

PCB concerns run high at meeting



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A capacity crowd turned out Thursday night to hear an EPA report on the Twelve Mile River. PAUL BROWN

EPA river plan fails to pour oil on water

Residents want agency to do more

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PICKENS—As the Environmental Protection Agency tries to ease concerns of local residents over PCB contamination in the Twelve Mile River, decades of history leave many feeling that more could be done.

There are "vast differences" in what EPA has done on New York's PCB-contaminated Hudson River in New York and on the Twelve Mile, said Lar-

ry Dyck, who lives on the Twelve Mile and is a Pickens Soil and Water Conservation District commissioner.

"They are looking at floodplains, they've taken soil samples and they're advising people on what they might do if they access those floodplains," Dyck said.

"If the PCB levels reach a certain threshold, then they do some kind of remediation, and that hasn't been done along the Twelve Mile."

Craig Zeller, EPA project manager, said the floodplains in the Pickens County area where two dams were removed from the river this year will be tested as the agency assesses the risk of contamination.

Pickens County leaders said they aren't convinced that residents are protected from the risk of PCBs re-released into the river by a court-ordered dam removal or that a landfill holding sediment dredged from behind the dams is secure.

Council Chairwoman Jennifer Willis said the

county wants a seat at the table when decisions are made regarding the Twelve Mile.

"Pickens County Council is concerned the Twelve Mile River may not have been cleaned to the degree necessary to safeguard the environment, or to protect the health of county residents who live near the river or those who live downstream on Lake Hartwell," Willis said.

Seeing high concentrations of PCBs found in two separate studies this year

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by Pickens County and by Upstate Forever and other conservation groups is what drove the federal agency to take another look at the area where the dams were removed, Zeller said.

At a heated public meeting that filled the auditorium at the Pickens County Administration Building on Thursday night, council members Neil Smith and Sam Wyche told federal and state health officials that they don't trust them to look out for residents.

People who live on the river said they watched heavy equipment take contaminated material from behind the lower dam and haul it along the river bed to build a controversial shoal road. County officials asked why federal and state officials didn't keep a better eye on the work.

Other residents on the river worried about their grandchildren playing on

the banks.

Zeller said testing planned in coming months will assess the risk to people and children playing or picnicking on the banks or wading or kayaking in the river. Results of testing should be available this summer, Zeller said.

"We still don't have a solution to the PCB issue," Smith said.

Zeller and Steve Scott, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers hydrologist who is doing a study of how sediment will move downstream, said the shoal road already has started to wash downstream.

"The shoal road is shrinking," Zeller said. About a third to a half of what was there remains, he said.

Scott said there hasn't been much rain and "once there's more flow from storms it will begin to change much more. This last storm has moved material in the road back about 10 feet in places. Sand and gravel is slowly working its way down."