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Study could lead to removal of third dam on Twelve Mile River

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CATEECHEE — Trustees of a \$9 million environmental settlement have agreed to fund a study of toxic PCBs behind a third Twelve Mile River dam that could lead to removal of the final impoundment on the river.

The release of \$225,000 from the \$9 million Lake Hartwell Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Fund, announced in a prepared statement from trustees, was welcomed as a step forward by U.S. District Judge G. Ross Anderson Jr., who ordered the 2006 settlement that includes removal of two lower dams on the river.

"I'm glad to see that they used good judgment in approving that and moving forward. In my opinion it is absolutely essential that the Twelve Mile River be opened up all the way and that any PCBs be removed from that area," said Anderson, who has recommended that \$3 million of the settlement be used toward removal of the dam.

The study will develop an estimate of the volume of sediment in the impoundment behind the dam and provide information on the concentrations of PCBs.

In simpler terms, the study, proposed by sponsors of the dam removal project, should answer two questions Anderson asked in a hearing last year: How much sediment is behind the dam and how contaminated is it? No one at the hearing could fully answer the questions.

The study could put those questions to rest and the results would be used to determine the next steps of trustees as they consider whether funding toward removal of the third dam should be included in the final compensation plan.

"This information is considered critical in order for the Trustee Council to make informed decisions about any future proposals or activities involving the Easley Central Dam," trustees said in the statement.

Sponsors of the removal project "are pleased to have this feasibility study funded. We believe this study will corroborate earlier investigations and show that the third dam can be removed safely," said Larry Dyck, a river restoration expert and Lake Hartwell Association board member who lives on the Twelve Mile.

"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 Lake Hartwell which leads to reduced fish contamination," Dyck said.

The settlement stems from PCB contamination of the Twelve Mile and Lake Hartwell, where health advisories are posted warning against eating certain fish likely to carry PCBs in their fat.

The Easley-Central dam has been debated through the settlement process and remains controversial.

Removal was discussed but not included in the final negotiated settlement with Schlumberger Technology Corp. Anderson, in his 2006 decision, called on settlement trustees to consider using some of the money to help remove the dam. A draft compensation plan released by trustees last year recognized that removal could be beneficial but provided no funding for the project, in part due to lack of a sponsor, and four groups emerged to jointly sponsor the project — the Lake Hartwell Association, Upstate Forever, the Easley-Central

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Water District and the Pickens Soil and Water Conservation District.

A public survey conducted by trustees last year showed public support overwhelmingly favored removal of the third dam and creation of a free-flowing river as the best way to clean carcinogens from the lake. Of the respondents, 53 percent favored reallocating money for removal of the dam, *The Greenville News* found in analyzing survey results it obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

More than 400,000 pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, were released between 1955 and 1977 from the former Sangamo-Weston capacitor manufacturing site in Pickens, now owned by Schlumberger.

Schlumberger is responsible for removal of the two lower dams. Sediment is currently being dredged from behind the dams to prepare for their removal. Woodside 1, the upper of the two dams, would be removed first when dredging is finished.

Removal could begin as early as January, according to the most recent information provided to *The Greenville News* by Schlumberger spokesman Stephen Harris.



Dams on the 12 Mile River may be removed. (KEN OBSURN/Staff)

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