

Hearing on Canton dam gets heated

By Mary Standard , *Special to the Sun Journal*
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CANTON - More than 100 residents of Hartford and Canton packed the Canton Municipal building Wednesday night for a meeting with state officials on the opening of the dam gates at Lake Anasagunticook.

The meeting was chaired by Maj. Gen. John Libby, commissioner of the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management. He opened the meeting by saying he ordered the dam gates open to protect life and property.

State dam inspector Tony Fletcher confirmed that the dam is a significant hazard.

Libby said the attorney general had approved his order to open the dam because the owner, Raymond Fortier, has not complied with, nor submitted a schedule for complying with, any of the terms of a December order that required Fortier to hire an engineer and come up with a plan to repair the dam.

Libby stated in his order that the spillway does not have adequate capacity to handle outflow during flood conditions without overtopping the earthen embankments on both sides, potentially causing the dam to breach and flood areas below.

He further stated that the placement of fill material along the top of the left bank placed an additional load on the structure that was already unstable. He concluded the dam was a threat to public safety and ordered the gates opened until repairs were made.

Fortier claimed he has tried to get permits to fix the dam but the town wouldn't issue them.

Kathy Hutchins, town administrator, said the Planning Board had been trying for years to get Fortier to complete an application for a permit for repairs and he had not done so.

Terri and Paul Bernier, who own the island in the lake, said they can't get their big boat in the water and a small one has to be taken out several feet from the island before they can run the motor. They are concerned that the island may be threatened because the rocks on which the lighthouse stands are being exposed and may compromise the island structure.

Canton resident Michael Ranhoff has taken the initiative to try to find a

solution. He said, "Since 1978, the dam has been a serious issue. The state has been aware and now the gates are open. Summer people are suffering. Why hasn't the state done something?"

Libby responded, "I can't offer an acceptable explanation."

With that, Ranhoff offered a solution.

"I have spoken to a construction company that builds dams and they looked at constructing a coffer dam halfway up Whitney Brook," Ranhoff said. "I got an estimate of \$5,600 and have donations to pay for this. It could be up in five days."

A coffer dam would be a temporary fix until a more permanent solution could be found. Whitney Brook is the only outlet to the lake.

Libby suggested that state Sen. Bruce Bryant could expedite the paperwork.

Residents Rob Turnbull and Herb Harding reside on the pond part of the lake and both strongly objected to the suggestion of a coffer dam up Whitney Brook. They said it would drop their property value \$100,000 because they wouldn't have water access.

Jim Diamond, emergency management director for Canton, asked if Libby could order the dam fixed and charge Fortier.

Leslie Poland picked up on this suggestion and said, "I know the state already has engineers who know what they are doing. Why not have them take over as engineer, create a plan and hire the work done with qualified people and charge Fortier?"

At one point in the sometimes heated meeting, Fortier said he would sell the dam for \$350,000 before repairs. He didn't have any takers.

Libby summed up by saying, "You have every right to be disappointed in the state government because this problem has been going on so long. I will get immediate suggestions at the state level on how to get water level relief. I will run the coffer dam idea by the attorney general as a short-term solution."

Selectman Rick Ray said he thinks the best solution is to get funding to build a new permanent dam further up Whitney Brook.