

New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam History

Much has been represented by many people about the situation with the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam (the “L&D”), but here is what we know:

1. In 2000, the Corps, in pursuit of its desired removal of the L&D, conducted a drawdown of the River which caused public outcry due to shoreline damage and the unacceptable appearance of the River.
2. In response, Charlie Norwood quickly succeeded in getting the Federal Law changed to require the then negligently maintained L&D repaired and conveyed to City of North Augusta and Aiken County. The law required the construction of a fish bypass -basically a gradually sloped rocky ditch around a dam to allow fish to get further upstream.
3. At no time since 2000 did the Corps include a request for funding in its annual budget, so the repairs and fish bypass were never funded.
4. In 2013, the Savannah Riverkeeper and other environmental groups settled a lawsuit against the Corps and the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) allowing the Savannah River to be deepened, despite possible damage to the endangered short nosed sturgeon habitat in the harbor.
5. A condition of the settlement was that before the Corps could dredge the harbor, it must commence construction of the already legally required fish bypass around the L&D.
6. In 2016, the Corps threatened the GPA with a 2-year delay of SHEP (Harbor Dredging Project), if the 2000 law was not changed to Deauthorize (i.e., end federal funding eligibility) the L&D and to allow for the L&D’s removal.
7. The GPA requested Senators Isakson and Perdue to introduce legislation to get the federal law changed so that SHEP could proceed without delay.
8. At the recommendation of the Corps, the GPA encouraged the Senators to allow the Corps to draft the legislation (because they were already familiar with the issue).
9. Senators Isakson and Perdue quietly introduced an amendment drafted by the Corps to the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act of 2016 (the “WIIN”) without the knowledge or input of anyone who might object, including US Representatives Allen and Wilson whose districts included the affected section of the River.
10. When locals and Rep Allen attempted to get the amendment changed before final vote to allow the L&D to remain, the GPA and the Senators (at the Corps direction) resisted.
11. Since the 2016 WIIN Act, the Corps designed, selected, and promoted a lower fixed rock dam, known as a weir, to comply with the amended law. They refused to consider a more accepted fish bypass, which was called for in the 2000 Norwood law. The rock weir that will result in a lower pool in the River between downtown Augusta and the City of North Augusta, SC.
12. In 2019, a legally required, corps selected, expert review panel criticized the weir and questioned why the much simpler and cheaper fish bypass was not considered by the Corps.
13. Despite substantial criticism and public opposition, the Corps is proceeding with its plans to commence construction of the weir and removal the L&D at the beginning of 2021.
14. In November 2019, the State of South Carolina sued the Corps to prevent the lowering of the River’s water level. The City of Augusta and the GPA both joined the lawsuit. The Savannah Riverkeeper attempted to join the lawsuit, but the Judge refused to let it do so.
15. In July, SC Congressman Joe Wilson and GA Congressman Rick Allen attempted to introduce legislation to save the L&D, but their proposal was defeated in committee after opposition by several environmental groups led by the Riverkeeper. Efforts continue to get the law changed through the Senate during this legislative session.