

Email from Kathy Urffer of the Connecticut River Conservancy on June 28th, 2018.

Hello Dam Relicensing Partners!

Below is our latest update on the hydropower relicensing process for the Wilder, Bellows Falls, Vernon, and Turners Falls Dams and the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Station along the Connecticut River.

VT/NH facilities, owned by Great River Hydro

FERC Issued Study Plan Determination

As you might recall, Great River Hydro (GRH) submitted supplemental study reports for Study 18 (American Eel Upstream Passage Assessment) and Study 21 (American Shad Telemetry Study). They scheduled a study report meeting on March 8 where they discussed Studies 18 and 21, presented information about fish passage and eel monitoring work they have been doing at Vernon Dam, and discussed the Study 2/3 Erosion Supplemental data report filed on November 15, 2017.

Comments on Study 2/3, Study 18, and Study 21 as well as disagreements and requests to amend the study plans were submitted on April 23, 2018 by Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC), US Fish & Wildlife Service, VT Fish & Game, VT Department of Environmental Conservation, NH Fish and Game, NH Department of Environmental Services and many other private parties.

On June 21 FERC issued a study plan determination on Studies 2/3, 18, and 21:

- Regarding erosion issues (Studies 2/3) this quote sums it up, “The information presented in the study reports and addendum is sufficient for [FERC’s] environmental analysis of the likely causes of erosion. Therefore, we do not recommend that Great River Hydro conduct an additional analysis of the likely causes of erosion.”
- No specific requests for study plan changes were made on Study 18, so FERC did not address that study in their determination.
- Comments on Study 21 (American Shad Telemetry Study) requested a balloon tag study to quantify survival of American Shad for all downstream passage routes. FERC did not recommend any modifications to Study 21.

This basically means that these studies are considered complete.

Review Continues on Study 9, Instream Flow Study

US Fish & Wildlife and VT and NH state agency staff continue to conduct technical review of instream flow data. Great River Hydro completed the model run requested by stakeholders and held a stakeholder meeting on June 8 to go over the data and discuss next steps. Fisheries biologists will have a working meeting to discuss the model results and conversations with GRH will continue in meetings planned for early August.

Other studies underway

Great River Hydro submitted their required Progress Reports for Studies 9 (Instream Flow), 24 (Dwarf Wedgemussel and Co-Occurring Mussel), and 33 (Cultural and Historic Resources) on May 22, 2018. Their next progress report on these studies will be due on August 13, 2018 and then again every 90 days until final study reports are submitted. In their progress report, Great River Hydro indicated that they will continue efforts to complete their Traditional Cultural Properties report as well as develop a Programmatic Agreement in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer’s and tribal leaders during summer 2018.

Recreation Survey and Feedback

Survey results and associated feedback from CRC’s online recreation survey and public forums held in November and December will be distributed in the coming weeks for comment. In addition to information gleaned from the survey, CRC continues to have ongoing discussions with municipalities along the river regarding recreational access. We are finalizing the information and will be collecting clarifying comments. Once comments are received, a final version will be shared with Great River Hydro for their consideration as they continue to develop their overall recreation plan.

The process from here

What's next? Once the final Study Reports for Studies 9 and 24 are submitted there should be an opportunity to comment on those. When those studies are completed, FERC will commence the "post-filing" process. FERC has not indicated a date for Great River Hydro to file an amended license application at this point.

Facilities in MA, owned by FirstLight**CRC submits additional information/study request for Northfield Mountain Alternatives Analysis**

On June 8, CRC filed a new additional information/study request with FERC. The request lists the results of relicensing studies and the impacts that Northfield Mountain has on various resources. We are requesting that FERC require FirstLight to conduct an analysis, including costs, of various options for avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating Northfield Mountain's environmental impacts for the next forty years, while continuing to provide valuable large-scale electric storage in an era of increasing renewable energy generation. Thus far, FirstLight has proposed to study the feasibility of a barrier net across the Northfield Mountain tailrace, which may avoid impacts to downstream migrating juvenile shad and American eels, but will not mitigate other impacts to the river and fishery. There is no "Plan B" if the barrier net proves infeasible and the costs for this option have not been provided.

Settlement Discussions Underway

Meetings and discussions among settlement stakeholders and with FirstLight continue.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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