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Stillwater Dam work set to start today

01:00 AM EDT on Wednesday, June 30, 2004

By THOMAS J. MORGAN
 Journal Staff Writer

SMITHFIELD -- Work is scheduled to begin today on a \$3-million project to reconstruct the Stillwater Dam, the state's largest.

The dam, dating to the 19th Century, holds back the waters of the Woonasquatucket Reservoir, known popularly as Stump Pond. Its spillway drains into the Woonasquatucket River.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in March described the dam's condition as "poor," and said it has "a high hazard potential."

The work, expected to last two years, is to be carried out by the J.H. Lynch Construction Co. under the supervision of the state Department of Environmental Management.

Richard B. Geldard, town engineer, said yesterday that wells belonging to some residents of Log Road and Richard Street might be affected because the water level in Stump Pond will be lowered by 5 feet starting on July 9.

Geldard said he plans to monitor the wells, and said that the DEM has agreed to deliver water to any affected residents if the well water supply falters.

He said that Lynch workers today will fence off the parking lot adjacent to the dam, off Farnum Pike. The construction company plans to use the lot as a staging area. Residents, however, will be allowed access to the dam until next Tuesday.

After that date people will no longer be allowed to visit

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the dam, Geldard said, but the boat ramp will still be available, and there are several access routes leading into a small park that provides places to fish.

The town engineer said that the construction company will allow the water level in the pond to return to normal beginning in mid-October. The level will once again be drawn down, this time by 3 feet, starting next July and lasting through October 2005.

He said these maneuvers will require coordination with the Slack Reservoir Association and the Waterman Lake Association, whose respective bodies of water lie upstream.

The Georgiaville Pond Association, downstream, also will be affected, he said. He said the gates to a town dam on Georgiaville Pond will have to be opened because "there's going to be a lot of water coming down in a slug" starting next month.

The Corps of Engineers said several months ago that the project entails riprap and grading to brace the dam, repairs to the concrete wall and gatehouse, replacing retaining walls, replacing the spillway and discharge channel, and constructing an emergency spillway that would span 400 feet.

Robert W. Sutton Jr., chief of planning and development for the DEM, said earlier this year that the level of outflow to the Woonasquatucket River will be kept at a certain minimal level so as not to interfere with the operations of the town's wastewater treatment plant downriver.

The Stillwater Dam was completed in 1918, but its history dates to the mid-1800s, when it served the old Homestead Mill and other mills in Esmond. The dam is part of the Woonasquatucket River system, a tributary to the Providence River.

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 Seasonal
 Slide Shows
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 Local News
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 Blackstone Valley
 Business
 East Bay
 Education

Health
 Lottery
 Massachusetts
 Metro
 Northwest
 Outdoors
 South County
 West Bay

Opinion

Columnists
 Contributors

Editorials
 Letters
 Weblogs

Sports

B-Bruins
 Green
 Jolies
 Golf
 High School
 Outdoors
 Patriots

P-Bruins
 PC
 Real Story
 UPI

Your Life

Art
 Books
 Food
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