Officials mum on grounded airport project

State regulators, consulting firm won't comment

BY CARLOS GALARZA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — State regulators are mum on whether there are issues other than erosion control problems that are grounding the runway extension project at the Oconee County Regional Airport.

A spokesmen for the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) this week fended off queries by The Journal about what's holding up the project.

"Our practice is to not comment on specifics of investigations that may or may not be underway," DHEC spokesman Thom Berry said.

A company overseeing the project for the county also declined comment.

The Journal this week filed a Freedom of Information Act petition with DHEC requesting to review all files related to DHEC's permitting of the runway expansion project, as well as recent plans submitted by Oconee's engineering consultant to deal with erosion control problems.

Talbert & Bright, a firm specializing in engineering and planning services for airports and aviation related developments, submitted plans to mitigate stormwater issues after sediment from the project site emptied into nearby creeks and Lake Hartwell.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which built and regulates activity at Lake Hartwell, has approved plans by Talbert & Bright to address the erosion problems.

Chip Ridgeway with the

SEE AIRPORT, PAGE A5

AIRPORT: Project stalled

FROM PAGE A1

Corps' field office in Columbia said work on the plans must still get done and the sediment removed from the lake. He said the Corps would make sure the work is satisfactory and monitor it for five years.

However, the runway extension project cannot get rolling again without DHEC also approving the plans submitted by Talbert & Bright.

Jay Talbert, a principal with the firm, declined to comment on the situation Thursday and referred The Journal to county officials.

The Oconee County administrator said earlier in the week that it is "a matter between DHEC and Talbert & Bright."

In the meantime, the delay is costing Oconee money. Moulder confirmed this week that Plateau Excavation has submitted an invoice for $600,000 to recover losses for having its equipment sitting idly at the project site.

There is an outside chance, however, that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) might be able to reimburse Oconee for that expense.

FAA spokesperson Kathleen Bergen said Thursday that the agency has not yet determined whether the $600,000 expense "is an eligible item."

The airport project would extend the runway 600 feet and make it 5,000 feet, which would to allow larger corporate jets to land and take off. This would increase fuel revenues at the airport and increase the likelihood of corporations taking a closer look at Oconee as a venue for doing business.

The project was scheduled to have been completed by early August. However, work will not resume until DHEC approves the plans submitted by Talbert & Bright, and no one knows when that will be.

carlos@dailyjrn.com | (864) 973-6685



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

A runway extension project at the Oconee County Regional Airport remains in limbo. State regulators have yet to act on plans submitted weeks ago to correct erosion control problems that halted work.