Oconee airport project might resume soon

DHEC could issue stormwater permit by end of week

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SENECA — State regulators could give Oconee County's $4.2 million airport runway project a green light by the end of this week.

A spokesman for the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) said the agency might issue a stormwater permit that is needed for the project to resume.

DHEC halted the project after determining that Oconee County lacked a stormwater permit. DHEC discovered it had not issued the permit while investigating reports in February that sediment from the airport project site was emptying into a nearby section of Lake Hartwell.

DHEC spokesman Adam Myrick said Tuesday that the permit had yet to be issued, "but it could possibly be as soon as the end of the week."

Myrick said he based his comment on information he received from DHEC staff.

The permit issue has been a public relations nightmare for Oconee County and its airport engineering consultant, Talbert & Bright.

A Talbert & Bright project manager apparently misled county officials by representing that a stormwater permit was in place in accordance with state and federal laws. The project manager even presented a copy of the

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permit or the actual permit to county officials.

Although no one wants to talk about it, the incident raises questions about possible falsification of documents.

Talbert & Bright submitted new stormwater plans to DHEC in April. DHEC responded by modifying the plans to include additional stormwater controls at the runway site.

Oconee County Administrator Scott Moulder said Tuesday the county asked the engineer to develop a remobilization plan for when DHEC issues the permit.

Moulder said the county has not seen a plan from Talbert & Bright. The firm has consistently refused to respond to media inquiries.

Part of the remobilization plan would likely include extending the contract for Plateau Excavation of Georgia to dig and haul the dirt for the runway extension.

The project originally was to be completed by Aug. 7.

Plateau is seeking $600,000 extra from the county, including $500,000 to recover losses from having men and equipment idle at the site.

The airport project, when completed, would give Oconee a 5,000-foot runway, long enough for larger corporate jets to land and take off.

Airport officials have said that would help increase fuel revenue and open other economic development opportunities to Oconee.

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