Fort Drum Press Release

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Public Affairs

Fort Drum PW team rebuilds dam in the Historic LeRay Mansion District

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- Fort Drum Directorate of Public Works professionals are capable of handling a variety of building, repair and restoration projects on post. This week, they took on something a bit different – preserving history.

A Roads and Grounds crew began repairs to a damaged dam July 5 at the heart-shaped pond in the Historic LeRay Mansion District.

Jeff Semrau, PW project supervisor, said that the Roads and Grounds crew has been able to lower the water level down to where they can repair the dam, with Environmental Division specialists on site to provide guidance. Additionally, a team of archeologists from Cultural Resources arrived with their equipment to sift through the earth being dug up for any potential artifacts or other items of interest.

“Pretty much everybody in Public Works is on board with this project,” he said.

Semrau said that they couldn’t completely drain the pond because it would create an ecological disturbance.

“So we just put a drainage pipe in to divert the water around the dam,” he said. “Then we will build a cofferdam – basically a wall of plastic sandbags – to keep the area where they are working dry. We made sure everything was in compliance and with little impact to the environment as we can.”

Semrau said that the project is not overly complicated, so it only requires a small crew to be on site.

“We’ve done this type of work before, and it’s not too much a difference than when we divert waterways to replace culverts,” he said. “The only difference is that the masons are doing concrete work instead of us putting a culvert pipe in. So, we do this quite a bit, actually.”

By early next week, carpenters and masons will cut away damaged materials from the dam, rebuild and pour new concrete into the structure.

“The dam has been failing for years now, and the project has been talked about for a number of years,” Semrau said. “They’ve repaired one side of it before, and, of course, it’s a high visibility area so you really don’t want to disturb things if you don’t have to. I guess the time has come to get this fully repaired.”

Dr. Laurie Rush, Fort Drum Cultural Resources program manager, was giving a tour of the mansion grounds for new members of the archaeology team the same morning the PW crew arrived at the dam. Within an hour, the archaeologists got to work alongside the PW team.

“Since there are potential artifacts all through those deposits from the original construction, it’s required that our archaeologists are there while the earth is being moved around,” she said. “Any time there is ground disturbance in the district, we try to have at least one archaeologist present.”

Rush said the pond is a contributing property to the historic landscape in the LeRay Mansion District, which is identified as a National Register Listed Historic District. As such, she said they are duty-bound to preserve the historic structure.

“That’s why we decided it was important for us to try and save the dam,” Rush said. “The loss of the dam would also mean the loss of the beautiful reflecting pond.”

Rush said that an earlier bid to contract the project proved costly, and preliminary designs submitted did not reflect the need to preserve historic grounds. Fortunately, she said, the PW Roads and Grounds team was able to support the project.

“The PW Roads and Grounds team clearly demonstrated a far greater sense of understanding of the historic context of the dam and surrounding area,” Rush said. “One of things that is so wonderful working with our PW colleagues is that many people here have their own appreciation of the district and genuinely want to contribute to its preservation.”

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Media with inquiries regarding this press release should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs, Katie Wright at 315-772-9043 or katherine.e.wright12.civ@army.mil.

Photo Captions:

A Fort Drum Directorate of Public Works crew began repairs to a damaged dam July 5 at the heart-shaped pond in the Historic LeRay Mansion District. They have been working alongside their Environmental Division colleagues, to include a forester, a wetland biologist and archaeologists to restore the historic property. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)