



Ottawa River Coalition Plans Removal of Lowhead Dam at Allentown

DAM REMOVAL

The Ottawa River Coalition is championing the removal of the concrete dam in the Ottawa River, just north of State Route 81 in Allentown. The eighty five year old dam is no longer being used for the purpose it was created, and is a barrier to fish passage and water quality. The removal is planned for late summer of 2019.

PUBLIC MEETINGS SCHEDULED

The Ottawa River Coalition will conduct two public meetings to discuss the project. This is also an opportunity for the public to ask questions and give their input. Both meetings will be held at the American Township House located at 102 Pioneer Road near Elida. The two public meeting dates and times are:
Wednesday, November 14th from 11:00 am to noon
Tuesday, November 20th from 6:30 to 7:30 pm

HISTORY

The dam was erected in 1933 by the US Topographical Branch of the Dept. of the Interior in connection with a stream gaging station. Operation of that station was discontinued in the mid-1980s by the Ohio US Geological Survey (USGS) agency. There is no plan to resume any monitoring there.

CURRENT CONDITION OF THE DAM

The dam is 88 feet long, four feet tall, and two and a half feet thick. A 33 foot section near the middle of the dam is worn down considerably – with time having eroded as much as 11 inches from that section. In 1975 USGS gave permission to stabilize both ends of the dam because of erosion. The west end of the dam is currently exposed as a result of considerable erosion. Behind the dam, over three feet of rock, stone, gravel, sand and sediment have settled, effectively raising the stream bed on the upstream side.

OHIO EPA RECOMENDATION FOR REMOVAL OF THE DAM

Following its most recent study of the river system in 2010, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) recommended the removal of this dam because it is a barrier to fish passage. As a result of that study, downstream of the dam the river was determined to be in full attainment of the state's aquatic life water quality status. Upstream of the dam the river was determined to be in partial attainment. The dam is not the only cause of the upstream impairment, but it is significant enough of a barrier that OEPA strongly believes that it is low hanging fruit towards reaching water quality improvement.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REMOVING THE CONCRETE DAM

Permission and permitting for the removal of the dam is currently underway. The dam is located on two properties, one under the legal authority of the Board of Allen County Commissioners and the other owned by Dominion Energy. Permitting and approval of the dam removal is also being secured at the state and federal level from the US Army Corps of Engineers, Ohio EPA, Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources and Ohio USGS. There are a number of permit considerations that still have to be decided including placement of the broken down concrete in the stream, removal of two trees to allow access of excavation equipment, liberation of the bed material, and movement of freshwater mollusks into standing water once the dam is breached.

NO NEGATIVE IMPACT FROM DOWNSTREAM FLOODING

Since this small dam is not holding backing or trapping any excess water resulting from rainfall and snowmelt, downstream flooding is not expected to increase or otherwise change. The streambed area above the dam, extending for approximately one-third of a mile upstream, may narrow over time due to the elimination of the impounded area or dam pool. The depth of water in the channel, both upstream and downstream of the dam is quite shallow during normal to low flow conditions.

WHAT IS THE OTTAWA RIVER COALITION?

The Ottawa River Coalition is a local nonprofit organization created in 1993 as a result of increasing pressure by state and federal agencies to accomplish greater water quality improvements in the watershed. The Coalition is a collaboration of approximately 45 member and partner organizations, all working together to understand and protect water quality in the Ottawa River watershed. The mission of the organization is to facilitate a balance between the wise use and management of the natural resource with the needs of the community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Ottawa River Coalition Coordinator Beth Seibert for more information on this project by calling 419-223-0040 x107 or via email at beth@allenswcd.com.

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