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Sediment will be removed from Twelve Mile River

Schlumberger, trustees prepare for Tuesday hearing

*By Anna Simon
Clemson bureau*

CLEMSON — Sediment behind a Twelve Mile River dam won't be discharged downstream — a change that puts the court-ordered dam removal back on track days before a hearing before an angry federal judge.

“They've finally decided to do something. That gives me great hope,” said U.S. District Judge G. Ross Anderson Jr., who called parties in the 2006 PCB clean-up related settlement back to court to explain why nothing was happening. The hearing, scheduled for 10 a.m. Tuesday, will be open to the public at the federal courthouse in Anderson.

“But for the publicity given this thing by *The Greenville News* it still would be stalemated,” Anderson said.

Sediment will be placed in secure, temporary storage before flashboards are removed from the dam, said Joe Ferguson, project manager for Schlumberger Technology Corp.

The location of permanent storage remains unresolved, he said.

Removal of the flashboards from the lower dam is the initial phase of Schlumberger's work plan for the project that includes removal of that and another dam as well as other river restoration and remediation for natural resource damage due to contamination of PCBs released from the former Sangamo-Weston capacitor manufacturing plant in Pickens between 1955 and 1977.

Schlumberger later merged with Sangamo-Weston and became the responsible party in the clean up.

Earlier plans to let the sediment flow downstream concerned local residents and natural resource trustees in the project.

“Schlumberger has addressed our concerns. We have given them the green light to move ahead with development of the final design documents,” said Ross Self, chief of freshwater fisheries for the state Department of Natural Resources, the lead of six federal and state trustee agencies.

The final design documents are the next step of the planning process that will include a public meeting after the first draft of the final design is completed, probably sometime in the fall, Self said.

The final design package will address the entire project, including the remainder of the dam removal work and how the river will be restored. If all goes well, Ferguson said he has a “reasonable expectation” the work could begin on the river in the spring.

The project will create local jobs when work on the river begins, Ferguson said. Schlumberger has instructed its contractors to provide as many local jobs as possible. There will be a need for a range of skills from security positions to site workers.

The removal of the dams is a critical element of a Superfund plan to begin reducing the PCB pollution in Lake Hartwell — contamination that for three decades has resulted in bans on eating fish caught in the waters.

The removal of the dams is designed to allow fresh sediment to flow into Hartwell and cover the PCB-contaminated lake bottom.

Amanda Bauknight, former chair of the Pickens Soil and Water Conservation District said, "I have concerns about the fact that nothing has happened in three years following the consent decree. Absolutely nothing has changed in three years."

Larry Dyck, a retired Clemson University professor and river restoration expert who lives on the Twelve Mile said he's "pleased that the trustees and Schlumberger were able to go back to the concepts that were in the consent decree. It's a shame it took them three-and-a-half years to do it."

Three Upstate organizations, Upstate Forever, the Lake Hartwell Association and the soil and water conservation district, in a July 1 letter to Anderson, suggest asking additional for compensation from Schlumberger in the form of removal of a third dam on the river to make up for the excessive delay.

"There has been significant damage to the river and the lake because of the delay," said Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever.

Removal of the third dam is needed for a true ecological restoration of the river, Wyche said.

In the July 1 letter, attorney Frank S. Holleman III, representing members of the three organizations, asks that the court also schedule a status conference regarding removal of the third dam.

The 2006 settlement included payment of \$11.96 million to trustees to be used for fishing improvements and river corridor restoration and asks that trustees consider using some of the money to help remove the third dam, which is owned by the Easley-Central Water District.

Over the course of recent interviews, Ferguson told *The Greenville News* that the third dam "ultimately will have to be removed to create the environment everybody's looking at."

Self said efforts "have not proven fruitful" and the third dam "has been put on back burner." Trustees are "open to anything that would make that feasible."

Clemson Bureau reporter Anna Simon can be reached at 864-654-7563
