



**For immediate release
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DCR AND CITY OF CHICOPEE TAKE ACTION TO AVOID DANGEROUS SITUATION AT MOUNTAIN LAKE DAM

Joint effort follows years of noncompliance by dam owner

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the City of Chicopee yesterday launched a joint effort to prevent the Mountain Lake Dam in Chicopee from failing and causing damage to property downstream.

By late afternoon today (Friday, Sept. 12), a city contractor had removed a dangerous debris blockage from the dam outlet pipe. As a result of that effort, officials believe an emergency situation no longer exists.

The dam, which is privately owned by the Holyoke-based company J.H.J.H. Inc., is classified by DCR as a “high hazard potential” dam, meaning it could pose serious danger to residents and property downstream if it failed. DCR’s Office of Dam Safety also has determined that the dam is in unsafe condition.

Last weekend’s heavy rain increased concerns that the dam could fail. This week, on Thursday, Sept. 11, the dam’s owners gave DCR and Chicopee officials permission to do remedial work on the dam.

“This dam has been in disrepair for many years, and has not been maintained to any reasonable standard,” said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. “DCR ordered the owners to drain the dam in 2005 and not let it refill, but debris has clogged an outlet pipe at the base of the dam and the owner was not able to clear it. Last weekend, the pond refilled because of the clogged outlet pipe. We could not let this situation continue. It is an unacceptable threat to public safety. The owner will be ordered to reimburse DCR and the City of Chicopee for the cost of clearing the pipe and draining the water from behind the dam.”

DCR and the City of Chicopee are expecting to incur estimated costs of as much as \$15,000 each for the work that began yesterday and will continue over the next few days to clear the pipe, drain the remaining water behind the dam, and lessen the likelihood that the pond will refill. The work is being conducted by a construction firm under contract with the city.

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Earlier this week, before the remedial work began, the water, called the “impoundment,” had been about 10 feet deep behind the 28-foot-high dam. The dam is covered with heavy vegetation including weeds, brush, and trees, compromising the strength of the dam and making a visual inspection impossible. The spillway, which formerly maintained the normal pond level, failed in 2005 and cannot be used. It continues to erode, and trees have fallen into it. The upstream side of the dam is also seriously eroded.

Jay Hebert and John Hebert of J.H.J.H. Inc. purchased the dam in 1995. Since then, the owners have failed to respond to numerous dam safety orders from DCR’s Office of Dam Safety and recommendations dating to 1999 for maintaining the dam in acceptable condition.

DCR records indicate the current dam was built across Willimansett Brook in Chicopee in approximately 1920 to replace another dam that failed at the site. Originally an ice pond, the site was used as a recreation area after the 1920s reconstruction. It is believed the dam has not seen significant modification or repair for decades. The dam and its impoundment currently serve no purpose.

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency’s mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr. Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.

