

Conestee Nature Preserve Closer Than Ever to Dam Solutions

For immediate release

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The Conestee Dam, which is over 130 years old, has legacy contamination in the sediments of its lake, and needs to be replaced to ensure those pollutants remain where they are; safely capped by newer sediment. With \$3M in funding in hand and a clear plan to secure all necessary funds in 2023, Conestee Nature Preserve has a team of consultants and engineers, a DHEC-appointed trustee, and meets regularly with a regional stakeholder group to share progress and collaboratively seek solutions.

When Conestee Nature Preserve was founded by a small nonprofit, with a vision of preserving wildlife habitat and providing public access to a natural space near the heart of urban Greenville, the organization also inherited a problem of historical contamination and an aging dam.

Studies over the years determined that the contaminants pose no threat as long as they and the newer sediments above them, holding them in place, remain undisturbed. That fits perfectly with the mission and vision of Conestee Nature Preserve, but it means the dam must remain in place. No small challenge. The dam was built in 1892, and with the added complexity of the contamination behind it, solutions were always exceedingly costly. Despite years of focused effort, Conestee Nature Preserve and its partners were unable to find a viable solution and secure adequate funding before now.

Last year, the project was awarded 3 million dollars from the South Carolina general state budget, to be managed by the South Carolina Department of Environmental Control (DHEC). Further funding requests for this project to state, Greenville County, Greenville City, corporate, and other potential sources are in progress or planned for this year. Together, these should fund the project in full.

A coalition of consultants, partners, and stakeholders continue working together toward solutions. Kleinschmidt is leading engineering efforts, with Alan Johnson of Caliber Engineering consulting. Kelly Lowry of Lowry and Associates was appointed as Trustee by DHEC of the Lake Conestee Dam Restoration Fund. Regular stakeholder meetings allow for input from constituents from Greenville, Greenwood, and Laurens such as state and local elected officials, Commissioners of Public Works, DHEC, ReWa, Duke Energy, and City and County staff.

Solving problems as complex as this one takes time, but thanks to all these partners, and to much public support, Conestee Nature Preserve is on the verge of resolution.

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