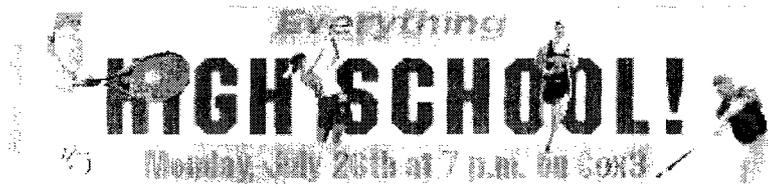


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Stillwater: Hard-hat country now

01:00 AM EDT on Friday, July 16, 2004

By THOMAS J. MORGAN
Journal Staff Writer

SMITHFIELD -- Although only in its early stages the project to rebuild the Stillwater Dam, the state's largest, has already altered the shoreline profile of scenic Stump Pond, known more formally as the Woonasquatucket Reservoir.

Rows of trees have been sawn down and last week were being fed into the maw of a powerful woodchipper. A screen of trees between the water and adjacent Farnum Pike will, however, be left standing, according to Anthony Caetano, the superintendent for the project, being carried out by the J.H. Lynch Construction Co.

It will be two years and \$3 million down the line when the work is accomplished, said Robert W. Sutton Jr., chief of planning and development for the state Department of Environmental Management.

Parts of the dam were completed in 1918, but the structure has features dating to the 19th century. The body of water that it holds back was created by the old Homestead Mill and other mills in Esmond. The pond drains into the Woonasquatucket River system, a tributary to the Providence River.

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Sutton said last week that the most obvious consequence of the project will be the lowering of the water level.

"You can't work underwater," he said. The level is to drop slowly until it is 5 feet below normal.

Sutton said it will be obvious to those who live along the pond's shores that the water is receding, although he said that the departure will not be noticeable on a day-to-day basis.

He said that the construction company will be careful not to constrict the outflow into the Woonasquatucket, lest the reduced current adversely affect the operation of the town's wastewater treatment plant farther down the river.

Workers last week operated large construction machines that run on tires 6 feet in diameter and haul heavy logs like matchsticks. The destiny of these trees was a red woodchipping machine the height of a two-story building, which ground the thick trunks into pieces that will eventually be used as fuel to generate electricity. The woodchipper is operated by L&L Dozer Services, of North Smithfield, a subcontractor. The machine spat its digested feast into the back of a big trailer truck.

When the woods are cleared the construction workers can reach the dam itself, a combination of concrete and pounded earth.

This is now hard-hat country, said Caetano, as he made his way along the concrete wall of the old dam, formerly reached by walking paths that have now been replaced by upturned soil stamped with the heavy treads of the tree-haulers.

The concrete will be refaced as part of the project, he said.

The contract with the DEM calls for J.H. Lynch to install riprap and grading to brace the dam, repair the concrete wall and gatehouse, replace retaining walls and

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the spillway and discharge channel. An emergency spillway is planned that would span 400 feet.

The long dam has been a favorite fishing spot for generations. Workers on Tuesday however were pouring concrete from a wheelbarrow to fix in place a sturdy pole to provide a gate in a chainlink fence that has barred access to the area. Eventually, however, the project will provide a boating access area and renewed fishing spots, including four for handicapped people.

The fenced-off area, which is the former parking lot, will serve as a base for Lynch's equipment.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers last year rated the dam in "poor condition," and said it has a "high hazard potential."

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