

## Corps to close off public access to Pearce Creek site

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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will close off public access to the Pearce Creek Dredge Material Containment Facility, but trying to retain public access to a boat ramp on the property.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TIM BOYLE/USACE

EARLEVILLE — With the seasonal dredging of the C&D Canal and its approach channels completed in March, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will close off public access to the Pearce Creek Dredge Material Containment Facility.

Prior to the efforts over the last few years by a coalition of state and federal partners to reopen the Pearce Creek DMCF for dredge spoil disposal, the inactive site was favored by locals for hunting, hiking, birding and other outdoor recreational activities. The Corps closed the site to hunters in November 2015, citing the safety liability of construction to seal the site.

“What we will most likely be doing with Maryland Fish & Wildlife is opening up the Stemmers Run boat ramp that goes into Pearce Creek Lake for recreation, such as fishing and hunting,” Gavin Kaiser, the Corps’ project manager for the C&D Canal, told members of the Pearce Creek Implementation Committee on Friday. “I don’t want to close off the whole site. I want to be a good steward of federal lands, but we also want to protect the access we have here, especially with the liner that’s been put in and all of the associated work.”

While the county operates the paved Stemmers Run boat ramp near the Pearce Creek DMCF, there is an adjacent unpaved road — separated with a gate — to a Pearce Creek Lake launch located on Corps land.

“If I open the main gate, then I would have to install more gates around the perimeter,” Kaiser said. “We already have gates at the main entrance that most see, but there are several other entrances from within.”

The greatest concern at leaving the 260-acre site open to the public during non-dredging months is that its remoteness presents a safety concern, Kaiser said. If someone got hurt inside the DMCF and there isn’t anyone around to get help, the ability to call for first responders and for them to find the victim would be more difficult.

“One challenge we’re seeing across our district is that ATV enthusiasts like to drive around in our DMCFs,” he said. “That’s no different down here, and it’s a real safety concern.

“The soil down there is moist and in some places almost like quicksand,” he added.

In related Pearce Creek news, the work to connect nearby residents to public water from Cecilton is nearing completion, with 195 of the 235 lots already hooked up. Another 24 have completed exterior work and await interior communication. So far, officials have received denials for only four lots while another two have never responded to communication.

A March 15 leak in town where new water service line connected to existing system did not result in any disruption of service, but it did lead Cecilton to consider how to notify residents in such a scenario. All Cecilton customers are encouraged to call or visit town hall to sign up for the town’s Code Red notification system, which uses phone, text or email in the case of emergency.