

CRJC Headwaters Subcommittee

Thursday, September 12, 2013

7:00 PM to 9:00 PM

Historic Columbia Town Hall

Draft Minutes

Present:

Kevin McKinnon, Colebrook  
Ken Hastings, Columbia  
Bill Schomburg, Columbia  
Gary Paquette, Stratford  
Ed Mellett, Northumberland  
Tom Caron, Canaan  
Brendan Whittaker, Brunswick  
Brendan Prusik, CRJC  
Tara Bamford, staff  
Cleve Kapala, TransCanada  
Edwin Nason, TransCanada  
Matthew Cole, TransCanada

2. TransCanada - Discussion of flow management and concerns

Cleve Kapala reviewed the background of TransCanada's dams at First Connecticut Lake and Second Lake as well as the Murphy Dam which is owned by the state. The management of all 3 dams is subject to the Connecticut Lakes Supplementary Agreement which resulted from the 15 Mile Falls Relicensing negotiations.

TransCanada purchased US Gen's interests in 2005. US Gen had purchased NEPCo's interests in 1998. Cleve will send Tara the Supplemental Agreement to share with Subcommittee members.

Edwin Nason is responsible for management of operations throughout the Connecticut and Deerfield. Edwin explained that the agreement provides for 2 nd Lake to be operated in the same manner as in the past. In order to ensure the success of spawning lake trout, this includes drawing the water levels down in early fall so levels are as low as they will get before they lay their eggs. Otherwise eggs in the shallow gravel areas near the shoreline would be exposed and die. Spring runoff fills the reservoirs back up and then levels are managed to try to balance the competing interests of recreationists, fish and flooding above and below the dams.

Ken Hastings asked if the agreement included managing 1 st lake for lake trout including drawing it down by September 1. It was explained that this was not part of the agreement but was a separate request from NH Fish and Game via Diane Timmins.

Murphy Dam at Lake Francis is owned by the state and addressed by a water user agreement between the power company and the state. The dam is physically managed by the state via Allen Williams, who reports the water level in Lake Francis to them, but flow is managed according to TransCanada requests. Payments go into a fund for maintenance of the dam. The water level is not part of the agreement. One of the factors TransCanada looks at when making decisions about Murphy Dam is the gauge below Indian Stream. If it is approaching flood levels – more than 1600 CFS, they ask for water to be held back at Murphy Dam.

Ken Hastings expressed concern that no one from TransCanada is in the area 24 x 7 anymore since Bob Ward retired. First and Second Lake dams are instead computer controlled. Cleve explained that staff currently come up from Comerford twice a week, and that TransCanada is still discussing staffing. Several Subcommittee members expressed concern about incidents involving farmers losing equipment due to rapidly rising flood levels and noted that with the increase in extreme weather events it is a growing concern. By motion of Hastings/Caron it was voted 6-1 to recommend that TransCanada strongly consider continuing the practice of having full-time personnel stationed at the Connecticut Lakes to monitor and manage flows and assist with communications during extreme weather events and other emergencies. Kevin expressed his reservations and suggested TransCanada might want to explore other options as well such as monitoring with cameras.

It was explained that water temperature for fisheries is one of the management considerations – it was noted that increasing discharge from Murphy Dam can decrease temperatures 10 degrees in N. Stratford within 12 hours and that this has been done to save fish in the past. In some instances this has resulted from Ken's calls to Diane Timmins. Cleve explained that because only 11% of their power generation capacity comes from the Connecticut Lakes they can manage for other factors such as water temperature. It was noted that the water released has to be from the cold bottom rather than the warm top spilling over the boards. The heavy rains in May and June and early July caused spillover. Concern about the condition of the boards was discussed. Ken also explained how low flow leads to both hot and cold temperature extremes due to radiant heat from the exposed rocks in the summer and ice in the winter.

Concern was expressed about sudden discharges as occurred on the "Trophy Stretch" below 1 st Lake on the Saturday of July 4 th weekend catching anglers by surprise vs. ramped discharges. There are sirens on the dams and TransCanada is evaluating how

audible they are downstream and considering day only vs night and day. Edwin explained that ramping is the practice when possible for public safety reasons but is not required by the agreement. Ken suggested some smaller signs be placed at access points to inform recreationists what the sirens mean.

Cleve and Edwin reminded members that the dams are not flood control dams and flooding is a natural part of the river valley and that microbursts are hard for them to manage for. However they store water to make sure flows are maintained through the seasons as well as they can considering weather and balancing needs. For example, when Tropical Storm Irene came the lakes were already full so all they could do is have the gates wide open and let the stormwaters flow through. If the lakes were drawn down further to create additional storage it would negatively impact lake users. Similarly if the water is low in the river, letting water out decreases the lake levels.

It was mentioned that a Lemington farmer who lost his equipment due to flooding had asked for a phone call before large discharges. Cleve noted that there is a website for discharges at the lakes and for the gauges at Indian Stream and N. Stratford. Kevin recalled a phone tree being set up at Murphy dam to contact towns and farms in an emergency. The broken gauge reporting bad data to the website was noted as an example of the importance of a fulltime TransCanada presence. Tom noted that recreationists make decisions based on that data and spend time and money to travel north based on reported conditions. Matt met with the fishing guides this summer to discuss some of these concerns and made sure they all have his contact info.

It was noted that the Comerford portage has been fixed. Cleve reiterated that they want to be informed of problems like that so they can address them. He also said TransCanada has a Community Investment grant program with a grant cycle coming in in February. There is a regional budget for New England. The info is on their website.

Brendan suggested inviting Allen Williams to a future meeting.

### 3. Housekeeping

a. The minutes of April 18, 2013 were approved as presented by motion of Hastings/Schomburg.

b. Update on activity between meetings-

Tara- Submitted the Recreation Plan updates, responses to NHDES survey, and FY14 workplan.

Kevin- Spoke with selectboards in Pittsburg and Canaan about finding additional reps from those towns. They said they would bring it up at their meeting. No reply yet.

Has generated some interest in the Riverwalk, has some members for the working group now incl. Brendan P. and April Hyde. Will talk to CRWC soon. Brendan P. showed it to Jean Shaheen and discussed possible funding with Chuck Henderson. Gary- Spoke with Mike Lynch again about being a Stratford rep but he doesn't feel he has time right now. He is interested in hearing if there is an opportunity to help with a clean-up.

Met with Ron Rhodes and about 8 DES staff to show them the portion of rail trail being eroded by Smarts Mill/Bissell Brook. There is interest in looking for money to address the problem as this is a year round trail (except mud season) between N. Stratford and Northumberland.

Bill - Spoke with a couple people he knows in Lemington about being reps but no takers.

#### 4. Permit Reviews

Ed had received the wetlands application for the Atlantic and St Lawrence RR's North Stratford bridge between meetings. The wetlands permit application says that less than 800 sq ft of ground is affected. Most of the discharge went directly into the river and so was only easily visible when there was ice under the bridge. The permit also says they'll be cleaning off the bridge infrastructure.

Bill attended the site visit with DES staff John Regan and Tracie Sales and Atlantic and St Lawrence personnel. The RR reported that they inspect every week. Bill has pictures of creosote on the girders taken at the end of August/beginning of Sept. Tara will email John Regan and ask if they will be doing a final inspection when Clean Harbors is done.

Bill's files contain correspondence with former CRJC staff Adair Mulligan and NHDES referring to enforcement action dating back to April 2008. In September 2008 it was reported that the NHDES watershed bureau had investigated the site and met with the legal dept. It appears that nothing happened during the ensuing five years except "diapers" being put on the ties and then not maintained. Bill has provided substantial photo documentation to the Subcommittee and NHDES of the constant flow of creosote into the river year-round. By motion of Schomburg/Hastings it was voted unanimously to send a letter to NHDES demanding that a substantial fine be applied to the St Lawrence and Atlantic RR for continuing to contaminate the river for five years after it was first brought to their attention. In addition, the Subcommittee strongly suggests that the fine be used for a mitigation fund earmarked for water quality.

#### 5. Other Business

Ben Copans emailed correspondence about gathering interested partner organizations together for a water quality sampling monitoring program on the Upper Connecticut was discussed. Ben is hoping to schedule a meeting the last week of September and would like suggestions for monitoring as well as volunteers. Bill and Kevin expressed interest in participating in the conference call and the monitoring. Tom Caron may be able to help with the monitoring. Some suggested metrics besides sedimentation were DO, pH, and E.coli. Tara will follow up with Ben.

6. Next meeting

Tara will follow up with Ed about a next meeting date.

Minutes submitted by Tara Bamford, NCC