

Dam inspections completed in Polk Creek Watershed

by Rebecca Young
WESTON DEMOCRAT
EDITOR

WESTON, W.Va. (WV News) — Dam inspections were completed along the Polk Creek Watershed in Lewis County on Wednesday, with Conservation Agent Jim Roy and WVDEP Dam Safety Senior Engineer and Program Manager Delbert Shraver present, as well as others, including Lewis Gilmer Office of Emergency Management Director and Assistant Director James Gum and Keith Talbert, respectively, and Lewis County Commissioner Agnes Guen.

Roy said inspections help identify debris buildup around spillways, noting that no erosion is occurring on the spillway, as well as obstructions in the channels that might need cleaned out.

The Polk Creek Watershed was one of the first built in West Virginia in 1959 and 1960, Roy said. There are eight dams between Dry Fork Road and Camden in the watershed, which empties into the West Fork River by the old school bus garage on North River Avenue in Weston.

Prior to the watershed being constructed, Weston flood frequently, Roy said, no matter how little or how much it rained.

"Then Polk Creek Channel was built, and it allowed water to get to the West Fork River quicker," he said.

Funding to maintain the dams comes from the city of Weston, Lewis County, and the state under the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program (Watershed Operations) that includes the Flood Prevention Operations Program authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1944 (P.L. 78-534) and

the provisions of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (P.L. 83-566). The act originally authorized the secretary of Agriculture to install watershed improvement measures in 11 watersheds to reduce flooding, sedimentation, and erosion damage; improve the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water; and advance the conservation and proper utilization of land.

The depths of the ponds created by the dams varies, depending on the amount of silt. The plant life around the dams also needs maintained, and plants like Bird Ox, Autumn Olive, and other noxious weeds are sprayed and/or cut down to keep them from spreading. This, and mowing, are joint efforts between landowners and the West Fork Conservation District that puts out contracts each year for mowing.

If a dam failure should occur, it could affect Weston residents as far as into the city as the Polk Creek Bridge, Roy stated in a 2020 meeting, adding that this is why dam monitors are so important.

"A monitor is a very serious job because they have to know the dam and what to do if an emergency arises," he said.

Dam monitoring is not a huge time commitment, but knowledge of the dam in all types of weather enables a monitor to identify potential problems that could lead to a dam failure.

"Every single dam has two monitors—a primary and an alternate—in case the primary is not available," Roy said.

The purpose of dam monitoring is that if an emergency should arise, the West Virginia Conser-



Staff photo by Rebecca Young

Lewis County OEM personnel, WVDEP personnel, West Fork Conservation District personnel and others inspect dams in the Polk Creek Watershed.

vation Agency can be notified immediately. Monitors inspect the upstream and downstream faces of the dam, check for slope failures, cracks, seeps, debris in the auxiliary spillway, or clogged risers.

"The dams have done their job," Roy said.

Each dam should have two monitors, Gum said in an earlier interview. Though Stonecoal and Stonewall are monitored by the federal government, there is still an emergency action plan in place for all dams in the county, he added.

An eight-hour class would take monitors through training on terminology, signs that a dam is failing, or soon will, and evacuation plans. A two-hour dam tour is part of the training, which teaches those in the class how inspections are performed.

If anyone is interested in becoming a dam monitor, contact the West Fork Conservation District at 304-627-2160. You can also report stream blockages by calling 1-866-UC-FLOOD (823-5663).



Staff photo by Rebecca Young

The Polk Creek Watershed was one of the first built in West Virginia in 1959 and 1960. There are eight dams between Dry Fork Road and Camden in the watershed, which empties into the West Fork River.



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Dams in the Polk Creek Watershed are monitored regularly for debris, erosion and obstructions.



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Dams in the Polk Creek Watershed have signs displaying information on drainage area, height of dam and construction date.