

The Sentinel - cumberlink.com

## Restoration begins on Opossum Lake

By [Joseph Cress, Sentinel Reporter](#), December 20, 2010 | Posted: Sunday, December 19, 2010 9:53 pm

Opossum Lake could reopen for public use by the summer of 2012, according to an official with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

Press Secretary Eric Levis said work is underway to remove part of the dam to prepare the site for installation of a new concrete spillway next year.

The site work is the first stage in a \$3.38 million project to replace the old spillway and upgrade the earth dam that created the lake in 1962.

In September 2005, commission staff were performing routine maintenance when they observed signs of seepage around the spillway drains. A clayish material flowing with the water was an early indication of erosion that could have undermined the spillway slabs and weakened the dam.

Later that month, the commission began the process of draining water from the lake to ease the pressure on the dam. The lake was completely drained by 2008 and the lake bed was left alone until mid-November, when the site work began for the new spillway, Levis said.

### Spillway construction

PFBC Engineer Jerry Woomer said this was done so the lake bed could completely dry out and vegetation get established for better erosion control. The plan is to complete the site preparation work by the end of this week and then shut down for eight to 10 weeks to wait for better weather, Woomer said.

Construction of the new spillway should begin next spring, with completion expected by late October or early November 2011. Crews would then have to backfill the project area and reestablish the grass before allowing the lake to refill with rain water.

Levis said it could take four to six months to fill up the lake in stages so staff could closely monitor the structural integrity of the dam to make sure it can adjust back to its prior function of holding back water. There are controls to prevent the water from filling up too quickly, Woomer said.

Eventually, the commission will restock the lake with fish, Levis said.

Tim Barrick is president of the Friends of the Opossum Lake Conservancy, which formed in April 2006 to preserve and restore the lake. He is excited the project is finally underway after years of hard work to secure funding, develop the design and obtain the necessary approvals.

"Various groups came together to make this work," Barrick said. "We all had a part in it through donations and volunteer time to see this thing through to where it is today. It means a lot to the citizens in this area."

### Community effort

State Sen. Pat Vance, R-31, said this was really a community effort to preserve an important tourist attraction.

"It's really a very lovely and serene place," Vance said. "I'm glad for everybody involved. Everybody is a winner."

The project has been a collaborative effort over the past four years between Lower Frankford Township, the Friends group, Cumberland County, the Fish and Boat Commission and the state legislature.

In April 2006, the township committed \$100,000 of its own money and applied for a county Growing Greener II grant to restore the lake. Lower Frankford would later approve a 25-year lease with the state commission to take over maintenance of the 215 acres around the dam and lake and establish a township park.

The Friends group, meanwhile, received a land partnership program grant in September 2006 to establish and improve a 4-mile trail around the lake, which was completed about a year later. It also raised money to put toward survey work, the testing of soils, the construction of a pavilion and restrooms and the removal of silt from the north end of the lake.

Cumberland County set aside about \$609,000 in Growing Greener II funding toward the project, while Vance announced in February

2008 that she had secured \$1.5 million from the Pennsylvania capital budget to move the project forward.

Years of work culminated in the state Department of Environmental Protection awarding a dam permit in mid-May 2010. Bids were opened in August and the contract was awarded to Performance Construction Services Inc. of Harrisburg later in the fall.