

PCB-related study on Easley-Central dam gets tentative go-ahead

By John Staed

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ANDERSON — A group has agreed to go ahead with a feasibility study on whether to remove the Easley-Central dam on Twelve Mile Creek.

Removing the dam has been the goal of conservation groups involved with recommending how money should be spent from a PCB settlement.

An official with the conservation group Upstate Forever said the Natural Resource Trustees, who are in charge of spending settlement money awarded related to PCB contamination on Twelve Mile Creek, have signed off on a study of PCB contamination in sediment and land around the dam.

The trustees are assigned to oversee disbursement of about \$9 million to restore fishing and fish habitat to Twelve Mile Creek and Hartwell Lake, which were contaminated with a toxic chemical called PCB more than 30 years ago. State health officials consider the fish from some of those waterways inedible because of the pollution.

Chris Starker, Rural Waters Project associate with the conservation group Upstate Forever, said the trustees agreed to pay for a \$300,000 feasibility study. It would "assess the character of the sediment behind the dam," he said in an e-mail.

"Once the feasibility is complete and the results are in, determinations will be made as to how to proceed, which will depend entirely on what is found behind the dam," Starker said. "We don't anticipate any hurdles but the feasibility is necessary to eliminate any surprises not unlike the high PCB levels found in the upstream wetland area nearest the dam.

"Knowing these will aid in the final dam removal plan implementation as well as the determination of cost," Starker said.

The Easley Central Water District operates the dam and its commissioners have said they would need a source of water to replace the reservoir should the dam be removed. A proposal by the engineering firm Kestrel Horizons would remove part of the dam, but keep most of the pumps and dam intact, add an earthen dam to split the waterway and provide a new reservoir, and dig a flume that would supply the reservoir.

The plan also calls for allowing a free flow for most of the river for fish to move upstream.

Twelve Mile Creek has three dams, Woodside I, Woodside II and the Easley-Central dam. A federal court order required the company that owned a capacitor plant on a tributary of Twelve Mile Creek, Schlumberger, to remove the Woodside dams and clean up tainted sediment. That work is under way. The capacitor plant was the source of the PCBs.

The Easley-Central dam, which is above Norris Road and the two Woodside dams, was not included in that court order.

Larry Dyck, a member of the Hartwell Lake Association and a Clemson University expert in river habitat restoration, said Starker's assessment was correct. Dyck said he has completed working on the plan and it was sent to the trustees this week.

"The proposal is to determine the drop in the river in that region so as to complete the engineering feasibility study for putting up a partial dam that the water district can review," Dyck said. "The plan is to not only investigate the PCBs in the sediment in channel behind the dam but the flood plain behind the dam."

Ross Self, a spokesman for the trustees, said Thursday that the trustees had met more than a month ago with Upstate Forever and other officials, but were still waiting on the documents from the various groups involved.

"We agreed in concept and we're waiting for the work plan from them," Self said.

The final approval, he said, would depend on whether the work plan was acceptable.

"The trustees haven't met or talked about this," Self said.

Once the study is completed, Dyck said, the major work can start, if approved by the trustees. The price tag for the complete project is about \$4.4 million.

"I feel reasonably confident they will find it (the dam removal plan) appropriate and then we can get on with the work," Dyck said.



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