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ANDERSON, SOUTH CAROLINA

Hearing set Tuesday on cleanup of Twelve Mile Creek

By Charmaine Smith-Miles
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ANDERSON — U.S. District Judge G. Ross Anderson wants some answers on what's happening with the removal of PCBs from Twelve Mile Creek, a restoration project that has been on the table for three years.

A hearing is set for 10 a.m. today.

And because of a decision made about a week ago, the parties involved in the project will have something to report.

Officials involved in the project have reached an agreement on how the contaminated sediment is to be cleaned up, said Ross Self of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

Self is one of several officials with six state and federal agencies charged with supervising the sediment removal.

“We are in high hopes the restoration is going to move ahead at a reasonable clip now,” Self said. “We’ve crossed one of the hurdles that was holding us up. And we expect to see progress in the coming months.”

In 2006, Anderson signed an order calling for Schlumberger Technology Corp. to remove two of three dams on the creek and nearly 400,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment. From about 1955 until 1977, the cancer-causing polychlorinated byphenyls, or PCBs, were released into the creek at a capacitor plant in Pickens.

At the time, the plant was owned by Sangamo-Weston Inc. The contamination prompted health officials to post warnings to residents about eating certain fish from the creek, area streams and Hartwell Lake.

Since the settlement was reached, the PCB-laden sediment is still in the creek and all three dams remain.

The delay has occurred for a number of reasons, officials said Monday.

Self said there have been several internal staff changes at Schlumberger, an international company that bought the capacitor plant in Pickens from Sangamo-Weston Inc. And the company has changed its consultants on the project.

Schlumberger officials also proposed a different restoration plan, which would have allowed them to release some of the contaminated sediment into the creek rather than dredging it all, Self said.

That plan was rejected by the state and federal officials. In a meeting held last week, Schlumberger decided to go back to the original plan.

Anderson set the hearing about a month ago to find out what's happening with a settlement reached about three years ago between several state and federal agencies and Schlumberger.

John Tynan, the co-director of Upstate Forever's Clean Air and Water Program, and Larry Dyck, a resident of Hartwell Lake, both are eager for the restoration to move forward. Dyck is also a member of Upstate Forever, is a board member of Lake Hartwell Association, and is Pickens Soil and Water Conservation District commissioner.

"We are certainly disappointed in the delay that has occurred," Tynan said. "We hope to see quick action to implement the original restoration plan."

Dyck said officials pushing for the restoration are going to ask that Anderson hold another hearing on the restoration to see what it would take for Schlumberger to remove the third dam.



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