

The Columbus Dispatch

Teen who drowned likely was caught in turbulent water from lowhead dam

Staff Writer The Columbus Dispatch

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When the 17-year-old boy waded into the Scioto River with friends Thursday afternoon, he likely had no idea of the dangerous swirling water that was below the surface.

Friday morning, Columbus police dive team members pulled Caleb Faught's body from the river. It was found about 100 feet from where his friends watched him go under, just south of the Greenlawn Avenue dam.

Police confirmed Faught as the drowning victim late Friday afternoon.

Gabriella Salinas, a cousin of Faught's, called him "the nicest person."

"He would always go for walks and he was always with his friends," she said.

Salinas said she heard that one of Faught's friends in the water "was having trouble swimming, and Caleb had jumped in to try to save him."

"He looked back in the water and Caleb was gone."

Faught lived on the South Side and Salinas said he went to South High School.

It was about 2:30 p.m. on Thursday when two brothers fishing along the bank of the Scioto River, just south of Downtown, called 911 to say a boy who had been with a group of teens wading in the water had gone under and not come back up.

Officials say that Faught likely was caught in a deadly current called a hydraulic pull. When fast-moving water flows over a low-head dam into slow, deep water, it starts to churn underneath. Though the surface of the Scioto

might have looked calm to Faught on the humid June day — the last day of classes for Columbus schools — the water underneath was spinning like a washing machine.

John Ivanic, a city utilities spokesman, said the area south of the dam where the boys were is marked with no-swimming signs.

"Those signs are there for a reason," Ivanic said.

Researchers at Brigham Young University found that since the 1950s, 482 people have died at 245 low-head dams in 38 states. About half of those deaths happened in the past 15 years, and 19 occurred in Ohio.

Just last July, brothers Joseph Welch, 18, and Anthony Martin, 20, died after they were pulled into the Olentangy River near the Dodridge Street dam north of Ohio State University, one of the seven remaining low-head dams in the city. Five of those are on the Olentangy River, and the other two on the Scioto.

Two low-head dams in Columbus were removed in recent years. In 2012, the work to remove the 5th Avenue dam and restore the Olentangy River north of it cost \$6.9 million. In 2008, 20-year-old Christian Hallam died after his raft went over that dam.

The Main Street dam was removed in 2013 as part of the \$35 million Scioto Greenways project.

A December 2005 report concluded that it would cost the city \$44 million to remove the five low-head dams on the Olentangy, but City Councilman Michael Stinziano said that since 2005, costs could only have gone up.

"Because of infrastructure that is contained in the dams, it's going to be a challenge to remove them," Stinziano said. "The city has done the appropriate analysis and where we could remove them, we did.

"I think given the tragedy, this is something that we'll continue to evaluate though," Stinziano said.

Last year, Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed applied for a \$10,000 grant from the Create Columbus Commission to modify the five remaining low-head dams on the Olentangy to make them safer, but the group had no luck.

"We want to get people out on the rivers more safely," said Laura Fay, the group's secretary. "But we need more partners. We need more funding."

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