

# With Pearce Creek liner completed, water service makes progress

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PHOTO COURTESY OF MPA

The completed Pearce Creek Dredge Material Containment Area liner is seen in this Jan. 19 aerial photo.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

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**CECILTON** — More than four years after a U.S. Geological Survey report found that disposal of dredge spoils had degraded water quality in local wells, the residents of Pearce Creek-area communities are increasingly looking toward the future rather than the past.

Over the past few years, officials from the Maryland Port Authority, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Department of Planning, the town of Cecilton and Cecil County have all helped develop a plan to seal the 260-acre Earleville site with a geosynthetic liner that aims to prevent leaching of naturally-occurring contaminants from dredge spoils into local water tables while also running a public water service line to the West View Shores, Bay View Estates and Sunset Pointe communities.

On Friday, Gavin Kaiser, an engineer with the U.S. Corps of Engineers, reported that the liner's installation and testing was recently completed and the only remaining work is to lay a geotextile layer and fill soil on top, which likely won't occur until October, just before new dredge spoils are pumped into the site. The Corps expects to dredge the C&D Canal and its approach channels in the winter of 2017-18, disposing of spoils at Pearce Creek for the first time in about 20 years.

"For all intents and purposes, the meat and potatoes of the project is complete," he said, noting that the Corps and its contractors are currently spending most of its time pulling major machinery off of the site. "We've been in your backyard for a long time, so we're trying to give you some space."

Kaiser also reported that the Corps will be installing 27 monitoring wells on the perimeter of the site in coming months in order to ensure that the liner is doing its job. It had to abandon about half of that number inside the disposal area when it laid the liner, as retaining them would have risked breaking the impervious barrier.

Meanwhile, the Corps' Groundwater Monitoring Plan was approved by Maryland Department of the Environment on Feb. 3, while its Discharge Monitoring Plan will be submitted to the state in the next few months, Kaiser said.

As the Corps checks off preparation for future dredge spoil disposal, residents of the affected neighborhoods are increasingly turning their attention to the water distribution system being brought in from Cecilton.

Chris Rogers, an engineer with Cecilton's contracted engineering firm AECOM, reported that the last of the service lines in the Pearce Creek communities was being installed Friday. The transmission line from Cecilton to the communities has also been completed, with only road restoration and a few smaller punch list items remaining for completion by May.

Starting in late spring, on-lot work will begin to hook homeowners up to public water service, allowing affected residents to one day stop receiving bottled water for consumption. In May, the U.S. Center for Disease Control's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

recommended that residents switch to drinking and cooking with bottled water due to concerns about the effect of high manganese levels on infants and young children.

AECOM did not include prioritizing all-year residents in the recently released bid package for on-lot work in order to allow potential bidders to make their best offer. Bids are due back on March 9.

“We thought it best to remain flexible, and give a contractor some kind of logical pattern for hookups,” Rogers said.

A community meeting at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 8, will explain to residents what they can expect during the on-lot work of the water service connections. Rogers said that the town hopes to have a representative from the future chosen contractor at that meeting.

One of the few remaining hiccups in a complex project involving a variety of stakeholders is a handful residents who have explicitly refused access to contractors to complete the on-lot work. Officials have reported that state regulations will mandate the capping of all residential wells, including anyone who doesn't comply with the project's parameters.

If a resident doesn't interconnect to the distribution system within one year of the project's completion, a resident would be responsible for the \$6,000 hookup fee that the state is currently funding for all complying residents. A noncompliant resident would also likely be unable to obtain residential permits for their property or sell it until they came into compliance.