

## Supporters of removing dam find an open ear

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CLEMSON — Removal of the Easley-Central Water District dam as a remedy to restoring fish habitat along Twelve Mile Creek and Hartwell Lake moved a step closer to reality Thursday.

Representatives of the Natural Resource Trustees and those in favor of removing the dam met at the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources offices on Hartwell Lake. After more than 2 hours and 30 minutes, officials with the trustees agreed to put the proposal before them into a resolution seeking \$300,000 for a feasibility study.

“You’ve come up with a plan to answer a lot of questions that needed to be answered,” said Ross Self, a biologist with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and representative of the natural resources department trustee. “We are anxious to move ahead.”

The next step, Self said, is for the trustees to be briefed on the plan and see if they want to pass a resolution to pay for the study.

Self said he would move with all due haste to schedule the meeting and the vote.

The \$4.4 million plan would, in the proponents’ words, allow fish to move up the waterway, allow the flow of river sediment downstream and keep the water district operational.

The former two elements are important to meet requirements of a federal settlement that requires fishing habitat to be restored along the waterway. More than 30 years ago, a capacitor plant released toxic PCB chemicals into Twelve Mile Creek and Hartwell Lake downstream. The result has been years of health warnings to avoid eating fish caught in the creek and on that end of the lake.

Twelve Mile Creek has three dams, Woodside I, Woodside II and the Easley-Central dam. A court order required the company that owned the capacitor plant, Schlumberger, to remove the Woodside dams and clean up tainted sediment. That work has already started.

But the Easley-Central dam, which is above Norris Road and the two Woodside dams,

was not included in that court order. Now, the Lake Hartwell Association, Upstate Forever and other organizations have pushed to have the dam removed to restore the waterway and allow improved fishing habitat.

A separate federal agreement provided nearly \$9 million to be used for restoring fishing and fish habitat in the affected areas. The Natural Resource Trustees, who are the representatives of a group of state and federal agencies, are charged with disbursing the money.

Bill Stephens, a principal with Kestrel Horizons, an environmental and engineering consulting firm representing the proponents of the dam removal, presented a plan Thursday that would:

- remove a western section of the Easley-Central dam, but keep most of the infrastructure already there, as a way to save money;
- build an earthen dam to split the waterway and provide a new reservoir for the water district;
- allow free flow of most of the waterway and access for fish to move upstream; and
- dig a flume that would supply the new reservoir.

While the total expected price tag is \$4.4 million, proponents asked for \$300,000 to study the levels of PCBs in the sediment behind the dam, to figure out the creek's depth, and to determine how much sediment has built up behind the dam and whether it can be released downstream.

Stephens said a 2002 study showed low levels of PCB contamination upstream from the dam, but that might need to be confirmed.

One trustee representative asked if the groups proposing the plan would be able to raise money to carry it out if they didn't receive the entire \$4.4 million.

Chris Starker, representing conservation group Upstate Forever, said the organization would try to raise money, but usually needed a funding commitment before it could seek large donations.

Natural resources department attorney Paul League asked if the Pickens County Council, which has not backed the dam removal, could be brought on as a funding source.

Larry Dyck, who has developed part of the dam removal plan and is a member of the Lake Hartwell Association, said that is a possibility.

"In my opinion, when some of the issues are resolved, they will come back on board,"

he said.

Herb Burnham, president of the Lake Hartwell Association, urged the trustees to fund the project and restore the health of the waterways.

“The PCB problem has been a stain on this beautiful lake for years and years,” Burnham said. “It will be a wonderful day when we can take these ‘do not eat the fish’ signs down.”

The settlement money was set aside to solve the problem, he said.

“I hope you will make this your first priority,” Burnham said.

He asked that the money not be used for more docks or other projects that don’t attack the pollution problem.

The trustees have proposed funding five projects, but did not include in that group of five the Easley-Central dam project, or a proposal by a group of Anderson leaders to build a Water Education and Environmental Center on the lake. Anderson County government has proposed building a fishing tournament center.

The federal judge overseeing the Woodside dams cleanup, G. Ross Anderson, has, in a court ruling, suggested the Easley dam removal and environmental center receive \$3 million each from the trustees, but said his suggestion was not binding.

Joe Bracken, superintendent for the Easley-Central Water District, said an engineer for the district has looked at the plan and signed off on it. One of the concerns was whether the district would have enough water to supply its 2,600 customers and keep pressure at levels necessary for fire department use.



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