



Massachusetts State Office

451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002
413-253-4350, fax 413-253-4375
www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT: Diane Baedeker Petit
Public Affairs Officer
413-253-4371

Work to begin on George H. Nichols Dam, Westborough

Lowell engineering firm awarded contract

AMHERST, Mass. (Oct.5 , 2010) – Work to upgrade the George H. Nichols dam in Westborough is slated to begin in mid October, according to the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The project will bring the dam up to current safety and performance standards by relocating, widening and armoring the auxiliary spillway, constructing concrete retaining walls, and filling earth to block the existing auxiliary spillway.

The Nichols Dam will be upgraded with \$2 million in American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds. Massachusetts is one of 11 states that received a share of \$45 million in funding to rehabilitate aging flood control structures nationwide. Watermark Environmental, Inc. of Lowell has been awarded the construction contract.

"We expect this work to continue through November, then be suspended for the winter and resume in the spring," said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "Westborough residents should know that there may be some noise and dust typically associated with construction. The contractor will work during designated hours to minimize the impact of noise and will use best management practices to minimize dust. In the long run this project will benefit the community with greater flood protection and residents can continue to enjoy the recreational opportunities that the dam provides."

Constructed by NRCS (then the Soil Conservation Service) in 1970, the Nichols Dam impounds flow from the Assabet River, providing flood control and maintaining a 380-acre pool for recreation. In a storm, the spillway prevents the dam from being overtopped and retains stormwater, releasing stormwater slowly over the course of 10 days, minimizing the impact to the surrounding area.

Now owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Nichols Dam is one of 10 floodwater retarding dams built between 1962 and 1987 in the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord rivers watershed (known as the SuAsCo watershed).

"DCR is very pleased that the work is going forward on the Nichols Dam," said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "The safety upgrades will help guarantee a long future of flood control in the area and continued recreational uses of the Westborough Reservoir. DCR thanks the NRCS very much for taking on this project."

Urban development upstream of the dam since it was built has increased the quantity of stormwater runoff and predicted hydrologic conditions during storm events now exceed NRCS standards. A 2004 NRCS study recommended that the auxiliary spillway be widened from 100 feet to 350 feet and other improvements made.

The Nichols Dam drainage area is 4,447 acres (6.94 square miles) with mixed land use, including forested uplands, open water and wetlands, agricultural, residential development and industrial and commercial development.

###