

PCB dam removal delayed yet again

Judge who ordered cleanup wants to 'get us moving forward'

By Anna Simon
CLEMSON BUREAU
asimon@greenvillenews.com

CATEECHEE — A study of toxic PCBs behind a third dam on the Twelve Mile River approved months ago can't start because paperwork to release funding isn't done and a new problem at the dam allowed potentially contaminated sediment to spill downstream.

"I need that study right away. It will get us off dead center and get us moving forward," said U.S. District Judge G. Ross Anderson Jr.

It is the latest in a string of delays related to a 2006 court-ordered settlement with Schlumberger Technology Corp. that includes removal of two lower dams and \$9 million to compensate for natural resource damages including contamination of fish in Lake Hartwell.

Settlement trustees want the study results before deciding whether part of the \$9 million in a restoration fund should be used toward removal of the third dam.

Anderson is unhappy that \$9 million of the public's money remains hasn't been put to use.

"I thought it would be over by now," Anderson said. "I'm always concerned anytime the people taking care of the taxpayers' business drag their feet, not just in this

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case but in every case."

Approval of \$225,000 from the \$9 million restoration fund for the study was announced by settlement trustees in early September. Project sponsors said they're still waiting for the money so the study can begin.

Larry Dyck, a member of several organizations sponsoring the proposed project, said he doesn't understand the delay. The study is expected to take two or three months and could be done or nearly done by now, Dyck said.

Paul League, a lawyer with the state Department of Natural Resources, the lead settlement trustee agency, said a resolution to release the money has to be signed by the six trustees, sent to the restoration fund manager and a contract written with Upstate Forever, the lead project sponsor.

League said funds should be released soon, depending on whether more negotiations are needed.

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, said, "We are very frustrated by the delay. We anticipated having the con-

See PCB on page 4A

PCB

FROM PAGE 1A

tract at least two months ago. We can't proceed until we have a signed contract with the trustees."

League said that a court filing over a now-resolved dredging dispute and the sediment release from the third dam, owned by the Easley-Central Water District, delayed the process

as trustees waited to see what impact there might be on the proposed project.

The amount of material released downstream is unknown, but it appears that its not enough to invalidate the study proposal, League said.

The water district opened its dam to get space in its impoundment behind the dam. A stump got caught in the gate, and it couldn't be completely shut, said Joe Bracken, district superintendent.

Over time, silt will slow the flow through the gate, and workers will be able to tie cables to the stump and try to pull it out, he said.

Craig Zeller, Environmental Protection Agency project manager, said the water district was told to suspend releases typically done several times a year, until dredging was done.

The water district asked for a one-time exception so it could continue to treat water and serve its customers, and the agency autho-

rized release of not more than 5,000 cubic yards from one of the two sluice gates in the dam.

When the stump became lodged, the second gate was opened to lower the water so workers could get to the stump.

"It didn't go exactly according to plan," Zeller said. "There was a fair amount of material released downstream."

It's hard to say how much material was released, Zeller said. "Proba-

bly in excess of 5,000 cubic yards," he said. The impact on the dredging project should be minimal, he said.

Schlumberger is monitoring the situation regarding the Easley-Central dam sluice gate, said Mary Jo Caliandro, public affairs manager. "We are hopeful that it will not significantly impact the project," although it was noted in the latest progress report to trustees and the court.

The bigger issue is that even with the two lower

dams removed, "we're still going to have to deal with the passage of sediment from the Easley-Central dam," Zeller said.

The EPA supports efforts to remove the dam, he said, but the agency isn't a settlement trustee and has no say in the decision.

An October 2009 draft plan for the \$9 million didn't fund removal of the third dam, although the settlement left a door open for some of the money to be used for the project.

Response during a public comment period that ended last December ran overwhelmingly in favor of removal. Anderson recommended that \$3 million of the settlement go toward removal of the third dam.

Negotiations on specifics of the proposal to remove the third dam between trustees and the project sponsors — Upstate Forever, the Lake Hartwell Association, the Pickens Soil and Water Conservation District and the water district — have spanned much of the past year.

A final plan for the \$9 million should be released soon, said Ross Self, chair of the trustee council and freshwater fisheries chief with the DNR.

Anderson said he is satisfied with current progress on the river.

Dredging behind the Woodside I dam, the upper of the two dams to be removed, should be done this year, and the dam should come down in January, Caliandro said.

Work stopped several weeks ago for pre-winter maintenance.

Some final upgrades that were discovered during the maintenance operation are being completed now, and work on the river is expected to resume before Thanksgiving, "once we are sure that we can resume operations in a safe, environmentally sound manner," Caliandro said.

A new general contractor, CH2MHill, is on board, and Anderson said he believes the change is positive and will save time. Disagreement on "handling of certain aspects" of the job led to the change, he said.

"We are still on, not my schedule, but a schedule they can meet," said Anderson, who in July 2009 ordered that work be completed within a year. "I gave them a tight schedule. I was reasonably certain they couldn't make it, and they came up with one that was acceptable."

The settlement stems from release of more than 400,000 pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, between 1955 and 1977 from the former Sangamo-Weston capacitor manufacturing site in Pickens, now owned by Schlumberger. Removal of the dams is designed to allow fresh sediment to flow into Lake Hartwell and cover the PCB-contaminated lake bottom.