River deemed safe for rec uses

Study: PCBs nearly gone from stretch of Twelve Mile where dams remove

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Kayakers and swimmers who dip into the water along a 1¼-mile stretch of the Twelve Mile River where two dams were removed and truckloads of contaminated sediment hauled away face no added health risks from PCBs that once lined the river, a new report has concluded.

Some contaminated sediment remains, but it is a fraction of the 400,000 pounds of PCB-laden materials that have been removed from the river, according to the report.

The remedial investigation report followed demolition of the Woodside 1 and Woodside 2 dams last year. The Environmental Protection Agency ordered the report from Schlumberger Technology Corp., which owns the former Sangamo-Weston superfund site and is responsible for river restoration under a 2006 court-ordered settlement.

"Our purpose was to get rid of the PCBs and make it a return to a safe waterway for wading and swimming and boating," said U.S. District Judge G. Ross Anderson Jr., who ordered the 2006 settlement. "They say we did that."

The report estimates that between 468 and 960 pounds of PCBs remain within the project floodplain, equal to 0.12 or 0.22 percent of the original 400,000 pounds that were estimated to have been released into the water.

The study focused on potential future uses of the river for recreation, including kayaking, boating, wading and sunbathing, and found that both cancer and non-cancer risks measured 25 times lower than EPA-allowed levels.

The study area focused on 7,600 feet of river from above the Woodside 1 dam to below the Woodside 2 dam. It didn't study areas downstream where a shoal road has slowly started to wash away toward Lake Hartwell, said Leon Harmon, one of two special receivers appointed to the case.

Soil samples showed small amounts of PCBs remained, but they would likely settle on the river bottom and be covered when new sediment

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washes downstream, he said.

"I think it's envisioned that those would stay in place," Harmon said. "The study shows that despite that fact there's not a risk to human health."

The EPA expected to find some residual PCBs but the levels found, spread out over three million cubic feet of space in the study area, presented very minimal risk, Zeller said.

The study didn't address the fishing advisories that remain on the river, he said.

The water ripples over rocks and splashes along where it once pooled up behind concrete and earthen dams. The major deconstruction work has been wrapped up, but monitoring of plantings and of the riverbank restorations continues, Harmon said.

"The project is nearing an end, but there is still some restoration work ongoing," he said.

Schlumberger removed at least eight fallen trees from the river this summer, planted 3,500 trees along the river bank and stabilized sections where the river had cut its new path, said Craig Zeller, EPA program manager on the project.

Zeller said he plans to discuss the report with Pickens County Council and will schedule a public hearing within a month.

He encouraged the river's use and said some have already begun to use it for recreation.

"To some degree, the kayakers have already found it," Zeller said.

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