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## Padding fans to protest proposed dam safety rule

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By **ANDRE SALLES** [asalles@scn1.com](mailto:asalles@scn1.com)

AURORA -- While thousands of people are enjoying Downtown Alive! above them Friday night, about a dozen paddlers will be getting into the Fox River by Galena Boulevard to make a serious point.

They will be there to protest a proposed state rule that would force paddlers to pull their boats out of the river 300 feet north and 50 feet south of any dam.

The rule, drafted by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, is intended to keep boaters safe from dangerous rolling dams and was drafted in response to three drowning deaths near the Yorkville dam in 2007.

But according to Gary Mechanic, the rule goes too far and doesn't take into account differing types of dams and canoe chutes.

Mechanic, a member of the Illinois Paddling Council, is the coordinator of the Aurora Paddlesports Festival, taking place Saturday and Sunday at Phillips Park.

Mechanic said the restrictions won't keep anyone safer. Rather, he said, they will criminalize perfectly safe areas of waterway north of these dams.

To prove his point, he and his fellow paddlers will spend an hour Friday night flipping their boats and playing around just north of the Galena Boulevard dam.

"If we did this after the rule passes," Mechanic said, "we'd be committing a Class A misdemeanor."

Mechanic said he's only inviting the best paddlers he knows, and he will have safety boats keeping people from coming within 50 feet of the dam.

Canoes and kayaks will be adorned with protest slogans on their undersides, which will be visible when the paddlers roll them -- basically flipping the boat on purpose.

They expect to draw a crowd and hope to publicize the Paddlesports Festival at the same time.

There is a hearing scheduled for next month on IDNR's Dam Safety Rule 3703, Mechanic said.

The rule would effectively cripple the Mid-America Canoe and Kayak Race on the Fox River, forcing boaters to clear the water around three dam portages and pull their boats out onto private property.

"I think it's an unreasonable, extreme, one-size-fits-all solution, and it's not an effective one," Mechanic said.

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