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# Dam repair won't be put on 'back burner'

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ROGERSVILLE - An engineering firm hired by the state continues to investigate what caused the dam at Duke Lake to deteriorate to the point the 62-acre lake had to be drained last July.

In the meantime, a task force has begun work to make sure restoration of the lake remains a priority and to develop plans for the park as well as other recreational resources in Greene County.

The Ryerson Station-Duke Lake Task Force, formed by state Rep. H. William DeWeese, D-Waynesburg, and state Sen. J. Barry Stout, D-Bentleyville, held an open house Friday to provide information to the public and receive input regarding the county's recreational needs.

"Ryerson will not be allowed to be given short shrift; it will not be put on the back burner," said DeWeese, adding he and Stout have both talked to Gov. Ed Rendell about the park's importance to the community.

The state's commitment should offer the opportunity to revitalize the park, DeWeese said later. "A few years down the road, people might be able to look back and say there was a silver lining to this cloud, and the park will be enhanced from what it has been," he said.

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources drained Duke Lake July 28 after an inspection revealed serious structural problems with the dam. It subsequently removed part of the spillway to prevent water from backing up following heavy rains.

An engineering firm, Gannett Fleming Inc., also was hired to determine the cause of the dam's deterioration. The company continues to monitor the dam's movement, said Roger Fickes, director of the DCNR's Bureau of State Parks, who attended the open house.

Surface monitoring is currently being done at the site. In January, core drilling also will be completed to determine the area's geology and further monitor movement. The bureau has to determine the cause of the movement and whether the site is stable before it can develop plans for a new dam, Fickes said.

"We're committed to doing everything we can to bring the park back," he said. The lake will be restored "if it can be done," he said.

One of the possible causes of the dam's deterioration that is being investigated is mining. CONSOL Energy's Bailey Mine currently is mining near the park.

Joseph Scaffoni, director of the state Bureau of Mines, said more information will be needed before the state can say whether mining played any role in problems with the dam. The bureau has determined, however, Consol was mining "exactly according to its mining plan," he said.

A mining map showed the company had left in place a large block of coal in the middle of the longwall panel closest to the dam.

The closest longwall mining occurred about 900 feet from the dam. "That's beyond any area we normally would expect to see any surface impacts," said Edward Motycki, chief of the bureau's mine subsidence section. He added the bureau now has decades of experience regarding longwall mining on which it can predict surface impacts.

Mike Manzo, DeWeese's chief of staff and chairman of the task force, said the open house was held to inform people about the status of the park and to seek input in developing further plans.

DeWeese and Stout have received a commitment from DCNR and the governor to support efforts involving the park. That can be viewed as an opportunity to expand recreational opportunities at Ryerson. "It's an opportunity and we plan to seize it," Manzo said.

The task force, through a mailed survey and the meeting, wants to know what residents think is important in regard to recreation. People may, for example, want to see more hiking trails at Ryerson, he said.

In addition to the focus on Ryerson, the task force is investigating other options for recreation throughout the county, including the possible development of the Wisecarver reservoir in Franklin Township as a recreation site, Manzo said.

Stout, who also attended the open house, said the "resurrection of Ryerson Park" will require everyone working together, including elected officials, state and local agencies and the public. Public support will be extremely important to show the project is a priority, he said, and to help him and DeWeese advocate for money in Harrisburg to see it to fruition.

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