

OTHER VOICES

Seize chance to restore watershed

By Larry Dyck and Brad Wyche

The public has the extraordinary opportunity to remove all of the dams on Twelve Mile River and restore the natural, free-flowing character of more than 100 miles of this beautiful river system. We must seize this opportunity.

From 1955 to 1977, the Sangamo-Weston capacitor manufacturing plant in Pickens dumped more than 400,000 pounds of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into Town Creek, a tributary to Twelve Mile River, which flows into Lake Hartwell. PCBs are toxic man-made compounds that are very slow to break down, do not mix well with water, and settle into sediments where they can enter the food chain and accumulate in small organisms, fish and people. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined that PCBs are a "probable human carcinogen" and have numerous adverse effects, including physiological, immunological, develop-

mental and reproductive.

As the result of Sangamo-Weston's operations, there is now PCB contamination both in Twelve Mile River and in the upper Seneca River and Twelve Mile River arms of Lake Hartwell. These regions of the lake have had the most restrictive warning, "Don't eat any of the fish," for more than 30 years.

In May 2006, Schlumberger Inc. (the successor to Sangamo-Weston) signed a consent decree entered by the U.S. District Court in South Carolina that, among other things, requires Schlumberger to pay almost \$12 million as compensation for damages to the natural resources of the river and Lake Hartwell. Most of this payment (nearly \$9 million) is assigned to South Carolina, with the rest for Georgia. In addition, Schlumberger is required to dredge, and dispose off-site, most of the PCB-contaminated sediments behind two of the three dams on the river (known as the Woodside I and II dams) and to

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dismantle the dams. One of the basic objectives of the consent decree is that after the contaminated sediments behind the two dams are removed, clean sediments will move downstream and eventually cover or "cap" the contaminated sediments

in Lake Hartwell.

The consent decree also requires certain federal and state agencies, designated as "natural resource trustees" and parties to the decree, to consider the removal of the third dam on Twelve Mile River. This requirement was included in response to an outcry from the local community for removal of all the dams. The Easley-Central Water District owns this dam but does not object to its removal if an alternative water supply system is provided.

After the consent decree was signed, Schlumberger made the required \$12 million payment but did little else to comply with the order. Outstanding reporting by Anna Simon of *The Greenville News* called public attention to the lack of progress and led U.S. District Judge G. Ross Anderson Jr. to hold a hearing and rule on July 7 that no further delays would be tolerated.

Under Anderson's watchful eye, the project is now back on track — the

contaminated sediments and the Woodside I and II dams should be removed next year.

No final decision has been made on how to spend South Carolina's share of the payment. Proposed projects include removing the third dam and providing an alternative water system for the Easley-Central Water District; building an education center in Anderson County; enhancing fish habitat in Lake Hartwell; establishing inland fishing ponds; and improving fish access opportunities in Anderson County.

In Pickens County, where the bulk of the contamination exists, there is overwhelming support for the first project. Both the Pickens County Council and the Pickens County legislative delegation recently adopted resolutions stating that removal of the third dam and providing an alternative water system should be the "absolute top priority" project. Upstate Forever, the Lake Hartwell Association and the Pick-

ens Soil and Water Conservation District agree. There is more than sufficient funding for this project and others.

Removing the third dam would achieve a wide range of public benefits, including restoration of natural river flows; movement of clean sediments from the river into Lake Hartwell, which is, in our view, the only way to achieve the goal of effectively capping the contaminated lake sediments; opening more than 100 miles of the river system and allowing unimpeded passage for many species of fish; improving water quality; and establishing outstanding whitewater paddling opportunities.

Judge Anderson has scheduled a hearing on the issue of removing the third dam at 9:30 a.m. Oct. 13 at the federal courthouse in Anderson. The hearing is open to the public — please come and show your support for one of the most important environmental restoration projects in the Upstate's history.