Engineer indicted over runway permit

Former Talbert & Bright worker faces fraud charges

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Federal authorities have indicted a man thought to be responsible for forging a South Carolina storm water permit and wreaking havoc on the runway extension project at Oconee County Regional Airport.

G. Martin Wynn, a project manager with Talbert & Bright Inc., the consultant Oconee hired to oversee the runway project, faces federal mail and wire fraud charges related to the fake permit.

If convicted, the 43-year-old Wynn could be sent to prison for up to 20 years for each of the two fraud charges. He also could face fines of up to $250,000 on each count.

U.S. Attorney Bill Nettles in Columbia announced the indictment Thursday.

Rumors began circulating in the spring that the Oconee airport project had been grounded by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) because of irregularities.

In late June, new County Administrator Scott Moulder released a statement that for the first time brought to light Wynn's actions.

In that statement, Moulder said the engineer "informed Oconee C that a storm water p was in place in accor with state and federa laws." However, DHE later informed the co that it had not issued permit for the project

According to the in ment, Wynn transfer unauthorized DHEC s onto a set of construct site plans for the Ocon project around Novem 2009.

"The unapproved work on the airport project caused the destruction of protected lands," the indictment states.

The U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of the Inspector General and DHEC's Office of Criminal Investigations led the investigation, Nettles said.

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Moulder said Thursday that Oconee County was aware of the investigation and cooperated fully.

Wynn was removed immediately from the project once Oconee County was made aware of the irregularities, Moulder said.

Talbert & Bright was allowed to continue as the project consultant on the condition that it cut its ties with Wynn.

Talbert & Bright issued a statement Thursday saying it first learned in March that a criminal investigation related to Wynn's actions was underway.

"Talbert & Bright terminated Mr. Wynn's employment and has cooperated fully with the investigation," the statement said.

DHEC required new storm water plans to be submitted and approved, which held up the project for more than seven months.

The cost of the project, funded mostly with federal money, ballooned from $4.2 to $4.8 million. It was because federal money was involved in the project that the U.S. Attorney's Office handled the investigation.

DHEC issued a permit last week to allow the project to move forward.

Moulder said he expects the extended 5,000-foot runway to be completed by the end of this year. The runway had been projected to be completed in August.

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