



## DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup

### **Graue Mill Dam**

Public Opinion Research

*May 15, 2019*

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## **OVERVIEW**

The DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup (DRSCW) is a diverse coalition of stakeholders working together to preserve and enhance water quality and stream resource quality in the East Branch DuPage River, West Branch DuPage River, Salt Creek, and their tributaries.

The organization consists of local communities, publicly owned treatment works and environmental organizations. In the spirit of its mission, the group has worked for years to improve water quality in the DuPage River and Salt Creek Watersheds.

In order to bring the watershed into compliance with federal environmental regulations and spare area taxpayers considerable expense, the DRSCW has proposed modifying the Graue Mill dam in a manner that will benefit wildlife and recreational visitors. The DRSCW is aware of opposition from some community members who are resistant to any changes that could impact the dam and the historic Graue Mill.

Aileron conducted public opinion research in order to understand community support and opposition and identify options for moving forward. From December 2018 to April 2019, the group conducted a multi-pronged public opinion-gathering process that included a telephone survey, an online survey, stakeholder interviews, and a focus group. Each research method found public support for dam modification and illustrated some of the issues that are important to opponents. Brief summaries of each of these tactics are below, with full results included in the appendix. In short, the research found that the Workgroup should be able to garner public support for dam modification if the group focuses on public concerns and communicates clearly and openly.

- *TELEPHONE SURVEY*

A telephone survey conducted in mid-December collected public opinion data from DuPage County residents related to water quality in general and the Graue Mill dam specifically. The survey was a statistically significant random sample of DuPage County residents, consisting of 453 responses on both landline and mobile phones.

The results indicated the public would support efforts to modify the dam and elected officials who vote to do so, as long as the benefits of dam modification are communicated clearly.

81% of telephone survey respondents said they would support modifying the dam to improve water quality. 79% of respondents said they would support dam modification if it saved taxpayers money. (Of the 324 total supporters, 311 respondents support dam modification both to improve water quality and to save taxpayers money.) Finally, 85% of those surveyed would be more likely to support and elected official who voted to make dam modifications in order to achieve these benefits.

- *ONLINE SURVEY*

The Workgroup promoted an online survey from December 2018 through April 2019 which garnered 162 responses. The online survey found 92.6 percent of respondents would support modifying the dam to improve water quality, wildlife habitat and recreation. Meanwhile, 93.8 percent would support modifying the dam in order to save area taxpayers the estimated \$180 million alternative measures would cost. The online survey allowed respondents to write comments in addition to responding to survey questions, which provided some insight into community sentiment and helped us select participants to include in a focus group. The online survey was not a random sample, but was completed by individuals who saw social media posts about the survey and chose to participate— this self-selection bias likely accounts for the stronger support in the online survey as compared to the telephone survey.

- *IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS*

Aileron conducted in-depth interviews with the following stakeholders, who represented different points of view on dam modification:

- Steve Sinderson, chairman of the Prairie State Canoeist organization, who regularly canoes near Graue Mill
- Stanley “Rus” Strahan, board vice president of the Graue Mill and Museum and a nearby resident
- David Carlin, president and CEO of the Greater Oak Brook Economic Development Partnership
- Dan Wagner, board member of the Greater Oak Brook Economic Development Partnership and the Conservation Foundation
- Don Fuller, president of the Fullersburg Historic Foundation

The interviews allowed participants to give detailed responses to a wide variety of questions concerning the dam and potential improvements. Sinderson, Carlin and Wager expressed support for modification, while Strahan and Fuller are opposed.

- *FOCUS GROUP*

In early April, seven area residents with a variety of opinions on the topic of dam modification participated in a 90-minute focus group. A moderator led a discussion on the importance of Salt Creek and Fullersburg Woods, water quality issues and opportunities, and potential options to modify the dam. Participants reacted to images of Graue Mill Dam and its impoundment, completed dam removals and renderings of the potential modifications of the Graue Mill Dam. The focus group discussion reinforced the public’s concern for water quality, highlighted several ways the dam held social or historical significance, and identified potential options for outreach and communication around dam removal.

## **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND MESSAGING**

The opinion-gathering process revealed several key insights that should guide the workgroup's next steps. It's clear from survey data that the public supports the concept of dam modification. That support could change if the workgroup isn't perceived as dealing with the public in a fair and transparent way. Below are general recommendations for how the DRSCW should explain the dam modification project to the public.

- *STRATEGY*

### **Think beyond the dam –**

1. Rather than thinking only about removing a dam, the Workgroup should think in terms of creating a better forest preserve and a healthier, more valuable waterway. Recreation, wildlife, water quality, scenery and history are all considered important aspects of Graue Mill and Fullersburg Woods - communications around the project should address all of these topics.
2. Water quality issues don't begin or end at the Graue Mill Dam, so the Workgroup should make it clear that dam removal would be a key part of a broader, long-term project designed to improve the watershed for many years to come. If possible, tie in other efforts to reduce litter and runoff and encourage recreation in Salt Creek and support volunteer projects that could get more people involved in caring for the waterway.

### **Water quality is a top issue -**

Across the board, the public expressed strong support for improving water quality. The survey results align with other research the DRSCW and its partners have conducted that found local residents care deeply about clean water. The dam modification project should be framed as an effort that will improve water quality – and DRSCW should use facts and simple language to explain how dam modification will make Salt Creek better.

### **Use data to prove that dam modification will work –**

We now have a substantial amount of data showing broad support for a dam modification project that will improve water quality and save taxpayer dollars. The Workgroup will need to communicate that the dam modification project will achieve those results.

Providing data on the water quality benefits of removing the dam, and the public costs of inaction will be critical to making the public believe the dam modification will be successful. Also – case studies of other dam removal projects, and their effects on communities nearby and downstream, will be an important way to build public support.

### **Operation of the Graue Mill's waterwheel is a key motivator –**

The DRSCW plans to keep the waterwheel operating. When interview and focus group participants understand this, their concerns decrease significantly. The DRSCW should clearly explain how the wheel can be kept in operation and design the project to make sure it delivers that result.

### **Use visuals to tell the story -**

Before and after images will be very important in helping the public understand what the project will change, and what it will maintain. Before beginning the outreach process, the workgroup should have renderings showing the millrace, waterwheel and dam.

Images of algae blooms and sediment in the impoundment are also a powerful way to communicate the need to improve water quality and can be used to make the case for dam removal or modification.

As a focus group participant said after seeing renderings of dam removal at Graue Mill: *“To me, the project now makes more sense, from a purely visual point. I can see there’s a wetland space being created. It seems like the more natural approach...”*

### **Build a coalition of supporters before going public –**

The workgroup has a number a natural allies in this project, as confirmed by stakeholder interviews. Before any public outreach begins, the Workgroup should line up support from allies such as paddling and angling groups, the Oak Brook Chamber of Commerce or other business groups and environmental and conservation organizations. The DRSCW may want to make adjustments to the project that will cement support from these allies.

The Workgroup could also coordinate with US EPA or other regulators to ensure that they clearly communicate the legal requirements for water quality. Treatment Works should also be engaged to explain the efforts they have made to improve water quality and testify to the potential costs of additional upgrades.

### **Create a Role for Historic Preservation –**

The biggest risk in dam modification is altering what many consider a unique historic landmark for DuPage County. While the need to modify the dam is not negotiable, the Workgroup should find some areas where it can engage with and incorporate feedback from preservationists. The Workgroup could create an advisory body of people interested in the historic aspects of Graue Mill and possibly provide funding for this group to create signage, interpretive displays, programming or other features that highlight the historic significance of the site.

### **Be transparent and honest –**

There’s no way to remove the dam in secret, so the Workgroup’s best strategy will be to provide clear and open communication throughout the project. Data shows that the majority of the public is already in support. The group should listen to feedback and be prepared to adjust plans based on public opposition, but also make it clear which decisions can and cannot be negotiated. Information on the project should be readily available and channels of communication should remain open all through the process.

- *MESSAGING*

General guidelines for communications around dam modification:

Focus on creating rather than destroying, using a natural approach to improve water quality, proceeding cautiously and deliberately, and working for a comprehensive solution.

Sample messages:

- “We’re allowing natural processes to improve water quality and recreation, while preserving the operation of the historic Graue Mill.”
- “Water quality and ecosystems are connected, the Graue Mill Dam creates a break in the Salt Creek Watershed. We’ve learned how to heal that break while allowing the water wheel and mill to continue operating.”
- “There are legal deadlines to achieve water quality improvements in DuPage County. We’ve spent years on comprehensive efforts to create cleaner rivers and creeks while saving taxpayers an estimated \$180 million. Modification of Graue Mill Dam is a key to making the entire watershed healthier – we want to work with the public to make this project a success.”
- “Working on a project that’s a focal point for the community is a big responsibility, and we’re committed to doing this project the right way. We look forward to working with the public create long-term benefits for DuPage County residents and our natural environment.”
- “With the right design, this watershed can balance human history and industry with wildlife and recreation. We’re creating an approach that can strike that balance.”

## ***APPENDIX***

### ***TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY***

A telephone survey conducted Dec. 12-13, 2018, collected public opinion data from DuPage County residents related to water quality in general and the Graue Mill dam specifically. The survey collected 453 responses, on both landline and mobile phones, providing a statistically significant sample with a margin of error of 4.53 percent.

Overall, the survey indicated the public would support efforts to modify the dam and the elected officials who vote to do so, as long as the benefits of dam modification are communicated clearly.

#### ***KEY FINDINGS***

- The Graue Mill dam is relatively well-known and important to some DuPage County residents

Thirty-three percent of respondents were familiar with the dam and roughly 11 percent had visited in the past year. Of those familiar with the dam, the majority felt it is “important to their community.” Thirty-seven percent said the dam is very important, and 37 percent said the dam is somewhat important. This data shows a segment of DuPage County residents has a connection to the Graue Mill dam, though the majority (67 percent) were not familiar with the dam.

- The quality of rivers, streams and natural habitat is a top issue for DuPage County residents

Ninety-five percent of respondents said rivers, streams and habitat are either very important (75 percent) or somewhat important (20 percent) to their community. When presented with five options, 46 percent said improving water quality in streams and rivers was most important, 16 percent said wildlife habitat was most important and 31 percent said saving taxpayers money was most important. Residents expressed strong support for modifying the dam in order to improve water quality, habitat and recreation (81 percent). This support was even stronger than support for the economic message that modifying the dam would save taxpayers \$180 million (79 percent).

- Economic issues are important, a close second to water quality

When presented with five options, 31 percent said saving taxpayers money was most important, making it the second-most popular choice after improving water quality (46 percent). When it was explained that modifying Graue Mill dam and other measures would save taxpayers \$180 million, 79 percent said they would prefer to modify the dam. This was an indication of very strong support, though slightly weaker than support for modifying the dam to improve water quality (81 percent). The survey has a margin of error of 4.53 percent, so we would consider the support in questions four and five to be equivalent.

- DuPage County residents would support elected officials who voted to make dam modifications

The strongest message from the survey was that residents would support elected officials who voted to make dam modifications to improve water quality and save taxpayers money. Eighty-five percent would be more likely to support these officials compared to only 2 percent who would be less likely to support them.



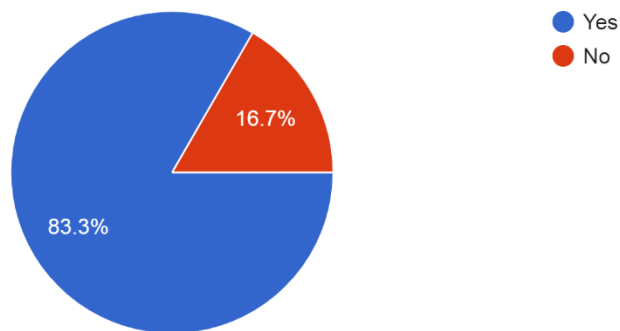
## ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

An online survey that was open from December 2018 until early April 2019 garnered 162 responses. This online survey was conducted to supplement the telephone survey and ensure additional members of the community were afforded the opportunity to provide input.

It should be noted that data from online surveys is generally collected from individuals who proactively chose to complete the survey, creating what's known as "self-selection bias" in the survey data. Online surveys, however, are a useful tool, and this one showed overwhelming support for modifying the dam in order to improve water quality, habitat and recreation and to save taxpayers money.

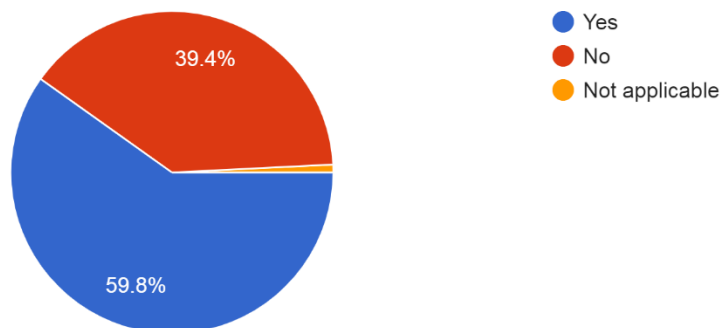
*Are you familiar with the Graue Mill Dam at Fullersburg Woods in Oak Brook?*

162 responses



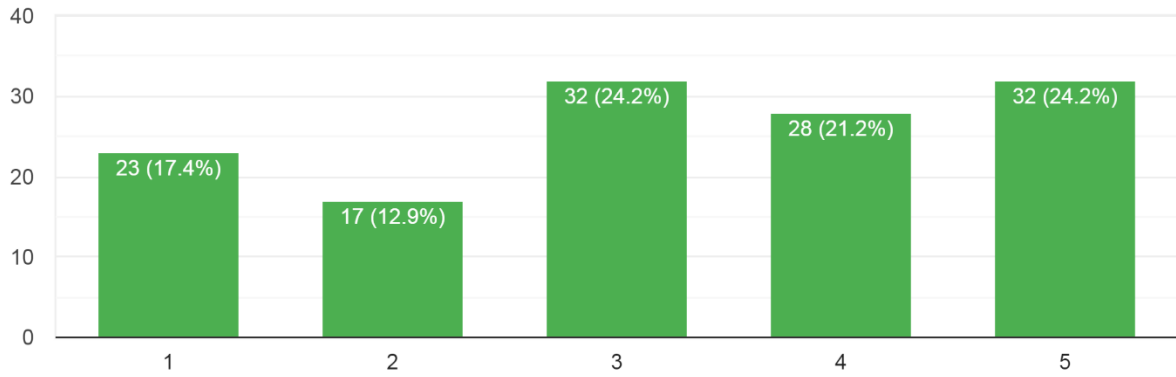
*Have you visited the Graue Mill Dam in the last year?*

127 responses



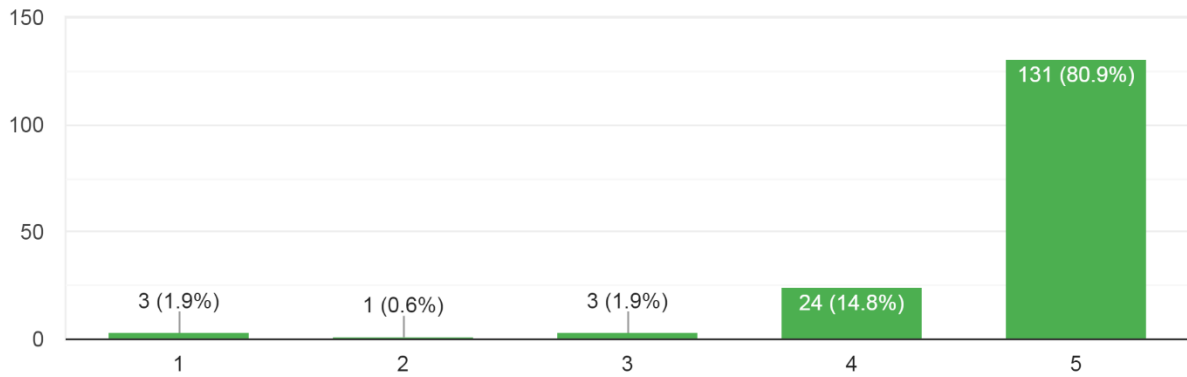
How important would you say the Graue Mill Dam is to your local community?

132 responses



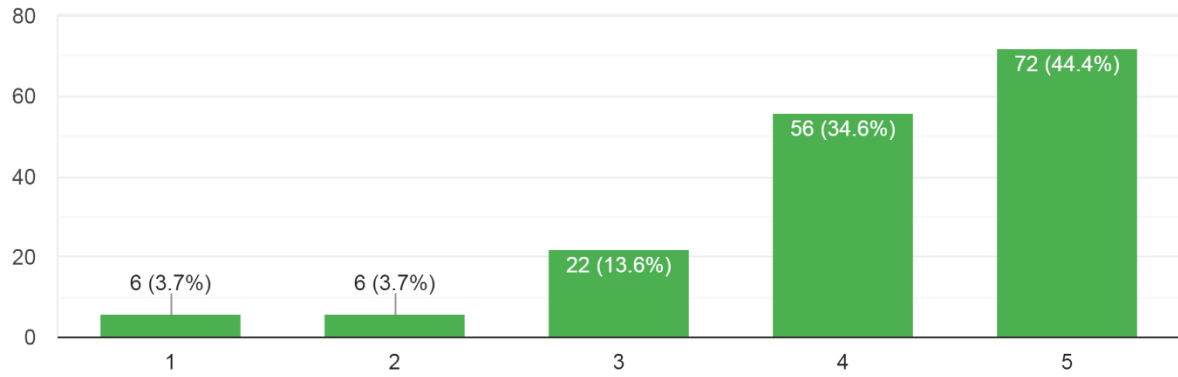
In general, how important is the quality of rivers, streams, wildlife and natural habitat to your community?

162 responses



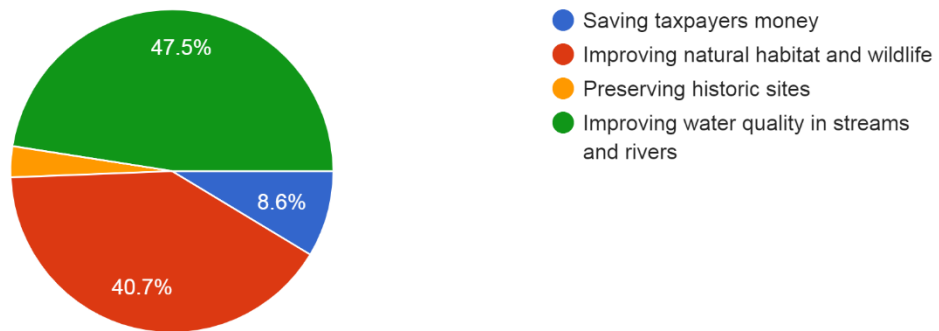
How important are historic sites to your community?

162 responses



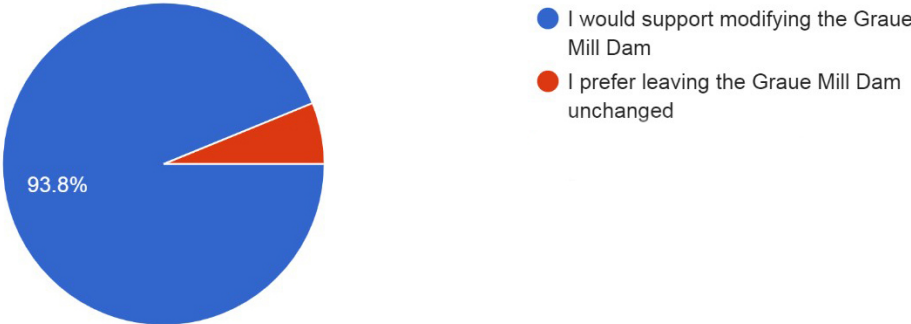
Which of the following do you consider to be MOST important to you?

162 responses



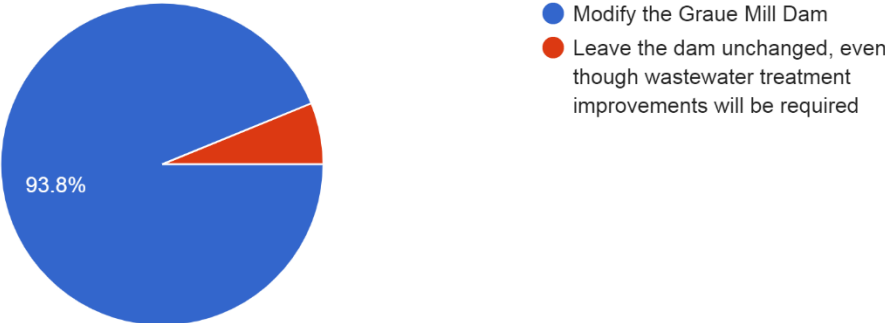
Experts have found that modifying the dams on our waterways such as the Graue Mill Dam would improve water qual...creation, would you support doing so?

162 responses



Experts have found that modifying the Graue Mill Dam and other alternative measures could save DuPage County taxp... treatment upgrades. Do you prefer to:

162 responses



## ***IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SUMMARIES***

### **DAVID CARLIN AND DAN WAGNER**

*“I think the business community would embrace changes that result in saving \$180 million. It’s pretty clear cut.”*

- President and CEO of Greater Oak Brook Economic Development Partnership (GOBEDP)
- Board member of the GOBEDP and the Conservation Foundation
- Date: Jan. 29, 2019
- Interviewer: Peter Gray, Aileron Communications
- Length of interview: 41 minutes

David Carlin and Dan Wagner are both leaders with the Greater Oak Brook Economic Development Partnership who believe the business and financial case for modifying the damn is strong. Saving \$180 million is an outcome the business community would get behind, they said, and the chamber, with more information, would be willing to publicly endorse dam modification.

“I think the business community would embrace changes that result in saving \$180 million. It’s pretty clear cut.”

Neither have a particularly strong connection to the Graue Mill Dam — one having never been there, the other only a handful of times — and they think that’s the case with most Oak Brook residents.

“It’s not something most people pay a ton of attention to.”

They did note that people visiting the nearby York Tavern like hearing the sound of water falling and were curious how modification would affect that.

They know a bit about the local homeowner opposition to modification and would anticipate historical preservation groups being opposed as well. But they also believe Oak Brook is a community with a strong affinity for nature and that improving water quality, recreational opportunities and habitat for animals are all outcomes the public would get behind. They referenced a recent referendum in which residents opted to raise taxes to save 35 acres of open land.

They were pleased to hear that funding for the project is secure and were curious about when plans will move forward, given that local elections were around the corner. They asked about our communications with — and the stances of — the park district, the village and others. They also asked about what kind of pressure federal and state authorities have put on the Park District to improve water quality.

Regarding the prospect of \$180 million in wastewater treatment facility improvements, they said local businesses are already hurting from the high rates being charged by the Flagg Creek Water Reclamation District. They cited a \$1 million bill for Cheesecake Factory and \$300,000 for Ditka’s, saying there’s a perception that businesses are being forced to pay for repairs the Reclamation District needs.

Moving forward, they’d like to see renderings of what the area would look like post-modification. They believe good images showing paddlers, fishers and residents enjoying the creek would make a positive impression on the public and they’d be willing to help with public education efforts.

They noted that although nearby homeowners may see their views change as a result of modification, they'll gain open land, on which walking paths or other public resources could be added.

"It sounds like a no-brainer to me. We don't mind taking a position that's controversial if it's the right thing to do."

STEVE SINDERSON

*"It seems to be a kind of hidden, secret spot."*

- Chairman of the Prairie State Canoeist, resident of Elmhurst
- Date: Jan. 24, 2019
- Interviewer: Peter Gray, Aileron Communications
- Length of interview: 35 minutes

Steve Sinderson is lifelong area resident familiar with Graue Mill who thinks of it as a nice place to visit once in awhile. He's more familiar with its nearby waterways, which he regularly canoes as a leader of the Prairie State Canoeist organization and as a steward with the Salt Creek Greenway Association.

He and others would canoe in the immediate area of Salt Creek more often if the Graue Mill Dam were made navigable, he said. (Paddlers are currently forced to portage around the dam and, as a result, start most of their trips below it, traveling from there to the confluence with the Des Plaines River). Most paddlers want obstruction-free routes on which they can "put their boat in, paddle and take it out" when they're done, he said. The farther they can go uninterrupted, the better.

Aside from modifying the dam, Sinderson said solutions could include the construction of a side channel that would allow paddlers to pass through. He's seen similar solutions implemented elsewhere in the region, including near a dam in Yorkville on the Fox River. He's also familiar with a site in Warrenville where an old dam was replaced with boulders and a middle opening. "From a paddling standpoint, there's now a bit of fast water there. It's kind of fun." Because water levels rise and fall, few waterways are navigable 100 percent of the time. A good goal, though, he said, would be making the Graue Mill Dam area navigable 95 percent of the time.

It's clear, he said, that the water above the dam is not as aerated or as good of quality as the water below the dam.

He's somewhat familiar with the history of discussions on modifying the dam, having sat in a couple public meetings four or five years ago. He knows it's a long-running debate and that nearby homeowners are opposed to dam modifications. From what he recalls, they like the river's current width and that it extends to near their homes, creating a more lake-like effect. Modifications would reduce that width, he said.

Sinderson believes a dam-modification message focused on taxpayer-savings is one that will resonate with area residents. A couple million dollars — or whatever a dam modification would cost — is a lot

less than \$180 million, he noted. And the concerns of a few dozen local homeowners are far outweighed by thousands of taxpayers around the county, he said.

While making the dam area navigable to paddlers would be a positive outcome, an even better outcome for paddlers would involve working with the Oak Brook Golf Club and Butler National Country Club to lift their restrictions on paddlers traversing Salt Creek along their property. Achieving that, Sinderson acknowledged, would probably not be easy.

In addition to fellow paddlers, Sinderson regularly sees bass fishers near the Graue Mill Dam. "It seems to be a kind of hidden, secret spot," he said.

### STANLEY "RUS" STRAHAN

*"I'm sure there is some part-way answer, like anything else in life...For me to get everything I want is usually impossible, and for you to get everything you want is usually impossible. But somewhere down the line we can probably accomplish something that works for a lot of people."*

- Board vice president of the Graue Mill and Museum, nearby resident
- Date: Feb. 8, 2019
- Interviewer: Will O'Brien, Aileron Communications
- Length of interview: 35 minutes

Stanley "Rus" Strahan is the vice president of the board of directors of the Graue Mill and Museum, where he's also the head miller. He's lived nearby for more than 25 years, has volunteered at the mill for more than 10 years, and is well-versed on — and strongly opposed to — plans to modify the dam. He's concerned that removing or modifying the dam will ruin the area's beloved aesthetic, interfere with the mill's operation and fail to improve water quality.

The mill and dam, in his view, are iconic area attractions that give visitors a sense of what life was like 170 years ago while providing them a peaceful escape to nature.

"That's one of the most scenic places in DuPage County," said Strahan, noting he grew up near powerful rivers in New England. "A lot of people are of the opinion it shouldn't be changed, and I'm one of them."

He's also concerned with water levels above the dam, noting homeowners enjoy their current views.

"The minute you start lowering that level, it becomes a mud pool," he said.

Though the mill no longer relies on the dam for operations — it uses electricity — Strahan said it's important that the water wheel continue to function so visitors can enjoy the full effect of the facility.

"The young people who come to visit our mill — if they don't see the water wheel turning, they don't believe the mill is in operation," he said, adding that as a nonprofit, the mill cannot afford to make expensive changes.

Strahan acknowledges aeration is an issue near the dam but doesn't believe the dam affects the quality of the broader waterway. Several of the wastewater treatment facilities in question, he said, are above the dam. If the quality of the water entering them is poor it's because of something other than the dam. He's worried taxpayers will wind up footing an even more expensive bill to upgrade the treatment facilities 10 years from now when the dam removal doesn't pan out as expected.

All that said, Strahan does acknowledge that a compromise could be reached and said limited dam modifications would be far better than a total removal.

"I'm sure there is some part-way answer, like anything else in life," he said. "For me to get everything I want is usually impossible, and for you to get everything you want is usually impossible. But somewhere down the line we can probably accomplish something that works for a lot of people."

Moving forward, he'd like to see the Workgroup keep the public informed, especially nearby residents and casual visitors to the area.

"We don't want them to show up one day and find out the dam's gone or that the trails they used to walk aren't what they used to be," he said. "Just try to make as many people happy as we can."

#### DON FULLER

*"I'm not totally convinced that the science is correct," Fuller said, noting there's a big push to remove dams across the country. "The proposals to modify the dam have really not been well-explained to me."*

- President of the Fullersburg Historic Foundation
- Date: Feb. 28, 2019
- Interviewer: Will O'Brien, Aileron Communications
- Length of interview: 16 minutes

Don Fuller is the president of the Fullersburg Historic Foundation, an organization that promotes and supports the preservation of the Fullersburg Historic District and its heritage sites, which include Graue Mill and the Dam. He is a lifelong Hinsdale resident and a descendent of Ben Fuller, who settled the area in the 1830s. Fuller has a strong affinity for the dam and does not want to see it modified.

"Over my lifetime, I've spent a lot of time around Salt Creek and the dam," he said, saying he fished there as a child and that his father learned to swim there. "I have no qualms about telling you I'd hate to see the dam get wrecked. I would prefer to maintain it as it is."

He's not convinced that modification is necessary, saying the water below the dam is fine and that his organization at one point hired a water quality expert who concluded better aeration could be realized through alternative means. He sees dam modification as a political issue, "driven by environmental dollars that have to be spent."



“The wastewater treatment facilities — that’s highly politicized too,” he said. “The whole thing tends to be a political football.”

When asked about the need to meet state and federal environmental regulations, Fuller said such regulations are always shifting from one administration to the next. He thinks framing the issue around \$180 million in potential wastewater treatment upgrades is an unfair oversimplification.

He said he’s familiar with the DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup and has spoken with the group several times. However, he doesn’t feel the group has done a great job communicating its various proposals.

“I’m not totally convinced that the science is correct,” Fuller said, noting there’s a big push to remove dams across the country. “The proposals to modify the dam have really not been well-explained to me.”

Fuller noted that past plans to modify the dam have always gotten strong pushback from neighbors, organizations like his and area residents who like visiting the dam. The dam is an important tourist draw, he said. As a result, the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County has always shelved modification plans, “but [the Workgroup] keeps coming back. They keep pushing for modification.”

Modification, while preferred to full removal, would still be bad outcome, he said.

“I’ve seen some modification projects and they change the whole character,” he said. “You can’t tell me it’s still going to be a pretty, historic site. I don’t think it’s a great idea personally.”

Before the idea is raised again, he said, area leadership should decide once and for all whether or not the dam is historically protected.

He said he appreciated having his opinion taken into consideration and hoped the Workgroup would openly communicate its plans moving forward.

## FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Overview:

The DuPage River Salt Creek Workgroup convened a focus group on Wednesday, April 3, as a means of gathering public opinion on potential improvements to area surrounding the Graue Mill dam. The meeting lasted about 90 minutes and was hosted at the Oak Brook Public Library.

Peter Gray of Aileron Communications led the discussion. Seven area residents, selected based on their responses to an online survey about the dam, participated in the focus group. We intentionally chose participants with a wide range of opinions and weighted the group toward people who would be skeptical of, or opposed to, dam modification. The focus group participants were better informed about Graue Mill and Fullersburg Woods than the average DuPage County resident, and we expect they have stronger than average interest in the outcome of the project.

### Participants

- Erik Lynch, Downers Grove
- Stephen Kraslen, Elk Grove Village
- Sarah Cavallo, Elk Grove Village, spouse of Kraslen
- Jennifer Bortman, Elmhurst
- Tim Bixter, Clarendon Hills
- Andrew Ragas, Westchester
- Michael Dutka, Oak Park

### Participant responses to [online survey](#)

[ Respondents answered questions 3-5 on a scale of 1: *Not Very Important* to 5: *Very Important* ]

	Lynch	Kraslen	Cavallo	Bortman	Bixter	Ragas	Dutka
Familiar with Graue Mill dam?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Visited dam in last year?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dam's importance to community?	5	5	4	5	1	5	5
Importance of water quality, wildlife habitat?	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
Importance of historic sites?	5	5	5	5	1	5	5
Most important consideration?	Water quality	Wildlife habitat	Wildlife habitat	Wildlife habitat	Wildlife habitat	Wildlife habitat	Historic sites
Support modifying dam to improve water quality?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Support modifying dam to save taxpayers \$180 million?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

## Key themes from discussion

- 1) Graue Mill area is seen as a community treasure: Each of the focus group participants had something positive to say about the Graue Mill area. Whether they've been visiting since childhood or were introduced later in life, they go there to enjoy the natural setting, fish, walk, bike and spend time with their families. Everyone agreed that the site is a popular destination deserving of investment.
- 2) Algae and stagnant water in the impoundment was seen as a clear indicator of poor water quality, and helps illustrate the need for a solution. Participants were not clear on the cause of water quality issues or whether toxic chemicals were in the impoundment water or sediment.

*"To me, that's just a sign of a stagnant waterway, that the water isn't flowing, that the water isn't clean. It's bad for the wildlife in there."*

- 3) Need for action is recognized, but ideas for solutions differ: Similarly, everyone present acknowledged the need to improve the area's water quality. There were differing opinions, however, on how to achieve that goal.
- 4) Proceed with patience: Given the site's historical significance and the many concerned stakeholders, the focus group participants said the Salt Creek Workgroup should proceed with patience, using data, case studies, and multiple perspectives to inform their recommendations.

## Discussion summary

### Connection to Graue Mill

The focus group began with each participant sharing a bit about their experiences at Graue Mill and the Fullersburg Woods.

Sarah Cavallo, who grew up in Park Ridge, said her parents took her there all the time when she was a child and that she loves the area's natural beauty. "I think it's a great place to enjoy history and a nice, natural spot to come together."

Tim Bixter and Andrew Ragas both said they who regularly visit the area to fish.

Michael Dutka, a director of the Fullersburg Historic Foundation, said he first visited the area as a youth on a canoeing trip with the Cicero Park District. He's in favor of preserving the dam but recognizes pollution has been an issue for a long time. He recalled trying to canoe there again in 1970s and being told by a ranger that he couldn't because the water was dangerous.

### Need for improvement

When asked how the Graue Mill area could be improved, Erik Lynch said more resources should be dedicated to picking up trash and keeping it pollution-free. The rest of the group agreed.

Cavallo raised the point of water quality, saying the condition of the Salt Creek above the dam has seemed to “really have degraded over time.” She noted the buildup of algae. “To me, that’s just a sign of a stagnant waterway, that the water isn’t flowing, that the water isn’t clean. It’s bad for the wildlife in there.”

Dutka said his group hired a water treatment expert who concluded there are ways to improve water quality without modifying the dam. Dutka said the area’s pollution stems from issues farther upstream, like discharge from sanitary districts and salt runoff from nearby roads. Dutka talked at length about the mill’s history and sees the dam, essentially, as an extension of the mill.

***Recommendation: Focus on the obvious water quality issues in the impoundment when communicating about dam modification***

### Fishing

Ragas said he prefers fishing downstream of the dam. He said walleye, musky, northern pike, catfish and bass can all be found in the creek. Several other members of the focus group talked about fishing or watching fishermen in the area.

### Flooding

Jennifer Bortman raised the issue of flooding and wondered whether removing the dam would create issues for communities downstream. Several members of the group agreed with her point and were curious what kinds of analyses may have been done to study the issue.

***Recommendation: Share data on water quality issues in the Salt Creek Watershed***

### The Mill

Several focus group members asked how dam modification would affect the mill and the operation of its wheel. They all seemed satisfied upon learning that modification wouldn’t impact the mill race of the mill’s ability to operate.

***Recommendation: Clearly communicate the goal of keeping the millrace flowing and the waterwheel operating***

### Reactions to images

*“PhotoShop is a wonderful thing. But they showed photos like that at the Hoffman dam when they were trying to pass that, and now it doesn’t look anything like that.”*

The group was shown photos of the area around Graue Mill dam as well as modification projects in Wood Dale, Warrenville, Naperville, Riverside and Lombard. Then they were shown images of potential modifications to the Graue Mill dam.

The group had mixed opinions. They reacted negatively to the algae above the Graue Mill dam, reacted positively to some of the riffle examples, but were also unimpressed with — or indifferent to — some of the other visuals. They said it’d be most helpful to see case studies of dams near mills.

Cavallo reacted positively to the Graue Mill dam modification images, saying, “To me, the project now makes more sense, from a purely visual point. I can see there’s a wetland space being created. It seems like the more natural approach, that will help with flow and some of the things we’re concerned about.”

Dutka, meanwhile, said, “PhotoShop is a wonderful thing. But they showed photos like that at the Hoffman dam when they were trying to pass that, and now it doesn’t look anything like that.”

***Recommendation: Create renderings that illustrate the dam, mill and millrace after modification***

### Cost

Ragas raised the point of cost, and Peter Gray, the discussion moderator, explained removing the dam is estimated to cost \$3-5 million, while alternative wastewater treatment upgrades are estimated to cost \$180 million. The group was curious about the specifics of who would pay that cost.

Dutka said the \$3-5 million estimate is probably low, not accounting for landscaping costs, while the \$180 figure is probably high. The group wondered how many wastewater treatment facilities are upstream from the dam. They also talked about the costs of dredging the area.

***Recommendation: present detailed information on current and projected costs, and impact to citizens, when explaining the dam modification project.***

### Passing the problem downstream?

A big concern of the group was whether removing the dam would simply take the area’s pollution issue and push it farther downstream.

***Recommendation: Make it clear that water quality issues are caused more by lack of dissolved oxygen than a buildup of toxins – i.e. explain how dam removal creates better water quality***

### Ideal outcome

Lynch said removing the dam but keeping the mill in operation seems like an ideal outcome.

“If we can say, there used to be a dam here, but we’re better at doing things now. We can show you the mill race, and we can grind corn and everything, and we can keep the waterways clean, that seems like a wonderful lesson to teach our children.”

### Moving forward

In advancing the project, Bixter said making the area as clean as possible should be the No. 1 objective.

Dutka remained unconvinced that removing the dam is necessary, saying “I’d like to see some other solutions, even if they’re a bit more costly.”

Lynch said the key objectives should be: improving water quality, maintaining the history and keeping the project cost-effective. “Balancing all three of those will be very tough. My advice to the workgroup is to take their time, and to not rush it.”

Bortman talked about the need to get multiple parties on-board, namely water treatment, forest preserve, environmentalist, members of the public who regularly visit the area, and taxpayers who will pay for it. “You have to look at all the options, it’s going to take some time.”

Cavallo repeated that point, saying that if the workgroup uses messaging that considers multiple points of view, “You’ll win over most people, I think.”

### **Key Takeaways from the Focus Group:**

With the right approach, the DRSCW should be able to build public support for dam modification.

#### Public communications should include:

- Discussion of water quality issues upstream of Graue Mill Dam
- Background on the causes of water quality issues
- Results of testing for toxins in the impoundment, sediment and in Salt Creek generally.
- Description of other efforts that have been undertaken to improve water quality.
- Details on project budget, current maintenance costs at Graue Mill, and cost of water treatment upgrades

#### Recommendations for public outreach

- Discuss preservation of millrace and waterwheel
- Use before and after renderings that show mill, waterwheel and dam
- Discuss impacts (or lack thereof) on flooding and communities downstream
- Include multiple viewpoints and provide time for public education and discussion