

EPD decides to study sewage plant longer

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The Environmental Protection Division wants to learn more about the Laurel View River before it decides whether to allow the Liberty County Development Authority to discharge up to three million gallons of wastewater into it.

Jeff Larson, EPD assistant branch chief, said his organization thinks further consideration is necessary after evaluating submitted written comments and concerns from January's public hearing.

"The public comment has given EPD some additional perspective on the uniqueness of the Laurel View River and has led EPD to do a monitoring study model," Larson said.

The scientific model will be specifically calibrated using actual local conditions.

"Based on the comments we received, we knew in order to fully answer questions from a local nature ... we decided we needed to validate the model through local sampling," Larson said.

The additional study is just part of the process and isn't delaying anything, according to Larson.

"We don't always do full-blown stream study after each hearing. We do that when we feel it's necessary," Larson said.

The EPD called a meeting with the Liberty County Development Authority and the Coastal Estuary Protection Association on Tuesday and Larson said all parties agreed a more thorough examination is needed.

"The purpose was not only to discuss each organization's points of view, but for EPD to let them know that a stream study has been determined," Larson said.

The study will begin in July, but it may be close to the end of the year before the EPD makes the final decision on the permit.

"You're looking at some time in September or October when we have an actual determination,"

Larson said. "What we're doing right now is drafting a study plan and we'll be involved in the next several months, monitoring the Laurel View River."

Preparations include deciding what perimeters to sample, where to sample, what probes to use and where monitoring stations should be.

After samples are taken and the monitoring plan is in place, researchers will put the local data from the plan through a mid-tide estuary model.

The aim is to have more realistic predictions on ecological effects from the wastewater discharge.

"We want to get an idea of the tidal cycle and areas not moving in and out," Larson said.

Residents' comments and concerns also will be taken into consideration during the draft plan phase.

"There's a lot of local people in that area that can help us understand the dynamics of the system because they've lived here for years," Larson said.

"We fully support the study being conducted by the [EPD] and we look forward to being involved and participating in the process," said CEPA president Allen Davis. "It's important to understand the fact that this is a very unique body of water in a very unique saltwater environment."