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Dam

ed \$700,000, said Kristine. Demolishing it will cost 10 times less than repairing it, Kristine said. "Who's to say in 20 years, it wouldn't need repaired again?"

The water from the creek had cut a new passage around the dam, a major problem identified by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

"It's a flooding hazard," said Charlie Young, a DEP spokesman. Also, the structure was generally deteriorating and cracking, he said.

Sharrer Dam sat on the property of AgCom Inc., at 2224 Oxford Road.

Sharrer said his family had developed an engineering plan for improvements and submitted it to DEP, but the state said more improvements were needed to meet codes.

"We wanted to do anything to keep it," Sharrer said.

But once reality set in, the family realized improvement costs were more than they could afford.

Over the next two weeks, Carlisle-based Gleim Excavating will demolish the dam in

stages to minimize sedimentation at the bottom.

A hydraulic hammer will be used to break it into little pieces. Some of the larger pieces of rock can then be used to stabilize the banks of the dam, Young said.

The effort to have Sharrer Dam demolished has been ongoing for several years, Kristine said.

"It's a tough decision for an owner," Kristine said. "It's been there so long and has been such a part of the life of the residents, that it's not an easy decision to make."

The dam is being removed for reasons other than just economics.

Low-head dams are notoriously unsafe. They create currents that pose a danger to boaters and swimmers and prevent fish from moving naturally. Water flows over the tops of the small dams, making it difficult to spot in time for boaters coming from upstream. An underwater churn is created by falling water and can make escaping impossible.

Gov. Ed Rendell is leading an effort to have low-head dams removed from the state's waterways.

Adams County has eight

other dams that have been classified as "run-of-the-river" dams — those with dangerous hydraulics.

Sharrer said accidents that happen at dams only toughen already strict laws.

"We wanted to do anything to keep it."

DICK SHARRER
Co-owner, Sharrer Dam

"I understand we must comply with the law, but this dam had very little risk," Sharrer said.

He said Sharrer Dam wasn't considered a large dam. It measured 8 feet high and 220 feet long, Kristine said.

People who choose to go boating, tubing or swimming in creeks at flood level, would likely have an accident whether or not a dam was there, Sharrer said.

"I think the water is the risk, not the dam," he said.

Two friends drowned last summer at another low-head dam in Adams County. David Miller, 18, of East Berlin, and Justin Miller, 20, of Abbottstown, drowned last July after jumping off the East Berlin Dam on boogie boards. The

search for their bodies also injured two firefighters.

At Dick's Dam in June 2003, a pontoon boat capsized and six of the boat's 11 passengers were stranded on a small, twig-filled island in the center of the Conewago Creek. That accident sent two children and two adults to the hospital.

Some state estimates show there are as many as 7,000 low-head dams in Pennsylvania.

The Dettler's Mill Dam northwest of Davidsburg was removed in 2004. It was the 14th dam to be removed on the Conewago Creek.

The Sharrer Dam's demolition also will provide fish a passage through the area and restore habitat that's associated with free flowing rivers and streams, said Kristine.

The Fish & Boat Commission's program for removing low-head dams was established in the mid-1990s and primarily focuses on providing fish passage in the Chesapeake Bay drainage area. It has since

expanded statewide. "Our main goal is to provide fish passage for the whole length of the Conewago Creek," Kristine said.

Contact Shari Sanger at ssanger@eveningsun.com.

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