

Pearce Creek dredge, water projects to coincide

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ELKTON — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will not begin placing dredge spoils at the Pearce Creek Dredge Material Containment Area in Earleville until October 2017.

The site drew controversy two years ago, when a U.S. Geological Survey report found that disposal of dredge spoils at the site had degraded water quality in local wells. Several harmful, albeit naturally-occurring, contaminants were found in varying levels in water samples of that study.

Since then a coalition of federal, state and local partners have been diligently working to address the issues at the site so it may be reopened for dredge disposal. Maryland Port Authority officials have cited the opening of the site as vital to the growth of the Port of Baltimore, a major shipping hub and employer in Maryland.

On Tuesday, Tim Kelly, C&D Canal manager for the Philadelphia district office of the Corps of Engineers, assured government partners, who have been working together to reopen the dredge site while also providing clean drinking water to residents in nearby communities.

In recent weeks, work has begun on closing abandoned wells, but actual construction and placement of a synthetic liner over the existing dredge spoil dump site — to prevent future leaching of elements in local water — should begin about Sept. 1, Kelly said.

“We haven’t given the notice to proceed yet,” he noted.

He explained the liner process has several steps including clearing vegetation, re-grading and compacting slopes before placing cushioning material and the liner.

“We’ll work in 60-acres at a time, starting at the north and work down,” he said.

With this schedule, the Army Corps anticipates being done too late to take advantage of the dredge season that starts Oct. 1, 2016, and runs through March 31, 2017, so they’re targeting the next dredge season instead.

Meanwhile, URS engineer Chris Rogers, who is working for the town of Cecilton to run municipal



Pearce Creek project on track

State and local officials met Tuesday afternoon in Elkton to discuss progress with the Pearce Creek project.

water service seven miles to the affected Pearce Creek communities, said the design of the water lines are 90 percent done.

“We just got our ground water appropriations permit, but we still have some county and state highway permits to obtain,” he said.

Rogers estimates water line bids to go out this fall with a construction beginning in January or February 2016 and taking about 18 months to complete.

“Now, these projects are running about the same time,” said State Sen. Stephen Hershey (R-Upper Shore), who was among the bevy of elected officials attending the progress report meeting Tuesday in Elkton.

Maryland Port Authority Deputy Director of Harbor Development Dave Blazer said the outreach efforts through a website, www.pearcecreekoutreach.com, and periodic meetings with property owners in West View Shores, Bay View Estates and Sunset Pointe has proven to help with communication.

“It’s been pretty quiet lately,” he noted. “So far, we’ve had a pretty positive response and we hope it stays that way.”

Blazer said at a recent meeting with Sunset Pointe residents, a few people wanted to keep their wells for irrigation of lawns, but he explained the only exception on the books for consideration is irrigation for agriculture purposes.

“MDE is pretty clear they want all wells abandoned to avoid any cross contamination,” he said.

County Councilman Alan McCarthy, who is the resident councilman for Pearce Creek communities, thanked all officials at Tuesday’s meeting for working together to find a solution.

“This is something that takes determination and dedication,” he said. “It’s really something to be very proud of.”

Blazer concurred, adding, “It’s really teamwork on everyone’s part.”

He attributes a lot of the success to the implementation committee with representatives from each community that began in January and is keeping everyone informed through meetings and the website.

“They know they’re being heard,” said Cecilton Mayor Joe Zang.