

Dam's removal a high-water mark



KEN OSBURN / Staff

The century-old Woodside I dam is about to become history, as demolition of the concrete structure begins Tuesday. The dam is the first of two slated for removal from the Twelve Mile River.

Judge who oversaw long PCB cleanup case to witness the fall

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CATEECHEE — The long-awaited demolition of a dam rising 27 feet from the bed of the Twelve Mile River will begin Tuesday.

The U.S. district judge who ordered the removal of the Woodside I dam will be there when a big yellow crane takes the first bite out of the century-old concrete structure next to the red brick shell of a textile plant it was built to power.

The dam is a part of Pickens County's textile past, and also part of a darker history, of PCB contamination and pollution that

has tainted the river and Lake Hartwell, sources of drinking water and recreation for tens of thousands of people.

Judge Ross Anderson Jr., who wanted the dam taken out five years ago as part of a settlement for damage caused by PCBs, said he's delighted it's finally going to happen.

"I am real glad to see our lake being cleaned up and the river restored to its natural beauty and cleanliness because it was a chemical cesspool," he said.

The removal of the Woodside I dam, and of the Woodside II dam downstream, which is slated to start this summer, is part of an effort to clean the contaminated

waters where health advisories warn against eating certain fish likely to carry carcinogenic PCBs in their fat.

The 2006 settlement stems from the release of more than 400,000 pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, between 1955 and 1977 from the former Sangamo-Weston capacitor manufacturing site in Pickens, now owned by Schlumberger Technology Corp.

Anderson ordered Schlumberger to remove the dams so clean sediment could flow downstream and cover the contaminated lake bottom, as prescribed in a

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1990s Superfund cleanup.

For years, negotiations, planning and implementation of the project stalled, until Anderson, after reading in *The Greenville News* that the dams still stood, called a hearing in 2009 and ordered them removed within a year.

A landfill was constructed across the river from the small mill village of Catechee to hold PCB-contaminated sediment from behind the Woodside dams, and last March, dredges began removing the contamination from the river.

In recent weeks, a siphon was installed to lower the water in the impoundment behind the dam, a final step before demolition begins.

"Despite weather delays due to excessive rainfall, our operations are safely progressing as planned. We're still on schedule to begin demolition of Woodside I," said Mary Jo Caliandro, a Schlumberger spokesperson.

Paul West, who lives in Catechee near the dam, has been watching the work.

"It's been moving right along, sometimes not as fast as we want, but I would think that type of project is not something you would run into every day," West said.

Larry Dyck, a river restoration expert who lives on the Twelve

Mile and has been a proponent of removal of the two Woodside dams as well as a third dam owned by the Easley-Central Water District upstream — a separate project still in limbo — said he is "delighted" to see this project reach this stage.

"This is one step toward providing the natural river restoration promised to the people in the 2006 Consent Decree," Dyck said.

Yet as the water in the impoundment is lowered, Dyck has growing concerns that PCBs could be in the sediment left behind in floodplains along the river banks, which he said haven't been tested for PCBs. He fears that as the restored river carves the channel back to bedrock, it could undercut the floodplains, and any contamination they contain would be released downstream.

"As I look at the residual sandy banks I see dark lenses of sediment within the sand. These layers likely contain PCBs," Dyck said. "If the banks are going to be uncovered, then we should know if they contain toxins so that appropriate protective action may be taken."

The court relies on settlement trustees and an independent expert to ensure the work is done properly, and all have agreed work to date has been satisfactory, said former federal Judge Billy Wilkins, one of two special receivers Anderson appointed in 2009 to oversee the project.