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Carpentersville Dam removal gets final approvals

GENEVA, IL — After nearly 10 years of planning, final approvals were issued this month for removal of the Carpentersville Dam, part of Fox River Shores Forest Preserve in Carpentersville.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) formally approved the dam-removal contract on July 2. The Forest Preserve Commission subsequently approved the contract on July 9. The Forest Preserve District of Kane County owns Carpentersville Dam, as well as nearly all of the shoreline for 2.5 miles upstream. Removal is expected to begin as early as late August.

“It took some time to get here, but taking Carpentersville Dam out will be a huge benefit for both recreation and for conservation,” said Forest Preserve Executive Director Benjamin Haberthur. “Once the dam is removed, the Fox River will be free-flowing from Algonquin all the way down to Elgin. This will allow the public to safely boat, kayak or canoe in this area, without the safety concerns of the dam, and/or having to portage around it. We’ll also see the health of the Fox River improve. Fish and other aquatic wildlife will be able to swim freely. The number of fish species and the total number of fish will likely increase, as they have after other dam removals. Natural water flow will flush-out sediment, reduce conditions that promote the growth of algae and other bacteria, and decrease water temperature.

Haberthur said he’s thrilled that the dam’s removal will begin healing the Fox River and restoring the natural riverine resource. It is the last District-owned dam on the Fox River. The District plans to mark the occasion with a ribbon-tying ceremony — as opposed to a ribbon-cutting ceremony — symbolizing the reconnecting of the river. A date is still to be determined for the celebration.

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When agreed to by the owners, IDNR has been removing dams throughout the state, in favor of restoring water quality and improving public safety. With the Fox River no longer used as an industrial corridor, the Forest Preserve District began seeking grants for removal of the concrete structure, years ago.

In 2015, the District signed an intergovernmental agreement with IDNR to remove both Carpentersville Dam at Fox River Shores in Carpentersville, and the Fabyan Causeway at Fabyan Forest Preserve in Geneva. IDNR agreed to pay for engineering and removal of both dams, with total costs capped at \$3.5 million.

Anticipated to be multi-year projects due to their complexity, the Fabyan Causeway removal project was scheduled first, and completed in November 2019, at a cost of approximately \$1.4 million. The Carpentersville Dam project followed, and began in earnest in late 2019. However, due to multiple rounds of permitting, engineering, regulatory approvals and bidding, as well as the pandemic, the project took longer to finalize.

“Projects involving water are always more complicated, and one of this magnitude required much more in the way of regulatory coordination,” said Chief of Planning & Land Management Jennifer Rooks Lopez with the Forest Preserve District. “We initially engineered the Carpentersville dam-removal project to be done while diverting all of the water. However, the cost for that was prohibitive. As IDNR is funding this entire project, we re-engineered it to be done within the water, so that it would be less expensive. The Forest Preserve District then sought approvals for the changed approach,” she said.

The project has now been fully vetted and approved with permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, IDNR Water Resources, Kane-DuPage Soil & Water Conservation District, and Kane County Water Resources. Additionally vendors were prequalified by the Illinois Department of Transportation. “We’re happy to finally be able to move forward with this important project,” Rooks-Lopez said.

For more information on the Forest Preserve District or Carpentersville Dam, visit www.kaneforest.com.