

# Road over dam poses questions

Experts say deciding what to do with the road is the first step in dam removal process.

By Christina Beam  
Dells Events

The town of New Haven will have to decide what to do with the road going over the Big Spring dam before plans for dam removal and stream restoration can be made, community members learned at a public meeting Thursday.

Over 40 people attended the meeting about the dam and brought concerns ranging from whether the project would leave wetlands for duck and geese habitat to what would be done with the newly-expanded creek bank after the impoundment dried up.

But over the course of the nearly three-hour meeting the panel of experts on the issue repeated what they felt was the community's first order of business: deciding what to do about the road. "We have to get the road issue resolved before we even get started," said Chris Murphy, of the Adams County Land and Water Conservation.

Marty Melchior, a project manager with river restoration consultants Inter-Fluve, gave cost estimates for the options associated with the road, Golden Court. Abandonment, or removing the dam to DNR standards and not restoring the road, would cost \$59,000. The road could form cul-de-sacs or parking lots for fishermen on

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either side of the stream, Melchior suggested.

Melchior said the opening for the stream below a road would have to be 100 to 200 feet wide to satisfy DNR standards for dam removal. In that case, a box arch culvert for the road would cost \$91,000, though Melchior said he wasn't sure that option would work because of the width the arch would have to be. A bridge would cost upwards of \$140,000.

Murphy pointed out that the structures that need to be in place to support the road are not covered by the funding for dam removal. Road and bridge costs would be the responsibility of the township.

An audience member questioned why the costs associated with the road fall to the township. Mark Knutson, co-owner of the dam and connecting property, said the earth and dam embankment that the road runs over were built for the dam, so the DNR is not liable for the cost of rebuilding the road. Knutson also said that though he owns the dam, the township has an easement covering the gravel and blacktop over it, which means it's responsible for replacing the road.

After the meeting Knutson said the Golden Court crossing over the dam was "a convenience more than a necessity." He said if Big Spring were to become a class one trout stream it would be better not to have another road going over it, in terms of runoff from vehicles. He was also concerned about the liabilities of having a road on his property, the

easements that would have to be arranged with the township and the high cost of road replacement. "Myself and others nearby are pretty OK with it disappearing," he said.

Aside from questions over who would bear the cost of the road's replacement, there were no comments during the meeting for or against rebuilding it. Town chairman Bob Krause said at the meeting that the town would need a referendum to make the decision on the road.

But regardless of the road issue, dam removal at the site will be done slowly, by removing a couple of feet of concrete at a time and letting the water draw down for a few months before removing more of the dam, Melchior said. Streams slowly return to their natural, meandering streambed after dam removal, but Inter-Fluve can also reconstruct streams in former impoundments, he added.

The audience also questioned how to reduce sediment in the stream. The main causes of sediment erosion in the Big Spring area are farm field runoff and livestock in the stream, Melchior said. The problem could be eliminated by the formation of a buffer zone along the stream.

Tom Jerow from the DNR said his agency has a program to purchase easements from landowners, compensating them for land put in a buffer zone. That program would also provide public land along the stream for trout fishing.

Helen Sarakinos of the Wisconsin River Alliance emphasized that the Big Spring restoration project would be done in phases. The first phase, involving input from the community

advisory group and preliminary engineering, is ongoing. The second phase consists of dam removal, bank stabilizing and Golden Avenue culvert replacement, and could take place next winter. Habitat restoration in the pond area would fall under the third phase and could begin in the spring of 2006.

Fund-raising for the project to this point has been for the first two phases of the project. Sarakinos said roughly \$65,000 has been secured to date, or half of the cost of phases one and two, including the Golden Avenue culvert's replacement. Melchior gave cost estimates for replacing that culvert, which ranged from \$39,000 for a circular pipe to \$67,000 for an arch culvert.

Sarakinos said many of the concerns being expressed at the meeting about future development of the watershed area would fall into phases four or higher. Those phases would depend on the direction the community decided to take the project, but could include further habitat improvement or a public green space where the impoundment once was.

Although Knutson and co-owner Nita Jones have signed an application for a dam abandonment grant from the DNR, an actual permit for abandonment will not be issued until a full plan is developed and approved by the agency. That can't happen until the township determines the fate of the Golden Court crossing.

Jerow said he is confident, however, that the DNR will eventually issue a permit for removal. "We have the common goal of restoring the stream," he said.