

# Where a dam once stood, A RIVER FLOWS

## Twelve Mile dams out; river restoration begins



The Twelve Mile River flows through what once was the Woodside II Dam. The dam is completely gone with only debris left to be hauled away. KEN OSBURN / STAFF

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**W**ater flows where the last vestiges of a more than three-story-tall dam have been removed from the Twelve Mile River, where it and a sister dam removed earlier this year stood for a century, holding back a tide of carcinogenic PCBs through the later half of those years.

For the first time in 100 years, the Twelve Mile flows free where the two dams stood, re-carving its path through the heart of Pickens County as restoration work begins — work meant to heal the wounded waters even as concerned resi-

dents worry about toxic leftovers washing downstream to Lake Hartwell.

To date, about 420,000 cubic yards of silt and sand have been dredged from impoundments behind the dams, said Stephen Harris, spokesman for Schlumberger Technology Corp., the company ordered by a federal judge to demolish the dams and restore the river contaminated by PCBs from a capacitor manufacturing site now owned by Schlumberger.

Dredged materials have been moved to a massive class III landfill, larger than six football fields, on a hilltop above the former site of the Woodside I dam, where the toxic material is to remain forevermore.

It will be capped and closed, which should take about two months, and Schlumberger will maintain it as required by state law, Harris said.

The project "continues to make significant advances," Harris said. As dredging and dam demolition conclude at Woodside II, "the majority of equipment and personnel on the river are being demobilized."

The work isn't over, though. The judge who ordered the work, local residents and state and federal agencies continue to keep watch and wait for an end to the legacy of contamination that has resulted in decades of health advisories

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against eating certain fish from the river and the lake that still carry the toxins.

"I want them to follow my order," said U.S. District Judge G. Ross Anderson Jr., who in 2006 ordered Schlumberger to remove the dams and restore the river as part of a negotiated settlement for natural resources damage.

"I don't anticipate any difficulty, but I will be prepared if anything arises," said Anderson, who was angered in 2009 to learn through a report in *The Greenville News* that work hadn't started. He hauled parties back to court to jumpstart the project and said he's now pleased with the progress.

"Now pray for rain," said Anderson, who is counting on "Mother Nature," a force the court can't control, to wash remaining sediment downstream.

There's been little rain lately in the Upstate, which recently was upgraded from incipient to moderate drought.

A Superfund remedy calling for clean sediment to wash downstream and cover the existing contamination "is the underlying basis of that order," Anderson said. "In the end, we've got to use Mother Nature," which "has not failed us up to this point."

### Resident's fears

While some pray for rain, others fear it will clog the river with slugs of sediment and re-release long buried toxins.

"I am extremely concerned for the lake if the sediment from the river does contain contaminants," said resident Ken Bomar, who has reported concerns to the state Department of Health and Environmental Control and the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Something has to be done to save the lake from getting any more polluted than it already is," said Bomar, who wants something done before it rains.

Anderson said it was known when the project was planned that "we couldn't get every PCB out of the stream," but once rain washes the residue downstream, then clean sediment will follow it and

cover the contamination.

DHEC spokesman Adam Myrick said Bomar's concerns were heard but "are in direct contrast" with the EPA remedy and most sediment controls soon will be removed.

"While we expect an initial large slug from the haul road to cause some short-term harm, the system should begin to normalize within six months," Myrick said. "That time frame could be shortened if we get any large events such as a tropical system."

As the river continues to find its new channel over the next year, DHEC will continue oversight as a settlement trustee as restoration plans are made and restoration work takes place.

### Remedial work

In a separate Superfund regulatory role, DHEC and EPA will meet with Schlumberger next month to establish the scope of remedial work on the sloping river banks, Myrick said.

The EPA isn't a party to the court settlement, however now that the dams are out, the federal agency will begin next month to assess any resulting risk to human health or the environment, said Craig Zeller, the EPA project manager.

In addition to risk assessment, Schlumberger will begin restoration activities such as minor work at the old Woodside I access

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road, general cleanup and re-establishment of aquatic habitat of a free-flowing stream, Harris said.

Provisions will be made where needed for bank stabilization and tributary stability, enhanced fish passage and re-establishment of native vegetation.

Leon Harmon, a special receiver appointed by the court, said Schlumberger is expected to prepare a restoration plan in the coming months.