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Erosion complaints stall airport runway project

DHEC verifies claims of dirt entering nearby creek, lake

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THE JOURNAL

SENECA — A $4.2 million runway extension project at Oconee County Regional Airport has been stalled by complaints of stormwater pollution to a nearby creek and lake.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) confirmed Thursday that it instructed airport officials to fix the problem by updating the airport's stormwater pollution prevention plan.

In the meantime, work that began in October to give the airport a 5,000-foot runway via a 600-foot has shut down. Instead, all work is focused on erosion control.

Local officials hope to have the project completed by early- or mid-August in time for Clemson University's football season.

Airport Director Kevin Short said DHEC officials requested erosion control modifications more than two weeks ago.

Short said the airport

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JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

State health officials are calling on Oconee County Regional Airport to improve its stormwater pollution prevention plan after receiving complaints of silt and sediment entering Lake Hartwell. The glitch is stalling the airport's runway extension project.

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area has received "tremendous amounts of rain" since the beginning of the year.

"My hope is that they'll get the erosion controls taken care of so we can start hauling dirt and get this project completed," Short said.

DHEC spokesman Thom Berry said the agency inspected the airport following a complaint turned in to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that silt and sediment were getting into a creek and lake near the airport.

"The Corps turned the complaint over to us," Berry said. "We investigated and confirmed the problem."

The Corps of Engineers monitors Lake Hartwell, which is near the airport.

Berry said DHEC met with airport officials and instructed them to update the stormwater plan. He said the plan includes steps to correct the problem and keep it from happening again.

In March, Short said that Plateau Excavation Inc. of Austel, Ga., the company hired to do the runway extension, had added additional people to its crews in an effort to complete the project by August.

Work entails digging up and hauling 430,000 cubic yards of earth from the west end of the airport for the extension east of the runway.

The runway extension would allow larger corporate jets to land at the airport and is expected to boost economic development opportunities for the county.

Short said he's received no indication from anyone so far that the project won't be completed on time.

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