

Still jammin'

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The recent discovery of a giant, apparently trashed, metal pipe in the middle of the Pearl River near O.A. Green Road brought attention to the progress of a U.S. Coast Guard project to clear a massive log jam that long blocked the waterway in that area.

In fact, it was a log jam cleanup crew that finally wrangled the pipe, which one man pointed out is big enough to contain a couple of cows, to shore.

Now that the sturdier hazard to boaters has been removed, the crews are again focusing on logs and similar debris. But while the pictures of the pipe site show a relatively clear surface, Coast Guard Project Manager Robert Travis warns that appearances can be deceptive.

The log jam accumulated over the course of at least four years, and in a letter to Travis dated March 11, 2009, the State of Louisiana, based on a contractor's calculations, estimated that it contained "about 125,000 cubic yards of timber and other materials."

Travis believes that was a light estimate.

"It's kind of an impossible question," he said. "There were a lot of cubic yards of logs."

The project to remove the jam got started in early February of this year when several pieces of big equipment, including an Air Curtain Incinerator, were moved to the edge of the waterway at Poole's Bluff.

Since then the contractors and Coast Guard overseers have been busy.

Pile after pile of logs have been transported down river, and the approximately 97 percent of the fallen trees and limbs that were deemed worthless were burned in what Travis said is a remarkably efficient device.

"The burner runs 24 hours a day and emits virtually no particulate matter except when it's starting up," he said. "It saves probably 100 to 200 trucks on the road, landfill space, fuel and time, at about the same cost.

"It burns at 2200 to 2800 degrees Fahrenheit for a 99.99 percent volume reduction, and can burn as fast as somebody can load. It can burn 100 hours and get maybe 10 to 12 cubic feet of really fine ash. That's dramatic waste reduction."

The ash would not even really need to be taken to the landfill, but the Coast Guard wants to keep the site clean as possible, Travis said.

After nearly four months chipping away at the log jam, the project manager is clearly impressed with the incinerator, yet he's far from finished with his task.

The monstrous pipe was not the final bit of debris that needs to be removed from the jammed area on the Pearl, Travis said.

“We’re clearing seven zones,” he said. “The pipe was one zone itself because it was such a threat to boaters. Of the other six, three are signed off on.”

Three zones still contain obstacles, and some of them might not be easy to see for someone speeding around a bend in a motorboat.

“The hard part is the sub-surface stuff,” Travis said.

While crews use sonar to continue to clear the area, he advises boaters to enjoy the river, but to travel with care.