



Upper Delaware Council

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UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

May 7, 2026

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, May 7, 2026. Chairperson Dexter called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. Roll call followed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees:

Damascus Township- Jeff Dexter, Town of Hancock- Jim Serio, Town of Fremont- Jim Rodgers, Town of Cohecton- Larry Richardson, Town of Delaware- Harold Roeder, Town of Tusten- Cathleen Breen, Town of Deerpark- Ginny Dudko, Town of Highland- Christine Martin (Zoom), Town of Lumberland- Nadia Rajsz (Zoom), Lackawaxen Township- Doug Case, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson, National Park Service- Lindsey Kurnath (Zoom), New York State- Ryan Coulter (Zoom), Commonwealth of Pennsylvania- Tim Dugan (Zoom), Delaware River Basin Commission- Kristen Bowman Kavanagh

Absent:

Westfall Township- Michael Barth

Staff:

Executive Director- Laurie Ramie, Resource & Land Use Specialist- Kerry Engelhardt, Administrative Support- Stephanie Driscoll

Media:

Sullivan County Democrat- Fred Stabbert

Guests:

John Conway, Debra Conway, Jim Killilea, Marcia Fink, John Fink, Town of Deerpark- Bill Dudko, Rosie Starr (Zoom), Vicky Krauss (Zoom), Tamara D'Antoni (Zoom)

Presentation: “The Semiquincentennial in the Upper Delaware: How We are Celebrating, and Why”: Dexter introduced Sullivan County Historian John Conway. Conway thanked the council for reaching out to request a presentation on the Nation’s Semiquincentennial; the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Conway showed via PowerPoint presentation the official seal for the Sullivan County Semiquincentennial Commission, which has been established to coordinate commemorative events locally. Conway said the commemoration is not limited to July 4, 2026, but spans the full eight years (2025-2033) of the Revolutionary War. The United States has already begun commemorating the Semiquincentennial the previous year since the Revolution began before the Declaration of Independence was signed. The focus is not only on America’s “birthday,” but on the entire sequence of events leading up to independence and the war itself. Sullivan County has embraced that long-range approach by planning programming that stretches beyond 2026.

Conway said that while the decisive battle of Yorktown took place in Virginia and the war began in Massachusetts, approximately one-third of Revolutionary War battles occurred in New York State. The Battle of Saratoga is what many historians consider the turning point of the war and he stressed that New York played a disproportionately significant role in the conflict. Why did the Upper Delaware matter during the Revolution? Although the Upper Delaware was sparsely settled, it occupied an extremely important logistical position because it controlled movement between the Delaware and Hudson Rivers. This area served as a critical corridor for supplies, communication, and troop movement. While there were no major large-scale battles in the immediate region, the area played a major supporting role in the war effort, particularly through transportation and supply routes. Conway said that the Revolutionary War era had profoundly shaped the identity and character of the Upper Delaware region. He described genius loci (“spirit of a place”) as the cumulative atmosphere created by generations of human experience, nature, and historical events. The divisions and hardships experienced during the Revolution still form part of the region’s cultural identity today.

Many settlers arrived from Connecticut during the 1750s under the belief that they were simply expanding the Connecticut colony westward. Investors from Connecticut purchased large tracts of land in what became the Upper Delaware region, viewing land speculation as a major business opportunity. Benedict Arnold's father—and even Benedict Arnold himself as a young man—were listed on some of the original land deeds associated with these purchases. The local settlement process contrasted sharply with what happened in Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley, where Connecticut settlers encountered strong resistance from existing Pennsylvania settlers, resulting in the Pennamite-Yankee battles. In the Upper Delaware, however, settlement occurred with comparatively little resistance.

Conway discussed the deeply divided loyalties among residents during the Revolution. As tensions with Britain escalated, local settlers had to choose sides between the Patriots and Loyalists. This was not a "good versus evil" conflict, but rather a deeply personal and complicated civil conflict in which neighbors and even family members found themselves on opposing sides. He referenced historian H.W. Brands' characterization of the Revolution as "America's First Civil War." Loyalists actually outnumbered Patriots in portions of the Upper Delaware region. As fighting intensified, many Patriots left the area because they no longer felt safe, relocating either back to Connecticut or to communities with stronger Patriot majorities such as Minisink and Peenpack. Loyalists generally remained in place during the war, but after the British defeat in 1783 many of them fled to Canada, effectively causing the collapse of portions of the original settlement. He described the settlement as being "ripped apart" by the conflict and said the region nearly ceased to exist because of the internal divisions created during the war.

The Battle of Minisink was the most significant Revolutionary War engagement in the Upper Delaware. Local residents from Cochection and surrounding areas fought on both sides of the battle. Conway let members know about the annual Battle of Minisink commemoration, which this year will occur on July 18, the Saturday closest to the anniversary of the July 22, 1779 battle.

Conway outlined the work of the Sullivan County Semiquincentennial Commission, which was created by the Sullivan County Legislature in 2022. He and his wife Deb Conway serve as co-chairs of the nine-member commission, which has been meeting for over a year to organize commemorative programming extending from 2025 through 2033. He reviewed activities already completed or planned as part of the local Semiquincentennial celebration.

Last year's kickoff event at Seminary Hill in Callicoon called "The British Are Coming!" featured the Boston-based group History at Play and a one-woman performance by Judith Kalaora called *Rendezvous with Rachel Revere*, which focused on Paul Revere's wife and her uncertainty during his famous ride in April 1775. Rachel Revere spent weeks without knowing whether her husband was alive, dead, or imprisoned after the British sealed off Boston. There is a weekly radio segment called "250 Years: A Look Back," which airs weekday mornings at 7:45 a.m. on Catskill News Talk radio stations. Topics have included General John Sullivan, Benedict Arnold, Nathaniel Sackett, local families such as the Tylers and Skinners, and numerous Revolutionary War figures tied to Sullivan County history. Nathaniel Sackett received particular attention because of his role in organizing George Washington's early intelligence network, which eventually evolved into the Culper Spy Ring. The commission also produced a 56-page Semiquincentennial publication with the *Sullivan County Democrat* covering Sullivan County's Revolutionary War connections and upcoming events. Twenty-thousand copies have been printed for countywide distribution throughout the summer. The Revolutionary War Film Festival held at the Narrowsburg Union at the end of April was a major success. The festival included screenings of *April Morning*, Ken Burns' *The American Revolution*, and *The Patriot*, along with food, music, musket demonstrations, and reenactments by Fort Delaware interpreters. Fort Delaware appeared in four of the six episodes of the Ken Burns documentary after producers spent three days filming there in 2024.

For future programming, a traveling exhibit called "The Revolution in Your Own Backyard" is being developed with the Time and The Valleys Museum that explores how local families and children experienced the Revolutionary War. The exhibit includes examples such as the divided Skinner family, where some brothers sided with the Loyalists while another fought with the Continental Army. Conway previewed several major upcoming events, including: Fort Delaware's May 16 opening weekend and a Nathaniel Sackett presentation; a Patriots and Loyalists July 17-19 weekend at the Minisink Battleground featuring demonstrations, music, exhibits, and the opening of a 1976 time capsule; a return performance by Judith Kalaora portraying Deborah Sampson, the woman who disguised herself as a male soldier during the Revolutionary War on August 1 at the Narrowsburg Union; a commemoration of the Battle

of Chestnut Woods in Grahamsville on Sept. 5; a planned screening of *Hamilton* to be determined; and a Revolutionary War-themed historical bus tour through Sullivan County in October.

Conway acknowledged current political and social divisions in the United States but encouraged attendees not to become discouraged; the nation has always experienced periods of intense division, including during the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and even prior to World War II. Despite those divisions, the country has consistently endured and recovered.

Sullivan County Democrat Publisher Fred Stabbert praised the presentation and discussed collaborating on the Semiquincentennial publication. The publication was intentionally released early in order to begin building public awareness about Sullivan County's Revolutionary War history well before the actual 250th anniversary in 2026. Stabbert presented Conway with a check with the amount the Semiquincentennial publication had raised as a donation toward the programming for the 250th anniversary in the Upper Delaware. There was a round of applause and appreciation expressed by Conway.

Dexter presented Conway with a UDC "Land, Water, People" lapel pin and the council members thanked Conway for his presentation. There was a brief pause to allow guests to leave the meeting.

Approval of March 31, 2026 (April) Minutes: A motion by Henry seconded by Richardson to approve the March 31, 2026 meeting minutes carried.

Public Comment on the Agenda: None.

Committee Reports: There were no questions regarding previously distributed minutes for Water Use/Resource Management 4/21 (Evan Padua), Operations 4/28 (Jeff Dexter), or Project Review 4/28 (Larry Richardson).

Status Reports:

Delaware River Basin Commission: Bowman Kavanagh said the hydrologic conditions report included in the packet shows a generally positive picture for the basin, but conditions vary significantly depending on where you look geographically. Reservoirs in both the upper and lower basin were currently full, and streamflow overall remained fairly normal. However, when comparing flow conditions between Montague and Trenton, a clear gradient emerged: conditions became progressively drier farther downstream. At Montague, streamflow figures were hovering around average to median levels, while Trenton flows were trending below median. Precipitation deficits were much more pronounced in the lower basin and had persisted across multiple timeframes, including the previous 30 days, 90 days, and even over the course of the past year. DRBC's drought monitoring tools and county-level basin maps reflected those disparities. In New York counties within the basin, conditions remained normal across the board, with all counties shown in green on the drought map. New York State evaluates drought status using a broad array of indicators, including streamflow, groundwater levels, precipitation, evapotranspiration, and related hydrologic measures. Based on those combined factors, the Upper Delaware region was currently in good shape. Conditions farther south in the basin were more concerning. New Jersey has remained in drought warning status for quite some time. While reservoir storage there was holding up reasonably well, groundwater levels remained below where they should be despite some modest recovery. Pennsylvania conditions have improved somewhat in the middle and upper basin, although much of the state still appeared in yellow and orange drought classifications on DRBC's maps. Wayne County is one of the few Pennsylvania counties still classified as normal. The Delaware was technically still classified as normal at the moment, but recent discussions at a Water Supply Coordinating Committee meeting suggested that conditions there were deteriorating enough that a drought watch might soon be considered. Groundwater levels in the Delaware remained well below normal. We would need above-average rainfall to recover fully. Bowman Kavanagh said we've seen this before; over the last couple of years conditions have generally been "wet enough," but with persistent dryness developing in different parts of the basin at different times. Conditions had flipped during previous years, with the upper basin becoming dry for a period before receiving more rainfall while the lower basin dried out afterward. Current conditions overall were still close enough to normal that people were not becoming overly alarmed at this point. Bowman Kavanagh reported that the DRBC's June 11 business meeting would be held virtually. The DRBC's one in-person business meeting of the year would be in September near DRBC headquarters in Trenton near Washington's Crossing. That meeting would also incorporate elements tied to the America 250 commemoration efforts. Several advisory committee meetings were also previewed, including: the Subcommittee on Storage Waters Protection meeting on May 14; the Monitoring Advisory and Coordination Committee meeting on May 28; and the Water Management Advisory Committee meeting on June 3, on which UDC is represented. The DRBC will be attending many events taking place around the basin, including festivals and river-related community gatherings. The DRBC will attend Friends of the Upper Delaware River's RiverFest in Hancock on September 12. She asked members to continue informing DRBC about events where the DRBC's participation might be useful.

Henry asked when New York City expects to move forward with the long-discussed aqueduct shutdown and repair work. Bowman Kavanagh said that the project was not expected to happen anytime soon. NYC DEP staff could provide more precise details, but the agency had encountered repeated technical and engineering challenges during previous attempts to proceed with the work. Drought conditions during prior years had forced postponements. There were also complications with contracting delaying the timeline. Portions of the process must be restarted. Her understanding was that the project might now be three to five years away.

NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation: Coulter reported that DEC staff had been busy across several divisions. On the fisheries side, trout stocking operations were still ongoing, with hatchery crews working nearly every day to complete seasonal stocking activities. Fisheries staff had also been heavily involved in outreach programming, including free family fishing days and various community events aimed at encouraging public participation in fishing and outdoor recreation. DEC biologists are actively conducting fish population surveys around the region. He highlighted an upcoming bass and sunfish survey planned for Lake Superior in the Town of Bethel. Striped bass season on the Hudson River is underway, with the Hudson River Fisheries Unit currently monitoring striped bass, river herring, and sturgeon populations. He has recently heard encouraging reports regarding the Delaware River shad run. One of his coworkers from the Dingmans Ferry area had gone out over the weekend and caught six to eight shad. Operations staff have been opening campgrounds and preparing fishing access sites for the season. There are ongoing concerns about the Narrowsburg boat launch site. He has already submitted a high-priority work request several weeks earlier regarding the conditions there. Silt buildup and structural damage had still not yet been fully addressed. He hopes repairs and cleanup will occur during the week. Coulter said that NYSDEC is actively seeking seasonal employees for campground operations and told anyone interested to contact him for information about available positions and hiring contacts. The opening of turkey season was on May 1. DEC Wildlife staff reported that favorable weather conditions during the summer of 2024 had resulted in strong turkey poult production. Because of that, DEC expected an increased number of toms to be available during the spring 2026 hunting season. The department is proposing several measures intended to increase harvests of antlerless deer and improve DEC's ability to manage abundant deer populations statewide. Proposed changes included adjustments to the Deer Management Permit (DMP) system to improve access and usage of antlerless tags, expansion of Wildlife Management Units participating in the September antlerless season, and the creation of an "earn a second buck" tagging system. Public comments on the proposed deer management rule changes would be accepted through May 17, 2026, and that DEC had posted summaries and question-and-answer materials online for public review. That information can be found on the NYSDEC's website.

G. Dudko asked Coulter if NYSDEC has gotten any reports on ticks this year. Coulter said he did not receive formal departmental monitoring reports on tick populations, but based on anecdotal reports he had heard, the tick season had been awful so far. Ticks have been especially bad immediately after winter thaw conditions. He was unsure which agency specifically monitored statewide tick conditions but agreed that it had been a particularly severe year.

Breen offered to take and send photos documenting the Narrowsburg launch conditions, but Coulter responded that DEC had already received substantial documentation from anglers, community members, and Engelhardt. He requested updates when locals observed the work being completed. DEC staff have recently toured various access sites and addressed several smaller issues, including fisheries staff shoveling silt off the Highland access path. Additional repairs remained pending at other locations, including damaged parking posts and signage at Long Eddy.

B. Dudko said the Mongaup access parking lot continues to deteriorate, where a previously repaired hole had reopened and the overall lot condition was again becoming problematic. Coulter said that the DEC had only recently completed repairs there before winter conditions caused renewed damage. The rough winter had created widespread maintenance problems throughout the region, including damaged signposts knocked down by snowplows and numerous other infrastructure issues. The maintenance list has become extensive, but he assured attendees that the problems would continue to be addressed as resources allowed.

Pennsylvania Dept. of Conservation and National Resources: Dugan said he had sent Driscoll some highlights for PA DCNR that were included in tonight's packet. Trout season in Pennsylvania has gotten off to a strong start this year. Spring turkey season also appeared to be progressing well, with hunters seeing a healthy number of toms throughout the region. He confirmed that ticks had been especially bad on the Pennsylvania side. DCNR staff, hunters, and others working outdoors in the field were consistently reporting high tick activity, and he encouraged everyone to be diligent about checking themselves carefully after spending time outside.

Dugan said that Pennsylvania had approved a significant policy shift involving Sunday hunting opportunities. Under the new framework, all hunting seasons will now include Sundays that fall within the official start and end dates of the season. Previously, many seasons ended on Saturdays, but under the revised rules, those seasons will now extend through the following Sunday, effectively adding additional hunting days across the calendar year. There are still exceptions for migratory game birds, including waterfowl, woodcock, and morning doves. Those seasons remain dependent on federal coordination and guidance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with final dates typically released in July. He added that Pennsylvania increased antlerless tag allocations in several areas of the state, although Wildlife Management Units in the northeastern region had generally remained fairly stable without dramatic increases. The more substantial changes were occurring in portions of central and western Pennsylvania where Chronic Wasting Disease outbreaks continue to spread. In those areas, wildlife biologists are intentionally increasing antlerless tag allocations in an effort to reduce herd densities and slow disease transmission. Managing Chronic Wasting Disease remains a very difficult challenge for PA.

Dugan said his office had hosted a Pike/Wayne Conservation Partnership legislative breakfast earlier that same morning, which Ramie and Dexter had attended. It was a successful networking and outreach opportunity, with roughly 30 to 35 attendees gathering to discuss issues informally and tour DCNR's new office space at the Delaware State Forest Resource Management Center.

He reported that Pennsylvania was now entering budget season. Nothing will be clear until mid-July when they will have more information.

National Park Service: The NPS monthly activity report is included in the packet. Kurnath said the Water Safety Partners meeting is scheduled for May 21 at the Tusten Town Hall Community Room. The NPS had structured the meeting around collaborative discussion and partnership-building. Invitations had gone out to municipalities, the UDC, state agencies, and DRBC. Participants were asked ahead of time to think about several core questions, including what their connection to water safety was, what partnership goals they hoped to accomplish, what issues might benefit from a collective approach, and who else should be involved in the conversation moving forward. UDC members are also encouraged to attend either as representatives of their municipalities or as UDC rep. She said that Jim Rodgers planned to attend and invited anyone else interested to contact either her or Ramie for the RSVP information and meeting link.

Kurnath reported there had already been numerous spring events and a significant amount of water safety programming underway. NPS had just completed two days of Canal Days programming, although one school postponed until June because of the rainy weather. Despite chilly conditions, today had gone very well. Attendance figures would likely be reported at the next meeting once finalized.

Kurnath said UPDE will be assisting the National Park Service's "America 250" event at Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton on June 15-16; a reunion between Union Pacific Big Boy No. 4014 and Big Boy 4012, which resides at Steamtown. The event is part of a nationwide cross-country tour tied to the America 250 commemoration. Steamtown is expecting extremely large crowds and is already advising people to secure tickets in advance.

UPDE is bringing back many returning seasonal employees while also onboarding several new staff members for the summer season. She is optimistic that UPDE would soon have nearly its full seasonal team assembled, with only a few remaining hires scheduled to begin in the coming weeks.

Resource Management crews had recently completed invasive plant clearing work around Milanville and along the Towpath Trail. Additionally, preparations were underway for annual water quality sampling efforts conducted jointly with DRBC. There is a new water quality study involving the U.S. Geological Survey. The project will examine water quality impacts associated with visitor use in recreational rivers, and the Upper Delaware has been selected as one of the participating study areas. She said this is an exciting opportunity for UPDE to contribute to broader national research efforts. She believes sampling activity would likely occur downstream of Skinner's Falls. Additional details would be shared as the project developed further.

Kurnath said new signs were part of NPS's ongoing efforts to address illegal commercial guiding activity on the river. The issue had been a major point of frustration raised repeatedly during Fishing Guide meetings over the past several years. Guides who properly obtain Commercial Use Authorizations (CUAs) have expressed concern that

unpermitted operators continue guiding trips without complying with NPS requirements. The new signage was designed to address two issues simultaneously. First, it helps inform guides who may not realize they are required to obtain a CUA. Second, it attempts to educate customers by encouraging them to ask guides whether they possess the necessary authorization. The signs include QR codes that link directly to the relevant NPS webpage explaining the CUA process. She's aware that the NPS website can be difficult to navigate. The direct-link approach was intended to simplify access to the information. The signs had received a positive response during the recent Fishing Guide Spring Meeting and she hopes that the effort would help reduce illegal guiding problems over time by increasing awareness and encouraging accountability among both guides and clients.

Bowman Kavanaugh asked for clarification regarding the USGS water quality study; whether the project was being coordinated through a national USGS program or through one of the regional science centers. Kurnath said she did not immediately know the answer. UPDE had primarily been asked to submit a letter expressing interest in participating. She said she will follow up with more details and later added information into the Zoom chat: *"To answer Kristen's question, this is a national level program -- the USGS/NPS Water Quality Partnership -- but this specific project was spearheaded by the Upper Midwest Water Science Center."*

UDC Executive Director: Ramie thanked Bowman Kavanaugh for being here in person tonight and for authorizing the DRBC's sponsorship of four of the UDC programs/publications. She asked if Bowman Kavanaugh would like to report on the Cannonsville Reservoir expansion study project. Bowman Kavanaugh said the DRBC's Phase 1 storage study, completed in 2023, had been a large-scale desktop analysis intended to identify potential future water storage opportunities throughout the Delaware River Basin. Consultants reviewed roughly 2,500 possible sites, many of which were active or inactive quarries, excavations, or depressions where water storage might someday be feasible if additional freshwater storage became necessary to support basin flow targets. Phase 1 focused largely on broad screening and ranking rather than engineering design. As part of the follow-up Phase 2 effort, the DRBC asked consultants to take a closer look at three of the higher-ranked quarry sites. This is not an engineering or construction-level study, but rather a more refined evaluation involving preliminary geology, conceptual feasibility, and rough cost estimates to better understand what future options might exist decades down the road if additional water storage were ever needed. There are three quarry sites currently under examination. One is an inactive quarry in New Jersey, located between Trenton and Lambertville near DRBC headquarters that was considered attractive because of its close proximity to the river, although surrounding land use and state park planning created additional complications. The two Pennsylvania quarry sites remained active mining operations and were still decades away from any possibility of conversion into storage reservoirs. The quarry owners had been cooperative in sharing long-term plans and information about eventual site conditions once mining operations cease. She reassured members that the DRBC was not preparing to immediately purchase quarries or begin filling them with water. Instead, the work was intended to help the basin think proactively about future storage possibilities if climate change, drought, or flow management needs eventually require additional freshwater reserves. During the Phase 1 review, Cannonsville had emerged as a potentially significant opportunity because even a relatively modest increase in reservoir elevation could create a substantial amount of additional storage capacity. The DRBC therefore began discussing a separate, more focused conceptual study with NYC DEP as part of the broader Phase 2 storage effort. Cannonsville study work had not formally started yet. The DRBC and NYC DEP had been going back and forth on contractual and legal details because NYC DEP had agreed to fund the study due to the increased complexity and expense involved in evaluating an existing major reservoir system. She has spoken with NYC DEP representative Jen Garigliano, who would be willing to come directly to the UDC and discuss the project in more detail if requested. Bowman Kavanaugh emphasized that the proposed work was not intended to produce immediate construction plans or initiate a reservoir expansion project soon. Rather, it would serve as an initial assessment of what might theoretically be possible at Cannonsville in the future. If the study proceeds, she estimated that the consulting effort would likely require approximately 12 to 18 months to complete once underway.

Henry asked why the DRBC was discussing the possibility of increasing storage at Cannonsville while NYC DEP continued losing enormous quantities of water through the long-delayed leaking aqueduct system with roughly 35 to 40 million gallons per day being lost. He expressed frustration that the DRBC appeared to be contemplating ways to store additional water while such large losses continued unchecked. The DRBC should have enough influence to pressure NYC DEP to accelerate repairs to the leak. Bowman Kavanaugh said the DRBC supports fixing the leak and that, based on her conversations with NYC DEP staff, the DEP had been genuinely disappointed each time previous repair efforts had been delayed or canceled. The last postponement had been especially frustrating because drought conditions and contracting complications forced the DEP to abandon the planned work, creating cascading delays as procurement and contractual arrangements had to be restarted. Many of the engineers and staff members had

reportedly worked on aspects of the project for decades and remained committed to completing the repairs as soon as possible. The DRBC's direct regulatory authority over NYC's Delaware Basin water withdrawals is limited because those withdrawals are governed by the Supreme Court Decree under the Delaware River Basin Compact framework rather than through a standard DRBC permit or docket process. That legal structure makes New York City's water withdrawals fundamentally different from those of typical municipal utilities operating elsewhere in the basin.

Ramie welcomed Jim Serio back to the UDC board as the Town of Hancock representative. Serio previously served as either a representative or alternate during multiple earlier periods dating back to 2003. He was co-recipient of the 2013 Distinguished Service Award alongside Dr. Peter Kolesar for volunteer research and advocacy work related to thermal mitigation protocols intended to improve fishery habitat in the Upper Delaware River. Serio had previously chaired the Water Use and Resource Management Committee and has rejoined that committee. His appointment became effective April 7, replacing Kat Judd. Serio thanked Ramie and said "it feels like I never left".

The Pike/Wayne Conservation Partnership Legislative Breakfast held she and Dexter attended this morning provided an opportunity to tour PA DCNR's newly constructed environmentally sustainable district office headquarters. She posted photo's from the event on the UDC's Facebook page, including displays within the building featuring regional bluestone tools and exhibits highlighting forestry and natural resource themes. The building itself is highly modern and environmentally advanced, featuring silver LEED certification, sophisticated heating and cooling systems, and a heated sidewalk designed to prevent snow and ice accumulation. The event allowed conservation organizations to present their missions, priorities, and funding requests directly to legislators and staff. Unlike previous years when organizations displayed large poster boards, this year's event used printed handouts and packets distributed to legislators, along with an ongoing slideshow presentation summarizing participating organizations and upcoming projects. The UDC's primary request again focused on securing a dedicated line-item appropriation within Pennsylvania's state budget to support UDC operations, as strongly envisioned within the RMP. Elected officials and/or their staff members attending the breakfast included State Representative Tarah Probst, an aide to Representative Jeff Olsommer, and outreach staff representing Congressman Rob Bresnahan. While the event is fairly informal and attendees largely mingled conversationally rather than through structured presentations, the UDC did have productive conversations and collected direct contact information from several participants, including some personal cell phone numbers. Dexter added that multiple officials expressed interest in becoming more engaged with issues affecting the Upper Delaware region even if they did not directly represent the immediate area.

Ramie thanked Al Henry for agreeing to represent the UDC on that the newly formed Wayne County Natural Heritage Area Advisory Council, since staff resources are stretched thin. The initiative, spearheaded in part by Steven Schwartz from Equinunk and others, focuses on identifying and protecting significant natural sites throughout Wayne County. She felt it made sense to involve one of its Wayne County UDC representatives directly. Henry provided a brief recap of today's meeting. The mission involves identifying approximately 30 potential natural heritage sites throughout Wayne County. Maps had been distributed carefully because they contain private landowner information. A group of affiliated biologists plans to conduct fieldwork aimed both at validating these sites and improving Pennsylvania's Natural Diversity Inventory system, commonly known as PNDI. The current PNDI data is badly outdated; portions of it had not been updated since 1991. The meeting ended abruptly when the scientists leading the call announced that the allotted meeting time had expired just as discussions were becoming especially interesting.

Ramie said the UDC participated in the NPS's seasonal staff training day held on May 4. The UDC had been invited to speak with new and returning seasonal employees about the organization's cooperative management role within the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River. Some seasonal staff had worked in the area previously, but many were brand new and unfamiliar with the unique structure of the Upper Delaware compared to a traditional national park. She focused on explaining the UDC's purpose, cooperative management framework, and the unusual federal-state-local partnership model governing the river corridor. She also distributed newsletters, brochures, and informational materials, and encouraged seasonal staff to attend future UDC meetings.

Ramie said that NYSDOT had notified UDC about the next planned full closure of the Callicoon-Damascus Bridge as part of the bridge's extensive renovation project, which is scheduled to continue through November 2027. The closure, expected to last up to 48 hours, was tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, May 20, with backup dates of May 27 or 28 if needed. Closures become necessary during major construction phases such as concrete pours or lane

changeovers. She noted that UDC had specifically requested to be placed on DOT's notification list so the organization could help communicate closure information to the public. The upcoming annual meeting of the New York-Pennsylvania Joint Interstate Bridge Commission, where both state DOT agencies gather to discuss construction plans, inspections, and maintenance schedules for the nine Upper Delaware river crossings will be held on May 13 at PennDOT facilities in Dunmore, PA. She intends to attend in person and will put out a press release afterward. She expects that discussion of the future of the Skinners Falls-Milanville crossing and the status of the remaining Milanville abutment would arise during those conversations.

Following the success of the first Citizens Emergency Preparedness training held in March, which drew approximately 50 enthusiastic attendees, a second session had now been scheduled for June 8 at the Tusten Town Hall Community Room. Participants attending the training receive emergency preparedness instruction along with a free emergency "go kit" backpack filled with supplies for each household represented. Pennsylvania residents are welcome to attend even though the program itself is administered through New York State. Registrants need to select Sullivan County as the host location during registration because the online system does not accommodate Pennsylvania addresses. She's hoping for an even larger turnout during the second session, particularly because many people who attended previously had reportedly found the program extremely worthwhile.

Ramie said the June 4 full council meeting will feature a presentation on results from an archaeological study conducted on NPS properties at the Cowen Farm and Minisink site; while the July 2 meeting will feature a presentation by Professor Paul King on John Augustus Roebling and the Delaware Aqueduct. Additional calendar reminders included "Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day" on May 15 and registration information for the Delaware River Sojourn, which will run June 20–26.

Breen suggested that the UDC formally request either a presentation or written update from NYC DEP regarding the status and timeline of the long-delayed aqueduct repair work. Ramie said that NYC DEP's Jen Garigliano has always been very responsive to UDC inquiries. She will find out whether the DEP could address both the Cannonsville storage study and aqueduct repair timeline either through a presentation or written correspondence.

New Business:

- a. **Draft Resolution 2026-05: Approving 2026 River and Shoreline Clean-up Grants:** Ramie said the UDC only received one application from the Town of Deerpark which is an estimate of the work they do on the 2.9-mile section of the Hawk's Nest three times a year (after Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day). The amount requested is \$4,318.43, though that is an estimate and could end up being lower than that. A motion by Henry, seconded by Rodgers to approve Resolution 2026-05: Approving 2026 River and Shoreline Clean-up Grants, carried.
- b. **Draft Resolution 2026-06: Approving NPS-UDC 2027 Cooperative Agreement and Work Plan:** Ramie said there is a deadline of May 22 to get this submitted for federal review. A motion by Henry to approve Resolution 2026-06: Approving the NPS-UDC 2027 Cooperative Agreement and Work Plan, seconded by Rodgers, carried.
- c. **Draft Letter to NPS: Well Ordinance Revisions (2026-08), Shohola Township:** Engelhardt reported that this is a letter recommending that the well ordinance revision to remove property line setback requirements in Shohola Township substantially conforms to the River Management Plan. The Project Review Committee made a recommendation to send this letter to the NPS. A motion by Henry, seconded by G. Dudko to send a letter to NPS recommending that the well ordinance revisions in Shohola Township (UDC 2026-08) substantially conform to the River Management Plan, carried.
- d. **Personnel Subcommittee Report:** Henry said the Personnel Subcommittee met at 6:00 p.m. tonight to conduct UDC Executive Director Laurie Ramie's annual performance appraisal. He recognized Ramie for her hard work. There was a round of applause, and everyone thanked Ramie.
- e. **Other:** None.

Old Business:

- a. **River Management Plan Amendment Proposal Advisory Opinion by Tom Shepstone:** Ramie said that planning consultant Shepstone's advisory opinion had arrived in time for preliminary discussion during the April 28 Operations Committee meeting and had also been circulated to the full Council ahead of this meeting for broader consideration. Robinson acknowledged that many Council members may not have the patience for the amount of detailed historical and procedural discussion involved, but the issue has become

unavoidable because of the organization's worsening financial condition. However, the matter properly belonged in the Operations Committee because the heart of the problem was funding and organizational sustainability. He said the UDC is "on life support." The Council recently had to rely on donated funds to purchase updated computers and complete a Windows 11 upgrade. To him, that situation symbolized the severity of the problem because computer infrastructure was not a luxury but an operational necessity central to every aspect of UDC's work. If the organization must dip into discretionary or donated funds merely to cover basic operational infrastructure, then the funding model itself is fundamentally broken. The UDC has tried numerous other methods to improve funding over the years, investing time and energy without meaningful success. Because of that, he viewed the RMP amendment process as the only remaining avenue available. Robinson made a motion to send the River Malmanagement Plan amendment discussion back to the Operations Committee, seconded by Roeder. Rodgers asked how the Shepstone advisory opinion had been funded; is the UDC permitted to use NPS funds for this kind of legal or policy analysis? Ramie said that UPDE's Community Planner Carly Marshall has been reviewing whether the expenditure could qualify under the Cooperative Agreement's provisions for studies and investigations. There was belief that because the RMP itself contemplates amendment processes and related evaluations; the expenditure could be justified under existing federal funding authorities as long as it is not duplicative. Rodgers asked whether there were other pathways available for increasing funding through Interior Department budgeting processes. Kurnath said that increases for park operations are pursued through the NPS's internal budget planning and Green Book process. Park units submit requests based on demonstrated operational needs, critical responsibilities, or new obligations requiring support. However, in recent years park units have been expected either to absorb new responsibilities or cut programs rather than request substantial increases. The UDC's funding is not treated as an entirely separate federal line item. Instead, the Cooperative Agreement funding comes out of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River's overall operational allocation. Current federal budget proposals are concerning, including proposed NPS operational cuts of roughly 27 percent. She said the outlook was "not rosy."

Robinson framed the issue by comparing the original financial assumptions underlying the 1986 RMP to present-day operational realities. He questioned whether it would be fair to compare the original envisioned funding levels and responsibilities against current appropriations and inflation-adjusted realities. Kurnath said that NPS budgeting does not typically work through inflationary comparisons alone. Requests are generally built around identifying specific unmet needs, critical tasks, staffing shortages, or programs that can no longer be sustained. Robinson argued that the RMP establishes concrete obligations for all partner agencies and organizations, including the UDC, and questioned how the NPS differentiates between legally mandated duties and more discretionary operational goals. Kurnath said she was struggling somewhat to answer the question because NPS operations are built upon layers of enabling legislation, federal regulations, management policies, resource protection responsibilities, recreation obligations, staffing structures, and operational realities that have accumulated over decades. The NPS itself faces many of the same constraints the UDC does. The Upper Delaware park unit currently operates with less than half the staffing level originally envisioned when the RMP was written, despite still carrying essentially all of the same responsibilities. Robinson argued that because both UDC and NPS are jointly responsible for implementing the RMP, the federal government has an obligation to ensure that the UDC remains functional. The UDC should not be competing against the park unit's own budget for survival because the UDC is intended to function as a partner, not a subordinate. The UDC is operating in the red and he argued that the organization was now reaching a "fund or die" moment.

Rajsz acknowledged Robinson's frustrations but said that generalized complaints about inflation or stagnant funding were unlikely to persuade federal officials. The council should identify specific unmet needs or operational deficiencies that could be tied directly to concrete funding requests, such as staffing positions or measurable program requirements. The current federal budget climate was extremely difficult; expectations for large increases should remain realistic. Robinson responded by giving an example involving the increasing administrative burden associated with preparing and managing the Cooperative Agreement itself. The amount of staff time and organizational resources now required to maintain compliance and reporting obligations represents an operational burden that did not exist decades earlier. That constitutes a tangible new cost directly tied to federal requirements. Richardson said that before the UDC could make an effective funding case, the organization needed hard numbers identifying exactly what tasks or responsibilities could no longer be accomplished under current funding levels. He suggested bringing accountants into the

process (as suggested before) to help build out more detailed operational and financial analyses that could demonstrate actual unmet needs in a concrete way.

Robinson reflected on his own involvement dating back to the late 1970s during the original controversies surrounding creation of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River partnership structure. No town/township supervisor at the time would ever have approved the RMP had they been told the UDC would still be receiving only \$300,000 annually nearly 40 years later. He called the stagnant funding level “an embarrassment” and “irrational.” The RMP was intended to create a true cooperative partnership between local governments and the federal government. In his view, if the NPS genuinely considered the UDC a partner, it should be actively ensuring that the UDC has sufficient resources to function. The UDC is not asking for excessive funding, only enough money to carry out the obligations imposed by the RMP. Kurnath said that if the UDC is truly serious about amending the RMP, the conversation should not assume that amendment necessarily means obtaining additional money. Instead, she proposed that amendment could also involve reevaluating and potentially redefining the responsibilities themselves. The assumptions underlying the original RMP have fundamentally changed over the past four decades. Staffing realities, operational methods, park management practices, regulatory structures, and available federal resources are all dramatically different today than they were in the 1980s. The plan itself originally envisioned regular reviews, five-year updates, and long-term evaluations, none of which had really occurred in a meaningful way. Despite all the challenges, the cooperative management structure has still achieved success. For nearly 40 years, the partnership has consistently brought together municipalities, two states, DRBC, and the NPS around one table every month while successfully protecting the river corridor. That success should not be ignored simply because the original assumptions no longer fully align with modern realities. Rather than focusing exclusively on fighting for more funding, she suggested that the more productive use of collective time might be to honestly reevaluate what responsibilities are truly achievable under current conditions and what a modernized RMP should realistically look like. The motion carried to send the discussion on amending the River Management Plan to the Operations Committee.

- b. **NPS Determinations: Callicoon Riverside Park (UDC 2026-03), Town of Delaware; Highlands Salon (UDC 2026-04), Town of Tusten; Keller Williams Office (UDC 2026-05), Town of Tusten; and Natural Nails Salon (UDC 2026-06), Shohola Township:** Engelhardt said that the NPS concurred with our recommendations that UDC 2026-03, 2026-04, 2026-05, and 2026-06 substantially conform with the River Management Plan.
- c. **Upper Delaware Litter Sweep Wrap-up Press Release:** Driscoll said a copy of the press release is included in tonight’s packet. Though she says this every year, this year was the most successful year yet with 525 t-shirts ordered and around 500 given out. For comparison, last year we ordered 475 t-shirts. She expressed appreciation for everyone who volunteered for the Upper Delaware Litter Sweep. A round of applause was done to thank Driscoll for her hard work with the litter sweep.
- d. **Other:** None.

Public Comment: None.

Adjournment: A motion by Roeder seconded by Henry to adjourn the meeting at 8:39 p.m. carried.

Minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 5/14/2026