

Anguilla Brook work likely to begin in 2012

By MICHAEL SOUZA
Sun Staff Writer

STONINGTON — The creation of a fish passage along the Anguilla Brook and the removal of the Rutan Dam will probably have to wait until next summer, according to Sally Harold of The Nature Conservancy.

Permit applications for the work have been submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state Department of Energy

and Environmental Protection, Harold says. (DEEP is a new Connecticut agency, merging the former DEP with two other departments.)

"If they review it very quickly and approve it as it was submitted, then we might be able to start some work this fall," Harold told the Conservation Commission at a recent meeting. She indicated, however, that 2012 is more realistic.

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The project consists of removing the Rutan Dam (also known as the Anguilla Brook Dam) and using the removed material to construct a fish passageway at the Wequetequock Pond Dam downstream. With the Rutan Dam removed, the small pond it retains will revert to a brook, its natural state.

"Removing the dam is also necessary because it is at risk of failing," Harold said.

During heavy rains in 2009 and 2010, the nearby neighborhood known as Birdland, near Swan Street, was evacuated due to concerns about the structural integrity of the earthen dam.

The passageway at Wequetequock Pond Dam will act as a natural fish ladder enabling alewife (freshwater herring, commonly called a bucky), blueback herring and American eel to return upstream to their native habitat. It will be built on the southeastern side of the dam, away from saddle rock and the remains of a 17th century mill.

"There will be a series of small pools to make the transition from the stream to Wequetequock Pond," Harold said.

The pools will increase about 6 feet in elevation over 80 feet in order to provide a gradual rise to the top of the dam, where fish can then enter the pond.

Once the fish return to the pond and brook, they will attract other wildlife, such as striped bass, bluefish, gulls, terns and other coastal birds.

Harold said the practice of removing dams and improving fish migration, rather than rebuilding a dam, is a nationwide trend. In most cases, governmental agencies such as the DEEP recognize that if feasible, demolition is cheaper and the environmental benefits are greater.

There is no estimate on the project's cost at this time.

"It's too premature to put the project out to bid or receive estimates," she said.

Harold credits the Avalonia Land Conservancy for taking a huge role in the project, with the support of The Nature Conservancy and DEEP. Thanks to about \$175,000 in various grants, an engineering plan to execute the project was written

and the applications submitted in the last six months. She is hopeful additional grant money is acquired to help fund the project.

According to Avalonia President Duncan Schweitzer, the brook is very healthy. It is known as a "cold water" brook, a reflection of its natural and clean status. The restoration is especially meaningful to brook trout, an environmentally sensitive species requiring cold water.

"Anguilla Brook doesn't have a lot of development near it, so it's very clean," Schweitzer said. "There's no history of industry in the area and sediment near Rutan Dam has been tested and proven to be clean. The work will open up the whole watershed, including about eight miles of the brook."

The restoration project

will mark another achievement for Avalonia. Last week the group announced the acquisition of a 16-acre parcel of coastal grassland on Wequetequock Cove, expanding a 2.4-mile, 1,000-acre corridor of contiguous open space from the Pawcatuck River to the cove. The land also abuts 48 acres of salt marsh, wetlands and coastal forest added to Barn Island Wildlife Management Area.

Bill and Linda Rutan, owners of the dam, have agreed to its demolition, including the loss of their waterfall and 1-acre pond.

Once permits are approved, construction can begin when the water level in Anguilla Brook is relatively low, in late August or September.

msouza@thewesterly-sun.com