell land for the visitor center to the city of Appleton, which would lease the land to FRNSA. Plans call for the upper level of the



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Surrounded by students from Menasha's Nicolet Elementary School, Gov. Scott Walker signs Assembly Bill 810 into law Thursday at Appleton Lock 3.

visitor center to house interpretive exhibits that would explain the importance of the locks system.

The lower level would include a meeting space for classroom visits and public restrooms that would be accessible year-round by paddlers, boaters, pedestrians and bicyclists. The center also would sell refreshments.

"Our vision is to create not only a summertime destination, but really a three- or four-season destination because there are activities that can occur on the frozen canal," said Robert Stark, FRNSA's

chief executive officer. "It's a very exciting project."

FRNSA pledged \$750,000 for the visitor center, and the Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau awarded a \$100,000 tourism development grant for the project. A fundraising campaign will be launched to generate additional money. Organizers hope to open the visitor center in 2017.

The Fox locks system is owned by the state and maintained and operated by FRNSA. The new law broadens FRNSA's responsibilities from a

maintenance role to a development role.

"Our long-range goal is to improve access to the locks for boaters and pedestrians," said Tim Rose, chairman of FRNSA's board of directors. "We have made substantial investments in renovating the locks, and it's time for the public to enjoy this resource."

The legislation was sponsored by state Sens. Roger Roth, Robert Cowles, Dave Hansen and Frank Lasse and state Reps. Jim Steineke, Amanda Stuck, Alvin Ott, Mike Rohrkaste, Michael

Schraa, David Murphy and Gordon Hintz.

In August, FRNSA completed a 10-year, \$14.5 million effort to restore 16 of the 17 locks on the lower Fox River. One month later, the Menasha lock was closed indefinitely by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to prevent round gobies, an invasive species, from reaching the Lake Winnebago System.

Rose said the closure of the Menasha lock won't impede plans to increase access to the river. "We regard the Menasha lock closure as temporary," he

said.

FRNSA will study the feasibility of moving a proposed boat transfer and decontamination facility from the closed Rapide Croche lock to the Menasha lock.

"There are hundreds of invasive species in the Great Lakes," Rose said, "and if Menasha is the front line in defending Lake Winnebago, then moving a cleaning station there may make sense."

Duke Behnke: 920-993-7176, or [dbehnke@postcrescent.com](mailto:dbehnke@postcrescent.com); on Twitter @DukeBehnke