

NEW SAVANNAH BLUFF LOCK & DAM REPLACEMENT



Combining 2 Required Projects

1. The Savannah Harbor Expansion Project (SHEP) mitigation agreements **require the construction of a passage for migratory fish** species. The cost of that project is currently estimated at \$36M, and existing models involved diverting the river around the failing lock and dam.
2. The dam at New Savannah Bluff is in need of major repairs. Under Section 348(1) WRDA 2000, P.L. 106-554 and Omnibus Appropriations Act, 2001, P.L. 106-554, the Corps of Engineers are **required to rehabilitate the lock and dam structure**. Replacing dam with rock dam would combine 2 federal projects, saving money.

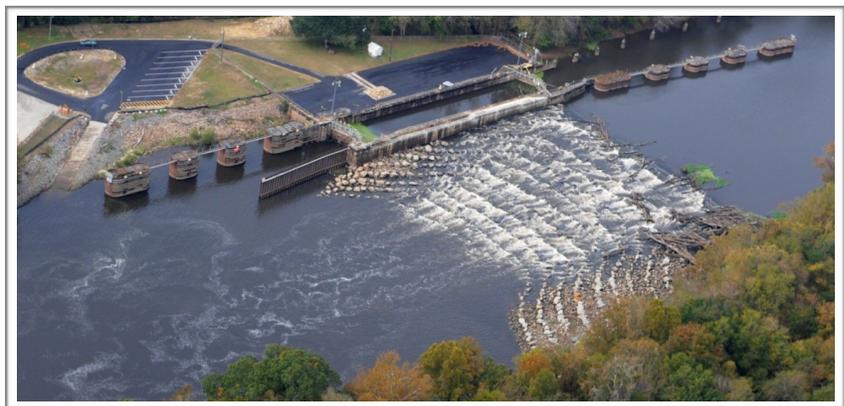
In spring 2016, Savannah Riverkeeper and other stakeholders presented the idea to combine the two projects to federal lawmakers: **construction of a rock dam would meet the criteria for both a fish passage and "rehabilitation" of the New Savannah Bluff Lock & Dam.**

The Solution to a Decades-Old Challenge

The New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam was originally built to create an elevated water level in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) to support the inland port 200 miles from the coast. Barge traffic has long since ceased on the river, and the lock and dam has fallen into serious disrepair. Despite urgent need, funding for this endeavor is the responsibility of the local municipality and due to a variety of challenges, it has not been secured.

Upon studying the mitigation requirements of the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project, Savannah Riverkeeper recognized a tremendous opportunity. While funds for the required fish ladder cannot be used to "rehabilitate" the lock and dam, one model could address both projects. Replacing the ailing dam structure with a system of rapids would be a cost-effective solution for facilitating fish passage and restoring the natural ecosystem. It would also offer recreation based economic opportunities for the local community, all while maintaining the current water levels upstream.

The replacement of a concrete dam with a rock fish passage dam is not without precedent. One such project already exists on the Cape Fear River in Wilmington, NC. It has been so successful that another is underway upstream on the same river. The ecological similarities between our locations are very strong. The idea of combining the projects has garnered wide support including from local municipalities, industrial users, conservationists, federal and state agencies. The 2016 Water Resources and Development Act continues to advance, containing the language necessary to perform feasibility studies required for combining the two projects.



Example of a rock dam/fish passage with locks intact on the Cape Fear River, NC.



A community festival at the U.S. National Whitewater Center. Charlotte, NC.

A Whitewater Destination on the Savannah River

A new set of rapids at New Savannah Bluff would present previously unimagined opportunities for the CSRA, or “Augusta’s River Region.” Communities such as Charlotte, NC and Columbus, GA have enjoyed a surge of tourism and recreation centered around whitewater attractions in urban settings. Construction of the rock dam could be achieved while maintaining functioning locks which could be modified into whitewater chutes. Outdoor enthusiasts would flock to the area. The adjoining Lock & Dam Park would benefit from an increase in visitors and use, and nearby property would become rife for development and business ventures like adventure/tour companies, retail outfitters, restaurants, and more.

ECONOMIC IMPACT of U.S. National Whitewater Center: \$37M, with \$30M from external businesses.



Commercial development surrounds Nantahala Outdoor Center, Bryson City, NC.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will the project cost local taxpayers more money? No. By replacing the existing dam with a rock dam as part of a federal project, we cancel the need for repairs to the structure, thereby saving Augusta citizens from footing the bill.

Why can't we just fix the lock & dam? \$36M in federal funds are allocated to building a fish passage diverted around the failing lock. However, this money cannot be used for repairs to the lock & dam. The City of Augusta would have to come up with those funds and has not endeavored to do that.

What about flooding upstream? The Corps of Engineers are under legal requirement to maintain pool levels and will continue to do so in times of flood risk. Additionally, significant studies will be done before the project can move forward.

Will boats be able to navigate through? No. Motorboats and other large vessels will not be able to pass through the rapids, just as with the lock & dam. However, the area will be navigable to hand-powered vessels (canoes, kayaks, rafts). Boat ramps above and below the dam will remain accessible.

How will fishing in the area be affected? When the dam is removed, migratory fish like American shad, blueback herring, striped bass and Atlantic sturgeon will reach new spawning grounds, increasing their populations.

What are some benefits of dam removal? Free-flowing rivers support wildlife, boost fishing, increase water quality and promote tourism and recreation!



Urban rafting at Whitewater Express, Columbus, GA.