Airport project gets permit but work still stalled

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SENECA — State regulators handed Oconee County a stormwater permit this week for its $4.2 million airport runway extension project, but getting work restarted continues to be a challenge.

Thursday, a handful of heavy equipment sat idly at the project site.

The problem is that contractor Plateau Excavation, Inc. of Georgia deployed its workers to other job sites after the Department of Health and Environmental Control shut down Oconee's project in April.

DHEC ordered work stopped after discovering that a stormwater permit was never issued, although the project engineer told Oconee officials that a permit had been secured.

The same project engineer, Al Smith, continues to oversee the project for Oconee's consultant, Talbert & Bright.

Oconee County Administrator Scott Moulder said Smith was not responsible for the misrepresentation.

"He implied that he was misled by some other person," Moulder said.

DHEC on Thursday continued to side-step questions related to the misstatements and misrepresentations surrounding the stormwater permit.

Moulder reported getting the permit at Tuesday night's County Council meeting. He said DHEC is limiting work to installing sediment control measures before any more soil is disturbed for the runway extension.

In the meantime, Talbert & Bright is meeting with Plateau Excavation to work out a remobilization plan, Moulder said. For the moment, Moulder said he did not know when erosion control work would begin.

DHEC stated in a letter to Moulder accompanying the permit that it was not authorizing any additional construction or land-disturbing activity beyond the scope of the approved stormwater plans.

"Any future work on this project not shown on the stamped, approved plans will require that you submit another site plan for review and approval," DHEC stated.

Oconee officials had hoped that the runway project would be completed before the start of the Clemson University football season in September. Now it's doubtful the project will finish before the end of the year.

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