



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: Immediate

Contact: Susan Massengale; Jamie Kritzer

Date: Feb. 24, 2014

Phone: 919-810-5996; 919-707-8602

State environmental officials start sampling fish tissue near Dan River coal ash spill site

RALEIGH – Scientists with the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources started Monday collecting fish in the Dan River in Eden near the site of the coal ash spill to begin fish tissue testing, which will help determine if fish are safe to eat.

DENR staff members hope to compare the fish tissue samples collected throughout the week with samples the state agency will collect periodically during the next year to help scientists determine any impacts coal ash metals and other residuals could be having on fish in the river.

Fish tissues collected this week will serve as baseline data to compare against fish tissue samples collected later in the year. Scientific research shows that it typically takes more than a few weeks for pollutants to accumulate in fish tissue. After these initial samples are taken, staff members plan to return in about one month, then six months and then a year from now to take additional fish tissue samples for comparison.

“Sampling fish tissues is part of our ongoing effort to better understand the impacts of the coal ash spill on the health of the Dan River and all the organisms dependent on it,” said Tom Reeder, director of the N.C. Division of Water Resources. “The information will help us determine the extent of damage the spill has had on aquatic life and the river, and better inform cleanup efforts.”

Fish absorb chemicals from the water that passes over their gills, through the food they ingest and through sediments. One fish tissue sampling site will be upstream of the coal ash spill site while the other three will be downstream of the spill site – at the Virginia state line, at N.C. Hwy. 57 in Milton, N.C. and at the headwaters of Kerr Lake in Virginia. Results from baseline fish tissue samples will be published as soon as they are available.

Sampling priorities immediately after the spill emphasized the need to protect human health and therefore focused on drinking water and river water conditions. High water conditions from winter storms hampered the effort to gather fish for sampling because of safety concerns and because high water levels make it more difficult to collect a representative sampling of fish species. It is believed that the effects from the spill on healthy fish consumption, if any, will be revealed over time and the fish captured today will provide a baseline for further tests.

To learn more about DENR’s fish tissue sampling analysis, visit the agency’s website, <http://bit.ly/1juCx39>. State health officials have advised people not to eat fish from the Dan River and to avoid prolonged contact with the water.

Other developments

During the weekend, work continued to fill with grout two stormwater pipes beneath the coal ash basin. A section of the 48-inch stormwater pipe – the same pipe that failed and caused the coal ash spill – was grouted on Saturday. Also, grout was installed in a second, 36-inch stormwater pipe this weekend.

Rain and snow melt have increased the speed and depth of the river, which has prevented Duke Energy officials from continuing their efforts to remove a 300-cubic yard ash deposit near where the coal ash first spilled into the Dan River. Removal of the ash deposit will continue when river levels and currents allow operations to resume.

###

Jamie Kritzer, Public Information Officer

Phone: (919) 707-8602

<http://www.facebook.com/ncdenr>

1601 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1601

[RSS](#)

Jamie.Kritzer@ncdenr.gov

Facebook:

RSS feed: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/opa/news-releases-rss>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/NCDENR>