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Dorie Bolze, executive director of the Harpeth River Watershed Association, conducts a habitat assessment below the lowhead dam on the Harpeth River in Franklin. JEANNE REASONOVER / THE TENNESSEAN

## Harpeth's only dam set for demolition

Project is big step in reviving river

By Kevin Walters  
The Tennessean

FRANKLIN—For the first time since 1963, the Harpeth River will flow freely along its 125-mile path through five counties, allowing native fish to thrive while fishermen and canoers will have more reason to seek out its waters.

The only thing standing in the way is the Harpeth River's lone dam.

Built by the city of Franklin nearly 50 years ago, the concrete and steel structure

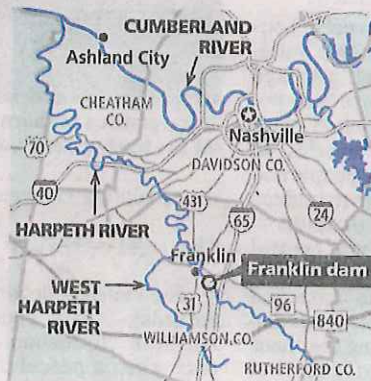
backs up the river to help supply drinking water to the city. But the 6-foot-tall, 63-foot-long dam divides the river, preventing fish from swimming upstream to get more food and limiting species, stagnating water downstream and posing a potential danger to unassuming paddlers who might tumble over its top.

Now, a plan using approximately \$871,000 in federal, state and city monies will reconnect the river. It's a sin-

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Organization wants help gathering water samples, on Page 7A.





# Federal grant to help defray cost

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gle but important step in resuscitating a river that's as blessed with natural beauty as it is beset by years of manmade pollution along its course from its Rutherford County headwaters to its confluence with the Cumberland in Cheatham County.

"It's a biologist's dream to basically remove a structure that affects wildlife," said Dorie Bolze, executive director of the Harpeth River Watershed Association. "This is a big deal."

### Few rivers in state have no dams

Removal of the dam, slated for next year, will allow the Harpeth to join only a handful of other Tennessee rivers that do not have dams.

"Dams can often have a profound impact on the fisheries and water quality of a river by blocking fish passage and causing stagnant waters," said Meg Lockhart, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation spokeswoman.

"In smaller streams, dams can cut off water to downstream neighbors," she said. "Therefore, TDEC will look for an opportunity to remove dams that are no longer needed."

The Franklin dam is known as a "diversion weir," or lowhead dam that impounds a portion of the river. Water taken from the river is kept in a reservoir behind the city's water treatment plant off Lewisburg Pike before being treated for use. Franklin buys most of its water from the Harpeth Valley Utilities District, which pumps water south from the Cumberland River, but uses the Harpeth to supplement the supply.

While the Franklin diversion weir is one of only three such dams in Tennessee, it is the first one Environment and Conservation officials have directed to be removed. It is also the only removal in which state environmental regulators are actively participating

Typically, dam removal is done voluntarily, but state officials specified Franklin's dam be taken down as part of the city's state water withdrawal permit, if studies showed it was feasible.

Bolze projects the river's fish population — as well as a greater diversity of fish — will be increased because fish will be able to swim the length of the river. That potentially will attract more fishermen to its shores.

"When you have dams, you change the biological makeup of rivers," Bolze said. "You change them into lakes. Lakes typically don't have variety."

### Bargain for Franklin

While the dam belongs to the city of Franklin, a new financial arrangement means the city will not have to foot the bill for all of the work.

Franklin will pay only around \$275,781 of the project's \$871,000 cost. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant will provide \$350,000, and the state will provide labor and resources amounting to more than \$189,000.

"This was a collaborative partnership, and TDEC appreciates the efforts the city and the Harpeth River Watershed Association have put forth to make these improvements, which will be beneficial to the overall health of the Harpeth River," Environment and Conservation Deputy Commissioner Shari Meghreblian said in a statement.

Work on the project has created more cooperation between the city and HRWA. In years past, discussions about the river and dam sometimes were contentious.

Even though the dam will come down, Franklin will still be able to draw water from the Harpeth to use for its roughly 17,000 water customers.

"We still want them to be able to withdraw water," Bolze said.

All the final costs and agreements between the city, HRWA and the state still must be addressed. However, it is likely they will be approved in the fall, clearing the way for demolition to begin possibly as early as next summer.

Though there was friction about the dam's removal in the past, Franklin officials today are happy about the partnership and the city's share of the cost.

"This is a way to (improve the river system) at basically the cost to remove the dam," said Eric Stuckey, Franklin city administrator. "We get all sorts of other community benefits, ecological benefits. It's a more sustainable solution, long term."

### 'A hidden gem'

Demolishing the dam is only one part of the project. Crews must create deep pools in the river from which Franklin can draw its water. Logs will be installed in certain places to help stabilize riverbanks.

With no dam, kayakers and boat paddlers will have better access to areas upstream and won't have to risk taking a tumble over the dam.

"Generally, lowhead dams do present quite a bit of risk to paddlers and swimmers," said Trent Ganstine, an avid paddler and president of the Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association. "They're one of the most dangerous of any type

of waterway."

Carrie Drury, owner of Franklin Canoe and Kayak Co., sees the dam's removal as key to Franklin residents finally appreciating a river that once was used as a dumping ground for household refuse, trash and garbage.

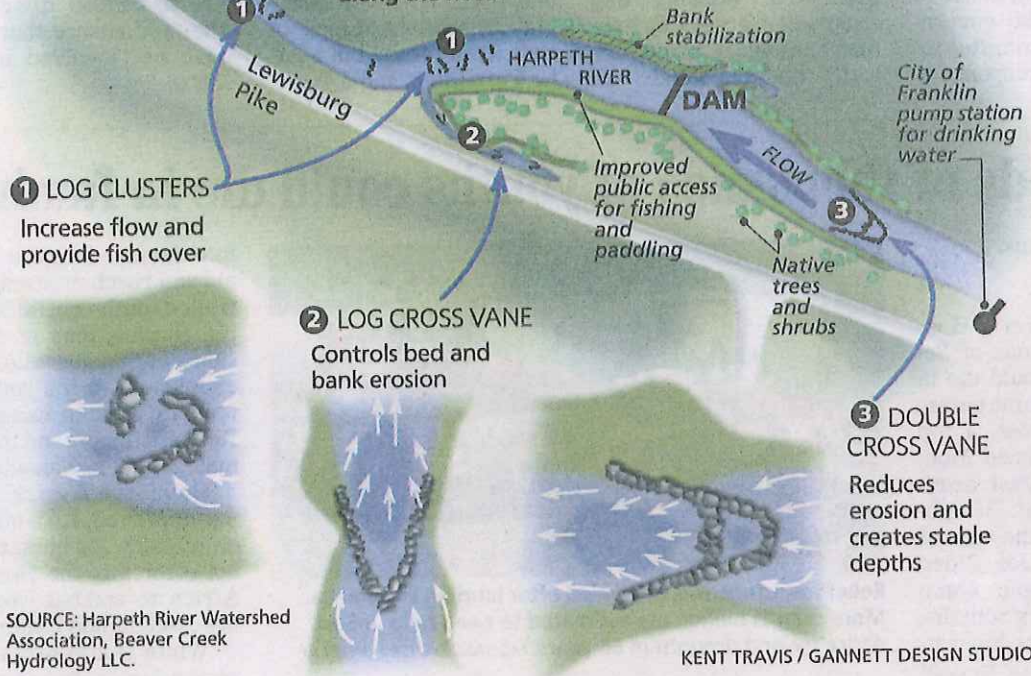
"It's just right here in our backyard," Drury said. "It's kind of a hidden gem."

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# A NEW FEEL FOR THE HARPETH RIVER

The Harpeth River's lone dam, in Franklin, will be replaced by a series of boulder structures built along the river.



SOURCE: Harpeth River Watershed Association, Beaver Creek Hydrology LLC.

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