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Pearce Creek Water Projects Are Ahead Of Schedule

September 22, 2016 By Maggie Tome

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By Stephanie Lipcius Palko

Maryland State Delegate Steven Arentz smiled as he listened to the Pearce Creek updates on Tuesday afternoon.

He said that he attends so many meetings where there are problems to be solved that he wondered how he got invited to a meeting where everything seems to be going according to plan.

Other federal, state and local officials were also jovial as they shared the good news about the work schedule and accomplishments at Pearce Creek.

For the past several years, these officials have tackled two large projects at the southern end of Cecil County.

The first project is to provide drinking water to nearly 250 homes located adjacent to the dredge spoils area. Local residents have claimed that the dredge area had ruined their wells and their fears were supported by studies.

At the same time, the Maryland Port Authority and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wanted to utilize the Pearce Creek spoils area so that channel depths in the nearby Elk River and Chesapeake Bay can be maintained.

The two massive water-related projects are well underway.

Several officials attended this week's update session. Delegate Arentz was joined by State Delegate Jay Jacobs, County Executive Tari Moore, County Councilman and County Executive candidate Dr. Alan McCarthy, County Council candidate Bob Meffley and Cecilton Mayor Joe Zang.

The drinking water project involves running a 14-mile pipeline from Cecilton to the Pearce Creek area.

"Well over half the pipe has been installed," reported Jerry Katzmire of AECOM, who said that up to three crews of workers have been working on the project in recent weeks. He said this project is ahead of schedule.

"Grove Neck Road is a mess," Katzmire said, explaining that the contractor will be addressing issues along the road, including clearing-out driveway pipes – even those that were in poor condition prior to any construction work.

The pipe installation is only part of the drinking water project. Another contractor is working on the distribution lines that will bring the public drinking water to the homes. This is a four-phase project with two phases now complete. Street work has been completed along Pond Neck Road and into one neighborhood. This part of the project is also ahead of schedule, Katzmire said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been working on the second major project in the area which involves getting the Pearce Creek dredge spoils area ready to accept dredged material.

Army Corps engineer Gavin Kaiser said that project is ahead of schedule.

Kaiser explained the liner system that will keep anything pumped onto the site from leaching into the groundwater. It is a three-part system. First, a felt-like textile material is put down. The next layer is a 40-mil dark, waterproof liner. Lengths of the liner are thermowelded and the welds are tested. The liner is topped with a second layer of the textile material. The three layers will be capped with a foot of soil. The soil will protect the liner from motorized vehicles, wildlife and the sun.



Federal, state and local officials stand on the edge of the 260-acre Pearce Creek dredge spoils area.

The dredged material is initially at least 70 percent water, Kaiser said. As the water sits in the area, the solids will drift to the bottom of the containment area. At the opposite end of the area from where material is pumped into the site, the clear water will flow out of the containment area,

eventually going back into the Elk River. The water quality will continually be monitored as it leaves the containment area.



With the materials used to line the 260-acre dredge spoils site on a table, U.S. Army Corps engineer Gavin Kaiser reports the project is ahead of schedule.

Wells around the containment area will be checked to make sure the groundwater quality is not being affected by the containment site.

Kaiser said the liner project should be completed sometime between Christmas and the springs of 2017.

With the spoils site covering 260 acres, officials said it could serve dredging needs for many years. Eventually, some of the spoils material will be used to raise the earth berm around the containment area to further increase capacity.

Dredging is permitted to be done six months out of the year with the dredging season starting on October 1. Officials said the Pearce Creek facility will begin accepting material sometime during the dredging season that will begin October 1, 2017.

Keeping the public informed has been a priority for both projects said Kristen Fidler of the Maryland Port Authority. She cited numerous meetings that have been held to explain the projects to the public and their continuing outreach through the website www.pearcecreekoutreach.com and additional meetings.

The most recent meeting was last weekend. The Pearce Creek Implementation committee will have a meeting on October 3 at 10 a.m. in the Parklands meeting room in Cecilton, she said.

While Pearce Creek area residents wait for public water, the Maryland Port Authority and Army Corps have been providing bottled water. They contracted with a water

company, Eastern Shore Water & Coffee, to provide the delivery service.

“The biggest complaint is that they’ve been receiving too much water,” Fidler said.

Jerry Jones of the Army Corps of Engineers said the water deliveries to homes will continue until all affected homes are tied into the public water system.

The goal is to begin connecting homes to the Cecilton water system in May, 2017.

It is estimated that 20 homes a month will be connected and there are 235 homes that will receive the public water. Since the homes include both seasonal and full-time residents, there will be a priority list to connect full-time residents into the public water system first, officials said.

Elected officials asked several questions and took a walking tour to view the vast containment area.
