



MINUTES - Connecticut River Joint Commissions Meeting
(unapproved)
Monday, Nov. 19, 2012
2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Kilton Library, West Lebanon, NH

NH Commissioners Present: Bob Ball, Rebecca Brown, Bob Christie, Donna Drouin, Jim McClammer, Brendan Prusik, Aaron Simpson, Mary Sloat, Rick Walling

VT Commissioners Present: Tara Bamford, Chris Company, Peter Gregory, Tom Kennedy, Bev Major, Gary Moore, Rick Hopkins (proxy for Michaela Stickney), Brendan Whittaker

Administrative Staff/Consultants: Rachel Ruppel

Members of the Public: Ron Rhodes, CT River Watershed Council; Ken Sprankle, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Lynn Dewald, Corrine Belt and Mark Mattson, VT Yankee

Company, Vice President, called the meeting to order at 2:08 pm and welcomed new Commissioners, Jim McClammer and Brendan Prusik. Introductions were made.

Moore moved to accept the Sept. 17, 2012 minutes as written, with a second by Drouin – motion passed unanimously, with McClammer and Kennedy abstaining.

Ruppel presented the slate of Local River Subcommittee members to be confirmed, as follows:

- To the Headwaters Subcommittee - Brendan Whittaker, Brunswick, VT
- To the Mount Ascutney Subcommittee – Doree Russell, Claremont, NH; Nancy Heatley of Weathersfield, VT
- To the Wantastiquet Subcommittee – Stephen Skibniowsky of Vernon, VT; Jane Worley of Walpole, NH.

Bamford inquired if any paperwork for Monroe representatives has been received; Ruppel reported no. Whittaker reported that he spoke with the Town of Lemington, who stated that they did not wish to participate, citing anti-regulation sentiment. Moore moved to confirm the slate of Local River Subcommittee members, with a second by Gregory – motion passed unanimously, with Kennedy abstaining.

Ruppel presented the Program Manager's Report; there were no questions. Ruppel presented the financial report as of October 31, 2012. Kennedy moved to accept the financial report, with a second by Moore – motion passed unanimously, with no discussion.

Gregory presented the status of the Scenic Byway signs grant project, which was stalled earlier this year, but now has some momentum to finish sign installation and project certification. He presented a request by CRJC's two contractors, TRORC and RSG, to amend their contracts to cover the costs to close out this project.

Gregory recused himself from a vote on the contract amendments and left the meeting.

Ruppel stated that both TRORC's and RSG's contract would be increased by \$2,000 and the time limit extended to the end of the year. Simpson asked if this contract was included in CRJC's budget; Ruppel replied that these costs were unanticipated and not part of CRJC's budget, but that there is money remaining in the grant to cover it. Walling asked if this was the last grant-funded project from the "old days", prior to UVLSRPC's involvement with program management; Ruppel confirmed that it was. Major moved to amend the contract with TRORC for the Byway Signs project to increase the amount by \$2,000 and extend the period to December 31, 2012 and to amend the contract with RSG for the Byway Signs project to increase the amount by \$2,000 and extend the period to December 31, 2012, with a second by Drouin – motion passed unanimously by those members present.

Gregory re-joined the meeting.

Campany presented the status of CRJC's spokesperson for the FERC dam relicensing – CRJC has not yet found a willing volunteer to represent CRJC who wears a single hat. Brown suggested that CRJC may want to consider hiring a consultant to represent CRJC on this relicensing; she suggested meeting with NH and VT state agency contacts and looking to TransCanada or VT Community Foundation and NH Charitable Foundation for funding. Major noted that there would be a conflict of interest for TransCanada to fund this position. Moore stated that he was in favor of the idea, but concerned about the cost. Drouin asked if David Deen could represent CRJC; Campany stated that Deen has a conflict as a paid employee of CT River Watershed Council. Kennedy stated that the stakeholder meetings that CT River Watershed Council has been convening have been an open dialogue, with a sense of advocating for everyone; Kennedy has been attending these for SWCRPC. Brown recommended that CRJC's Executive Committee have a meeting with Michaela Stickney, Steve Landry, and David Deen to discuss where CRJC fits into this relicensing process. Moore stated that it is imperative that CRJC get intervenor status and identify its key issues, based on his past experiences with the 15 Mile Falls and Deerfield relicensing processes. Walling asked Moore for his advice about what key issues CRJC might want to focus on based on Moore's past experiences; Moore related that minimum flows, fluctuation levels, recreation and fisheries are likely to be critical issues. Sloat added that data about the pollutants in the sediments behind dams may also be important. Moore noted that TransCanada does not have the landholdings around its 3 southern dams that are similar to its landholdings around 15 Mile Falls, which is an important difference. Moore added that taxes might be another issue for these dams. CRJC discussed the next steps – the Executive Committee should explore the idea of a consultant or other alternatives with state agencies, and that Kennedy should provide updates about the stakeholder meetings.

Ruppel recommended that CRJC establish a Committee on Communication with State and Federal Legislators, to review bills that might affect the river or its watershed. Brown, McClammer and Prusik volunteered for NH, and Moore and Whittaker volunteered for VT.

Announcements: Sloat reported that a wetlands permit has been filed for a large slope stabilization project on VT Route 102 in Maidstone. Whittaker suggested that CRJC may want to be involved.

Ruppel confirmed that the next meeting will be held on January 28, 2012 from 2-4 pm – the fourth Monday of the month, as the third Monday of January is Martin Luther King Day.

Ken Sprankle, Connecticut River Coordinator with US Fish and Wildlife Service, gave a presentation on migratory fish species in the Connecticut River (the slideshow will be available online). Ken explained that extremely low returns of Atlantic salmon as well as \$3 million in damage to the White River hatchery from Hurricane Irene were two key factors in the decision to terminate the salmon restoration program; he showed data reflecting the number of juvenile fish released and the extremely low number of returns. Ken also presented the results of several studies on shad, including one showing that shad fish passage through dams is limited to low-flow periods. He reported that US Fish and Wildlife Service will be actively involved with the FERC dam relicensing, particularly with issues about fish passage.

Sloat asked if Vermont Yankee's thermal discharge affect shad; Sprankle reported that he wrote a letter to the Public Service Board stating that he believes that there is some impact based on the results of peer-reviewed research, but he does not know the specific effect on the shad population.

Drouin asked if migratory fish basically stops at the Massachusetts border. Sprankle stated that 10,000 shad passed at Vernon Dam, so some migratory fish are moving into New Hampshire and Vermont waters.

Whittaker stated that he would like to know the fate of the adult Atlantic salmon currently living in the watershed, as well as the status of native resident (non-migratory) fish populations. He also stated that US Fish and Wildlife Service could have handled the cancellation of the Atlantic Salmon restoration program better, as thousands of schoolchildren and adults have taken part in salmon stocking efforts over the years.

Whittaker asked what the fate of the White River hatchery would be. Sprankle reported that the hatchery is set up to raise both Atlantic salmon and lake trout, and that strategic repairs are being made. The hatchery may be used to raise juveniles for the Atlantic salmon recovery programs in Maine, as there is a clear mandate through the Endangered Species Act to help endangered species recover; in Maine, some populations were never completely extirpated and so are listed as endangered species, unlike in the Connecticut River watershed, which was a re-introduction and restoration project.

Mark Mattson, environmental consultant for Vermont Yankee (with Normandeau Associates), presented on research since 1968 focused on the wildlife and river ecosystem in 55 miles of the Connecticut River near VY (the slideshow will be available online). He reported that VY has completed an annual report for the multi-agency Environmental Advisory Committee since 1968, as well as 92 analytical bulletins that investigated specific topics determined by the Environmental Advisory Committee. The annual monitoring covers water temperature, phytoplankton/zooplankton, macroinvertebrates, and resident and migratory fishes. Mattson stated that VY's studies have been very concentrated and rigorous – VY has cumulatively caught over 218,000 fish over 40 years in the 55-mile stretch of river.

Of the 92 special studies (published as analytical bulletins), 49 have been focused on American shad, 14 studies have been on resident fish, and 9 have focused on the thermal plume. Mattson also reported on monitoring of thermal discharge compliance with permit limits on temperature change; VY has been in compliance with its permit.

Mattson concluded that “studies have consistently found that the permitted thermal discharge from Vermont Yankee has assured the protection and propagation of the balanced indigenous populations of fish, shellfish and wildlife in the Connecticut River.”

Whittaker noted that 40 years ago, when the initial permitting was going through, there wasn't even certainty that cooling structures would be constructed.

McClammer asked whether VY has seen broader changes in fish populations in the river system, based on its 40 years of records. Mattson stated that VY has not studied this question directly, but indirectly can see that the populations of 3-4 resident species have stayed about the same, but others have changed.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm.