

Study will give details about PCB levels behind Easley-Central Dam

By John Staed

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PICKENS COUNTY — Funding for a study to check sediment behind the Easley-Central dam for PCB contamination is ready to be released, a state official said Monday.

Release of \$225,000 by trustees overseeing PCB cleanup of Twelve Mile Creek and Hartwell Lake will move a proposal to remove the dam one step closer to reality. Removal of most of the dam will open the watershed and restore fish habitat, some proponents have said.

Signs warning residents to not eat fish taken from the lake or Twelve Mile Creek have been posted by health officials since 1976, a result of PCB contamination. A goal of cleanup efforts is to remove or cover PCB-contaminated soil to prevent future contamination.

Ross Self, chief of fisheries for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and a trustee, issued the statement. In it, he said the group overseeing cleanup of PCBs from the river and lake still need to formally approve a resolution, release the money and sign contracts with the engineering firm that proposed the study.

The Independent Mail reported in June that the study had been approved, but this is the first official acknowledgement by the Natural Resource Trustees, a group of federal and state agencies who oversee disbursing about \$9 million for the cleanup. The money for the cleanup comes from Schlumberger, which in the 1970s bought a capacitor plant that was responsible for dumping PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, into Twelve Mile Creek, which flows into Hartwell Lake.

A 2006 consent decree between the agencies and Schlumberger required the money to go for restoring lost recreational fishing opportunities and “to compensate the public for natural resource injuries.”

Larry Dyck, who testified in federal court that removal of the Easley-Central dam was important to restore Twelve Mile Creek, said sponsors of the plan “are pleased to have this feasibility study funded.” Sponsors include the Lake Hartwell Association, Upstate Forever, the Easley Central Water District and the Pickens Soil and Water Conservation District.

“We believe this study will corroborate earlier investigations and show that the third dam can be removed safely,” Dyck said.

The Easley-Central Dam is one of three on Twelve Mile Creek. As part of an earlier agreement, Schlumberger is paying to remove the other two dams, called Woodside I and Woodside II, which are in Norris. That agreement does not include the Easley-Central Dam, which is used by the Easley-Central Water District for its drinking water reservoir.

“Public comments solicited by the trustees showed that the removal of the third dam, so as to create a free-flowing Twelve Mile River, was the most desired use of the restoration fund from among all proposed projects,” Dyck said. “We believe the release of these funds for the feasibility study is an important step in achieving a free-flowing river and ultimately a cleaner Hartwell Lake, which leads to reduced fish contamination.”

Easley-Central Water District 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, first presented in February, calls for removing part of the dam, but keeping most of the pumps and dam intact. The proposal also calls for an earthen dam to split the waterway and provide a new reservoir, and an artificial water channel that would supply the reservoir. The plan also calls for allowing a free flow for most of the river for fish to move upstream.

The study originally was proposed for \$300,000. The overall cost for the plan is \$4.4 million.



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