

Finding Of No Significant Impact
for
Piney Run Dam Rehabilitation Project
Carroll County, Maryland

Introduction

The Piney Run Dam Rehabilitation is a federally assisted action authorized for planning under Public Law 83-566, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act. This act authorizes the Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide technical and financial assistance to local project sponsors. Local sponsors of the Piney Run Dam Rehabilitation Project are the Carroll County Soil Conservation District and the Commissioners of Carroll County.

An environmental assessment was undertaken in conjunction with the development of the watershed plan. This assessment was conducted in consultation with local, State, and Tribal Governments; Federal agencies; and interested organizations and individuals. Data developed during the assessment are available for public review at the following location:

USDA-NRCS
George Washington Carver Center
Stop 5598 c/o Maryland State Office
5601 Sunnyside Ave
Beltsville, MD 2075

Recommended Action

Recommended actions will rehabilitate Piney Run Dam to meet current federal, state, and local safety criteria. The proposed plan will widen the auxiliary spillway, raise the dam crest and central core and chimney filter, modify the impact basin and rate control system, install roller-compacted concrete (RCC) along the downstream end of the auxiliary spillway, install a cutoff wall and scour pad at the auxiliary spillway crest, replace the downstream end of the toe drain conduits and install access manholes, make minor repairs to structural components of the riser and water supply intake tower, and install an automated cold water release system.

Effect of Recommended Action

The recommended action will ensure that Piney Run Dam meets current safety and performance standard for a Class "C" high hazard potential dam, provide 100 years of submerged sediment storage after construction, and maintain the current level of flood protection downstream.

Ground disturbance during construction will be limited to areas on or directly adjacent to the dam and spillway. All impacts will cease once construction is complete. There would be no permanent alterations to land use or zoning because of this action.

A short (less than 0.1 mile) section of the Piney Run Park hiking trail will be closed during construction. Once modifications are complete, the full hiking trail will be reopened for public use. There will be no long-term impacts to public recreation, parkland, or scenic beauty.

There will be no short- or long-term impacts on the segment of the South Branch of the Patapsco River located approximately 2 miles downstream of the dam that is used as a recreational fishery.

Water-oriented recreation will not be affected since the water surface elevation would not change during or after construction.

Excavation of the auxiliary spillway is required. It is anticipated that bedrock will be encountered. Minor localized impacts to geologic conditions are expected.

Raising the dam crest will result in slight permanent alterations to topography. The layout of the site has been designed to minimize these changes to the extent practicable.

Construction of the proposed action will temporarily remove vegetative cover and disturb the soil surface. This may temporarily increase erosion and sedimentation in the Piney Run drainage basin. A site-specific erosion and sediment control plan will be adhered to during construction.

Soils designated as prime farmland are present on-site, but they are not actively farmed as they are part of the Piney Run Park property. There will be long-term beneficial impacts to prime farmland areas downstream from the dam due to increased flood protection.

The proposed action may indirectly impact adjacent wetlands due to increased erosion and sedimentation during construction. There are no wetland impacts within the limit of disturbance and no mitigation will be required. Similar effects to riparian areas can be expected.

Construction of the recommended action will have no effect on impaired streams. Once dam modifications are complete, the automated cold water release system will have a beneficial impact on the health of Piney Run downstream of the dam.

The construction area will encroach on the 100-year floodplain. However, the water levels in the Piney Run reservoir and downstream tributary will not change. The proposed alternative will comply with applicable floodplain regulations and detailed floodplain maps will be developed. The annualized flood damage reduction benefits will not change.

The recommended action is not anticipated to intersect groundwater, involve groundwater withdrawals, or intentionally release or inject materials into groundwater resources aquifers. Best management practices (BMPs) will be used during construction to minimize impacts to groundwater from potential spills or release of hazardous substances.

The proposed action will result in the clearing of 6.5 acres of forest. A Forest Conservation Plan (FCP) and Planting Plan will be developed and enacted to mitigate for these impacts. Afforestation will be required in accordance with the Maryland Forest Conservation Act (MFCA), which will result in a net increase in tree canopy and thus potential lower average air temperature in the park.

Fish and wildlife habitats may be temporarily disturbed during construction due to construction noise and increased human activity. Once the construction is completed, local fish and wildlife will benefit from the habitat improvements. Moderation of the stream temperature will promote the spawning of fish and increase the availability of recreational fishing opportunities in Piney Run downstream of the dam.

The Northern Long-Eared Bat (NLEB) is the only endangered species with the potential to occur in the project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) confirmed that there are no NLEB hibernacula or maternity roosts in the area. Tree clearing will be restricted during the NLEB's active season to minimize any potential impacts.

Due to the presence of a bald eagle nest near the project area, the USFWS's Bald Eagle Management Guidelines will be followed. Avoidance measures will be evaluated and coordination with USFWS will be ongoing.

Migratory birds may also be temporarily impacted by the construction activity. To minimize impacts to nesting migratory birds, construction and clearing activities will occur outside of the general nesting period.

There will be no significant effects on air quality. Pollution generated during construction will be temporary and will primarily be a result of mobile construction equipment, employee commutes to the site, and dust generation.

Noise generating sources during construction will be temporary and will primarily be associated with standard heavy construction equipment. Construction activities will comply with the Carroll County noise control ordinance.

The recommended action will have no adverse effect on historic properties. One site located in the area of potential effects was determined to be potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) during the Phase I Cultural Resources Investigation. However, the Maryland Historical Trust concurred during the Phase II investigation that this site was not recommended for listing. An Inadvertent Discovery Plan will be followed if archaeological or historical materials are encountered during construction.

Alternatives

The planned action is the most practical means of meeting the purpose and need while presenting few impacts to the community, and particularly Piney Run Park. The chosen alternative is the socially preferred, locally preferred, and economically preferred alternative.

The environmentally preferred alternative would involve decommissioning of the dam. This would result in a reduction of flood protection and recreational opportunities at Piney Run Park and thus was not chosen as the recommended action.

The no action/future without project alternative would maintain the dam in current condition. The risk of dam failure would remain as the dam does not meet current state dam safety regulations.

In the future without federal investment alternative, the rehabilitation of the dam would need to be solely funded by Carroll County. As a result, the dam would remain in its current condition for a longer period, increasing the risk of dam failure to downstream properties, people, infrastructure, and environment.

The final alternative considered involved raising the normal water surface elevation. This would result in significantly more tree clearing and substantial impacts to wetlands.

Consultation—Public Participation

Public meetings were held throughout the planning process to keep all interested parties informed of the watershed study progress and to obtain public input on the plan and environmental evaluation. Meetings were held in February 2020, February 2021, and March 2021. Additional public participation was performed through the establishment of a project website where information pertaining to the project including final technical reports and public meeting materials were shared.

Formal agency consultation began in May of 2021. Four Federal agencies (Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Army Corps of Engineers, and USFWS), three State agencies (Department of the Environment, Department of Natural Resources, and the Maryland Historic Trust), seven County agencies, and 20 tribes were involved in part or all of the planning process.

The environmental assessment was transmitted to all participating and interested agencies, groups, and individuals for review and comment in March of 2025. A public and interagency review period was held from March 11th, 2025, through April 13th, 2025. A public hearing was held with the Carroll County Commissioners on April 3rd, 2025. Notification of the hearing was provided in the Carroll County Times on March 13th, March 20th, and March 27th, 2025. No public comments were received during this review period.

Agency consultation and public participation to date have shown no unresolved conflicts with the implementation of the selected plan.

Conclusion

Based on the environmental assessment summarized above, I find that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, and I have determined that an environmental impact statement for the Piney Run Dam Rehabilitation Project is not required.

Signature

Suzy Daubert

4/23/2025

Date