

Published: Jun 27, 2006 12:30 AM
Modified: Jun 27, 2006 08:03 AM

Cary works on fix for sewage spill

Accident raises watershed worries

DAVID BRACKEN, Staff Writer

SWIFT CREEK - Still struggling to control a massive sewage spill into Swift Creek, Lake Wheeler and Lake Benson, Cary officials were waiting Monday night for the arrival of two diesel engine pumps from New Jersey.

The diesel pumps will replace an around-the-clock hauling operation that has been in place since Saturday and is costing Cary about \$2,500 an hour. Nineteen tanker trucks have been hauling sewage past the disabled pump station to a treatment plant.

The pumps, along with a handful of other specialty parts from around the country, are to become a temporary replacement for the disabled pump station that since Friday has caused more than 3 million gallons of sewage to spill into Swift Creek, which feeds into Lake Wheeler and Lake Benson.

Despite the fleet of 6,500 -gallon tankers, officials estimated tens of thousands of gallons of sewage spilled out of a manhole upstream Sunday night.

Lake Wheeler and Lake Benson remain closed to swimming, boating and fishing. Richard Costello, director of lakes and amusements for Raleigh's parks and recreation department, said



Armando Posoz, right, slices a raw sewage pipe with a power saw at the Swift Creek pump station on Holly Springs Road. Posoz and others worked to remove the sewage pipe after heavy rain collapsed an excavated hole and dislodged the pipe.

Staff Photo by Joshua Lott

Story Tools

 [Printer Friendly](#)

 [Enlarge Font](#)

 [Email to a Friend](#)

 [Decrease Font](#)

More Weather Stories

- [Northeast flooding stymies Amtrak](#)
- [Cary works on fix for sewage spill](#)
- [Rain can't drown out gospel voices](#)
- [Rainfall above normal for June](#)
- [Bigger storms tied to global warming](#)
- [Season's first ozone alert doesn't bode too ill](#)

daily tests show the water is improving, but both lakes continue to have abnormal levels of bacteria.

Until the tanker trucks are no longer needed, Holly Springs Road will remain closed between Lilly Atkins Road and High Ridge Drive. Holly Springs Road is also closed to through traffic between Cary Parkway and Penny Road.

On Monday, some residents in the nearby unincorporated community of Swift Creek said the accident is evidence of Cary's failure to adequately protect the Swift Creek watershed.

"For the last 20 years, people have been making this argument," said Tom Vass, 54, who has lived in Swift Creek since 1978. "This huge amount of sewage in the watershed is unsafe."

Vass was a spokesman for the Middle Creek/Swift Creek Alliance, an activist group that disbanded last year after spending more than 20 years trying to curb development in the Swift Creek watershed.

Vass said having a large facility in the watershed such as the Swift Creek pump station, which handles about 5 million gallons of sewage a day, is far more dangerous than a community of individual septic tanks. Swift Creek is home to about 12,000 well and septic systems, Vass said.

Susan Moran, Cary's public information officer, defended the record of the town's sewer operations, including the Swift Creek station. She said the state of North Carolina generally prefers a professionally operated sewage system over an independent collection of septic tanks and wells.

"We work very hard to anticipate every circumstance," Moran said. "What has happened at Swift Creek is a confluence of natural events that we could not anticipate."

The spill was caused by heavy rains that collapsed a 60-foot hole excavated for a future storage tank and dislodged a pipe.

The closed roads were the least of the concerns for Swift Creek residents who worry the sewage will get into the groundwater around their wells.

James Gregory, 63, who has lived along Penny Road for 10 years, said many of his neighbors already were concerned about the watershed and the possibility of being annexed by Raleigh or Cary. Swift Creek residents have applied repeatedly to the legislature for incorporation of their community.

"We said to the General Assembly in 1996, if you give us the right of self government, we'll do a good job of protecting the watershed," Vass said.

The group finally gave up the effort last year.

The community's consolation prize was a new state law that gives anyone living in an area controlled by state development restrictions the right to sue local governments if they believe they violate the rules. For Swift Creek, the rules are outlined in the Swift Creek Land Management Act, which restricts high-density development by limiting sewer service in the watershed.

The act was not violated when the pipe dislodged Friday night, which Vass said just reminded him how little power Swift Creek has as an unincorporated community situated next to two growing cities.

"How do we hold the town of Cary accountable for what they've done?" Vass asked.

Moran called the incident a "tragedy."

"I don't think it's a bad idea to look at what's going on and ensure that we're making the best decisions," she said.

Staff writer David Bracken can be reached at 829-4548 or dbracken@newsobserver.com.

© Copyright 2006, The News & Observer Publishing Company
A subsidiary of [The McClatchy Company](#) 