

 At NVRH, we want the NEK *Choosing Health*
to be the healthiest region in the state.

http://www.caledonianrecord.com/news/years-in-the-planning-east-burke-dam-finally-coming-out/article_15df7520-aa96-57d1-8f63-5e6ccace9c32.html

FEATURED

Years In The Planning, East Burke Dam Finally Coming Out

Andrew McGregor Oct 18, 2017

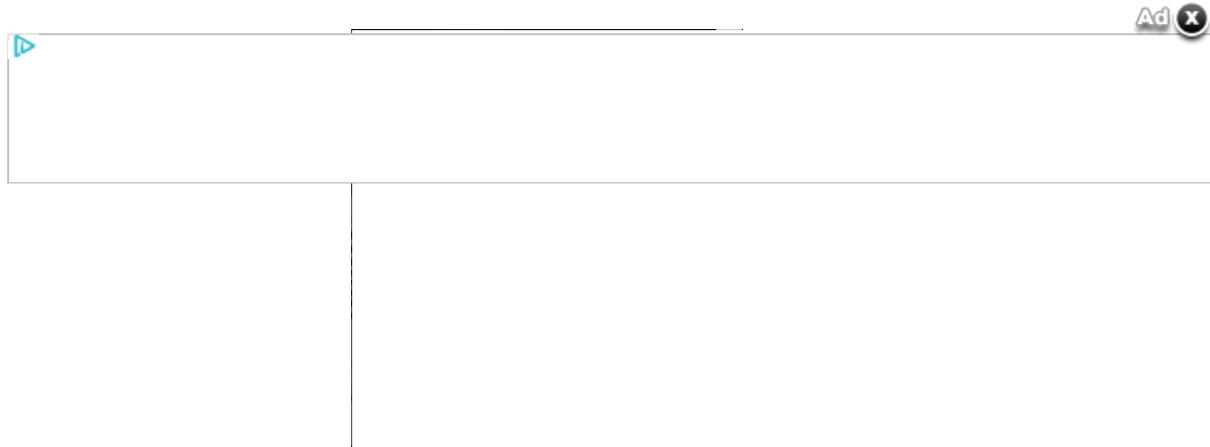


An excavator from construction firm G.W. Tatro removes sediment from the East Branch of the Passumpsic River in East Burke as part of the ongoing dam removal project Tuesday afternoon. The dam has been partially breached to allow water levels to drop so sediment can be removed upstream. (Photo by Andrew McGregor) (Photo By Andrew McGregor)

After years developing plans, obtaining permits and getting community buy-in, the dam in East Burke is finally being removed.

Work began last week and on Tuesday the site was bustling with activity, with as much happening in the river as on the shores.

The contractors have removed a small section of the dam to draw down water levels and were busy removing tons of sediment trapped upstream from the aging concrete dam. A steady stream of dump trucks were coming in and out of the site in the small NEK village.



Meanwhile crowds gathered on the shore to observe the progress and learn more about the project.

One group on site Tuesday was the Vermont Dam Task Force, a group of representatives from various NGOs and federal and state agencies. The group's coordinator Brian Fitzgerald, of the Vermont Natural Resources Council, said the group tries to meet a few times a year to discuss projects, policy issues and exchange information with the other members. He said one focus of the group is restoring river and stream connectivity as a way to improve the environmental quality of the water.

"One way to do that is to remove dams no longer serving a purpose," said Fitzgerald. The task force was given a tour by dam project manager Ron Rhodes, of the Connecticut River Conservancy, who led the group around the project site pointing out different aspects of the project and explaining the timeline.



Entrepreneur Elevator Pitch Ep7: More Secure Connections

Sponsored by Connatix

While the task force was wrapping up their tour a group of students from Lyndon State College arrived for a chance to watch the progress. The group, from professor Ian Balcom's introduction to environmental science class, was making a repeat visit to the dam. Balcom said the class had visited the site before work began for water and macroinvertebrate sampling and to take measurements in the stream about water and sediment depth, among other markers. He said the students will return later this year to take more samples and Balcom hopes to return with future classes to build on the data this class will develop, to allow for a longer term study of how the river is impacted by the removal of the dam.

The project has been a learning process for Rhodes and the construction team as well. Rhodes said since they started dropping the water level and removing sediment they have discovered more about the natural contours of the river based on the unknown presence of ledge. Rhodes also said he has observed deer crossing the river in a place that would have been impossible before because of the water level.

Another unexpected discovery was a number of logs harvested long ago and destined for a mill but never made it; they sank and eventually were covered with sediment. Those logs will be pulled up in the process and sent to a local mill for future use.

The notion of reusing materials pulled from the stream is a significant aspect of the project. The muck from the river bed will be used as clean fill nearby and the sand and gravel in the sediment as well as the concrete from the dam will be given to the town for use in future road projects, said Rhodes.

All told, 11,000 cubic yards of sediment will be removed from the river, which is estimated to fill over 100 dump truck loads. The significant work of dam and sediment removal is anticipated to be finished by Dec. 1. In the spring restoration work will be done along the river edge. The Northwoods Stewardship Council has been contracted to build a pair of access stairs to the river as well as to plant trees for erosion control.

The dam is owned by the Passumpsic Valley Land Trust. The PVLT bought the dam in 2000 for one dollar from Northern Star Corporation, former owners of the Burke Mountain Ski Area. In 2005, the PVLT sought to remove the dam, but the effort stirred a lot of controversy among Burke residents and a permit was never obtained.

That effort was renewed in 2015 and still met with some opposition from residents who supported keeping the dam because of aesthetic reasons, the swimming hole upstream from the dam and belief it helped the local economy.

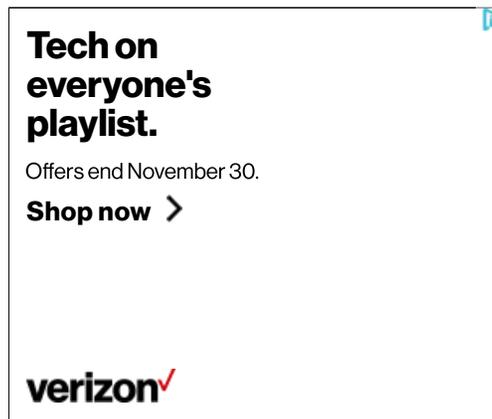
In 2016 the Connecticut River Conservancy (known then as the Connecticut River Watershed Council) joined the effort to finally fulfill the hope of removing the dam. This past spring proponents refined their plan to both appease locals and state regulators who were concerned about how the sediment trapped behind the dam would be handled. Proponents also held public meetings to explain the environmental benefits of removing the dam and receive local feedback.

The federal, state and local authorities signed off on the project earlier this year. The removal is largely being funded through a series of grants.

The removal of the East Burke Dam will open 99 miles of river to fish and other aquatic organism passage, allow trapped sediment upstream of the dam to naturally flow downstream, and lower flood elevation levels in downtown East Burke. Planning for the project began in 2000, with CRC joining PVLT in 2016 as the new project manager.

Beside opening up the river to fish and other aquatic life, removing the dam and sediment should also lower the flood level in the village and make it easier for ice dams to clear down river.

The East Burke dam was built in 1931. At one time, it provided power to the East Burke Lumber Co. According to local accounts, there has been a dam at the site since 1825.



Tech on everyone's playlist.
Offers end November 30.
Shop now >

verizon



