

**WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES**  
**February 21, 2023**

Committee Members Present: Ginny Dudko, Al Henry, Fred Peckham (Zoom), Andy Boyar (Zoom), Pat Jeffer, Evan Padua

Committee Members Absent:

Staff: Laurie Ramie, Kerry Engelhardt, Ashley Hall-Bagdonas

NPS Partner: Lindsey Kurnath-Superintendent (Zoom), Don Hamilton- Chief of Natural and Cultural Resources, Michelle Stevens- Biologist

Guests: Bill Dudko- Deerpark Alternate

The UDC's Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023. Chairperson Dudko called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**Introduction of NPS Biologist Michelle Stevens:** Hamilton said Stevens has worked at the Delaware Water Gap on the Invasive Plant Management team. Stevens grew up in the borough of the Water Gap and is really familiar with the river down there. She's excited to be on the Upper Delaware and learn more about the Northern end. She studied Biology at East Stroudsburg University and received her Masters at New Mexico State University.

**Approval of January 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes:** A motion by Henry seconded by Padua approving the January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023 meeting minutes carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

**Old Business**

**1/18 & 1/30 Neversink Watershed Management Plan Report:** Ramie shared that Sullivan County is working with Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR), Trout Unlimited, and other partners who received federal funding through the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program to do a watershed management plan for the Neversink River and its sub-watersheds and streams.

The meeting on 1/18 was the kickoff of that process and was meant to be educational with a presentation titled "What is a Watershed Management Plan and Why Do We Need Them?" There were 64 participants on the virtual meeting. Sullivan County Planning Commissioner, Freda Eisenberg gave the introduction. Eisenberg said this was the first of at least three public outreach meetings that they'll be having. The next meeting will have some interactive exercises. They will have a third meeting when they are ready to review the draft plan. Ramie shared that the project is to profile the Neversink Watershed; outline management goals; recommendations; and identified pilot sites for project implementation. At this particular meeting, they had three speakers. The first was George Schuler from The Nature Conservancy who provided an overview of how the water cycle operates. Heather Jacksy, Chief Planner for Sullivan County, described watershed planning efforts. The project began last summer when they had interns out looking at 1,000 culverts to collect and input data. This plan will most likely include a vision statement, watershed-wide goals, a stream corridor management plan which is meant to be aspirational but not regulatory, a project list, a community outreach plan, and they are going to be reviewing all the local laws and plans that could have an impact such as the Upper Delaware River Management Plan to make sure they're not duplicating anything, and that it's all compatible. The third speaker was Steve Schwartz from FUDR. He spoke on the visioning process in general and how the Neversink River drainage goes from the Catskills to the Delaware River. He said that there have been Neversink plans done before but not as comprehensive. It may ultimately lead to forming a Neversink Watershed Management Council to oversee the implementation of this plan. They will do another visioning session in a couple of months. They sent around a link to a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis.

Engelhardt participated in the follow-up meeting on 1/30 via Zoom with 62 participants. They stressed again that the plan is not a regulatory document; it is a management blueprint. They had two main speakers which she enjoyed. The first speaker Gian Dodici talked about stream dynamics. They are hydrology, flow dynamics, an overview of streams, and how they evolve. Then Stacie Howell, who is the program coordinator of the Rondout Neversink Stream Program which is an area that is the watershed, above the reservoir. She talked about different strategies that

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they had used mostly to stabilize stream banks so they're not constantly running, which impacts the dynamics of the stream. She talked about soil lifts and root wads and all kinds of streambank restoration. There's going to be another meeting on 3/1 titled "Flooding, Changing Weather Trends, & the Economic/Recreational Benefits of Stream Protection & Restoration." They have recordings of each of these meetings on the FUDR website:

<https://www.fudr.org/documents>

Hamilton mentioned they're evaluating all culverts for fish passage. Ramie said as this process moves along she feels it would be a good subject for a presentation to the UDC.

**1/18 DRBC Our Shared Waters Report:** Engelhardt attended the short talk given by Beth Koniers Brown. She's one of the DRBC representatives that attended the River Valley Awards Banquet this year. Koniers Brown gave the history of the DRBC, what led to its establishment, and the DRBC Mission which is: "Managing, protecting and improving the water resources of the Delaware River Basin." She talked about some water quality wins, some improving conditions that they have ushered in, dissolved oxygen standards and the anti-degradation program created in 1992. She talked about the power of partnerships with advisory committees, State of the Basin Report, Delaware Sojourn, and she did mention the UDC.

**1/20 Delaware River Sojourn Report:** Engelhardt attended the Upper Day Planners meeting on 1/20. The planning team is Ingrid Peterec from the NPS, Rachel Morrow from the Delaware Highlands Conservancy, Sherri Resti Thomas of FUDR and Sandra Demberger from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They discussed potential programming. Engelhardt was on vacation during the last committee meeting and the minutes have not been dispersed.

**1/23 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Minutes:** Ramie said 1/23 was the first meeting of the UDSB in this calendar year. Treasurer Larry Richardson prepared two budgets. One was a general spending plan for 2023 and he also did a budget for the \$40,000 New York State Grant that the UDSB has hopefully secured.

There was also a presentation on by Aaron Hicklin and Lucy Taylor, co-producer of the Deep Water Literary Festival which is entering its 4th year. They presented a Culture & History Grant application seeking \$5,000 for the June 16-19, 2023 event to be held at locations around Narrowsburg. It brings acclaimed writers, actors and artists to the river valley to engage broad and diverse audiences with the themes of iconic works, often drawing on Delaware River nature. Many of the events are free or by donation. For 2023, they will explore the work of George Orwell with a focus on his non-fiction and essays, with issues of moral integrity, the use of language, class and equality, and his everyday celebration of nature and beauty. They are developing a new program this year with the Lenape Center of New York for the opening night at which there will be a particular focus on species and heritage seeds that were cultivated by the Lenape people of this region and a presentation on Lenape language. They are also in contact with The Black Library in Monticello to devise a festival event to spotlight Black authors and writing.

Ramie attended the Catskills Legislative Networking Breakfast sponsored by the NYS Hospitality & Tourism Association and Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association on 2/10 at Bernie's Holiday Restaurant in Rock Hill on behalf of UDSB and UDC. The event featured legislative and regional industry updates with several NYS elected officials expected to be in attendance. That was the first time she met Congressman, Marc Molinaro, saying he was a real dynamo of a speaker.

There is interest in having The Delaware Company and UDSB partner to host a 2nd Upper Delaware Shadfest primarily on the weekend of May 19-21. In the inaugural year, they planned around 18 events. This time, they'd like to focus on arranging 5 or 6 foundational activities along the byway, centered on having another Shad Shindig at Fort Delaware "After Dark" which was very popular. Arranging a bus tour for Sunday could be a good idea, as well as coordinating again with Bethel Woods Center for the Arts to transport TAP NY guests to Narrowsburg.

A UDSB Representative who lives in the Town of Lumberland reported that there is a tree hanging dangerously over NYS Route 97 on top of electric wires there. She took photos of it and the closest mile marker to identify its location. The NYDOT Representative said they will determine whether it's within the NYS DOT's right-of-way so they can take care of it.

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Ramie provided the same report to UDSB of her notes prepared for the Upper Delaware Council from the 1/19 Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting for the Skinners Falls, NY-Milanville, PA Bridge Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study.

There was an executive session at the end of the meeting and they went over the applicants for the program manager position. 10 applications were received. They did interviews with 3 finalists on 1/17, and ultimately it was a person familiar to the community, John Pizzolato from Barryville, who was offered and did accept the six-month independent contract position. He has now started the scope of work that he agreed to perform. The next UDSB meeting is Monday 2/27.

**1/24 DRBC Regulated Flow Advisory Committee Report:** Ramie provided meeting highlights for the 1/24 RFAC meeting. There were 60 attendees plus presenters. It held its Committee Election for two-year terms, electing Chairperson Jennifer Garigliano (NYC DEP) and Vice-chair Hoss Liaghat (PA DEP). The DRBC Climate Change Forum took place 1/31 in Atlantic City.

Kendra Russell from the Office of the Delaware River Master spoke on the Flexible Flow Management Program. The Agreement was signed in October 2017 and is in effect through May 31, 2028. The FFMP included plans for an interim review. The partners have been meeting and have determined to do a modification to the current agreement, which is still under negotiation.

An update on the Delaware Aqueduct Repair was provided by Garigliano. The project is moving forward as planned, just shifted by one year. They will have a better sense of hydrologic conditions in the spring then hold a special meeting to go through NYC's modeling. After the system refills this spring, they will do normal drawdowns through 6/1 for the start of the water year. On 10/1, the 5–8-month shutdown will begin. John Milgrim, the director of Water Supply Outreach, will kick off a “road show” to stakeholder groups starting this spring to share the plans transparently.

There was a report by Jacob Zwart from the USGS on Near-Term Temperature Forecasts Using Deep Learning. They developed a special, deep learning model that they “teach” about spatial relationships among streams by weighting information according to distance. The model “learns” physics through pre-training with thermodynamic model predictions. They are able to provide visuals of stream temperature forecasts for Delaware River basin sites including Hancock, Lordville, etc., and create spreadsheets with a 90% confidence interval for temperature forecasts.

Brenan Tarrrier from NYS DEC provided a report on the Thermal Release Determinations in 2022. There were 2,500 cfs days available in the Thermal Mitigation Bank. From 6/1/22 to the present, they used 1,754 cfs days, leaving a balance of 746 through 5/31/23. The factors affecting the decision whether to release from the bank include: streamflows, air temperatures, previous water temperatures, sky cover, precipitation, length of the day/angle of the sun, and groundwater flow. Low flows don't necessarily lead to high water temperatures; neither do warm air temperatures. It's when they are mixed that it produces these conditions of thermal problems.

**2/8 DRBC Water Management Advisory Committee Report:** Ramie provided meeting highlights for members. The meeting on 2/8 had 45 participants. Two positions were advertised as open for Industrial and Water Utility representatives, with both incumbents to stay on the committee.

Anthony Preucil gave the Hydrologic Conditions Report. There was average precipitation over last 365 days of 45-52” in basin. Warmer than average temperatures and lack of snowfall have led to little to no snow accumulation in the lower basin and below normal in the upper basin. All NYC reservoirs are close to 100% full with no spilling. The salt front is at River Mile 67.1 near Pennsville, NJ. Groundwater conditions are mostly normal, as is drought status (NY returned to normal on 1/19/23, PA on 1/20/23). The winter/spring outlook is for a La Nina winter (below normal precipitation for the 1st half of the season and a normal 2nd half). Snow chances are looking minimal.

Chad Pindar provided DRBC Updates. Commissioners passed a resolution 4 aye-0 nay-1 abstain to amend the Water Code for High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing water-related activities on 12/7/22. The next DRBC public hearing will be 2/8 and the business meeting will be 3/8. A new staff member is Dr. Jeremy Conkle, senior chemist/toxicologist.

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Pindar also gave the Storage Study Update. They extended \$649,000 contract with Mott McDonald to March 2023; a 2nd draft prepared; sent to Commissioners and received comments back at the end of January. They will now review those comments, publish a final report, then determine next steps.

Sara Sayed talked about the population served in the river Basin. An estimate in 2016 was 13.3 million. That has been updated with 2020 U.S. Census data and by reporting to yield a new figure of 14.2 million. There are 8.629 million residents living within the Delaware Basin boundary. The rest comes from New York City, Outside New York City, and diversions of water from the system. The biggest increases in population occurred in PA and NJ. There was a small decline in NY. Future population updates will occur on 5-year intervals.

The next WMAC meeting dates are 6/15 and 10/12.

**River Litter Bag Stations Update:** Boyar will report back on progress with the River Litter Bag Stations following the Trout Unlimited Upper Delaware Chapter meeting to discuss it. Henry asked staff to look at <https://www.brwaterforum.org/> as they may have the non-plastic litter bags Boyar has been seeking.

**Bouchouxville Trail Signage Update:** No updates. Peckham will share any developments on the trail signage Request that was made to the NYS DEC and DOT for the Town of Hancock site for missing and inaccurately located directional signs.

**Other:** Ramie noted the dates of the NPS Annual Fishing Guides meeting on 4/12 at 8:30 a.m. at the Hancock Town Hall and the Annual Water Safety Partners meeting on 4/21 at the UDC office, time TBD.

**New Business**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Upper Delaware Litter Sweep:** Hall-Bagdonas is initiating the timeline of activities leading up to the 4/22-30 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Upper Delaware Litter Sweep, including outreach to past Litter Leaders, working with Platform Industries on a new t-shirt design, seeking costs, planning social media posts on sustainability messaging at work and home, initiating the permit applications with NY DOT for their rights-of-way, requesting assistance from PennDOT, and other needed tasks.

**Delaware River Flow & Storage Report:** The 213/ DRBC Hydrological Conditions Report noted combined storage is at 92.4%.

**Other:** Padua said he's sure all on the committee have heard of the train derailment in Ohio with Norfolk-Southern. Their parent company is in our river corridor with the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway and we had the derailment in 2018 when diesel fuel spilled in Deposit, NY which was avoidable. Padua said he knows they were working on an Upper Delaware River Contingency Plan in 2021 and wonders if the railroads can be held to a higher standard. Ramie shared that she was interviewed by the River Reporter about concerns of train derailments: <https://www.riverreporter.com/stories/concerns-about-railroad-derailments.83657>

**Adjournment:** A Motion by Jeffer seconded by Padua to adjourn the meeting at 7:43 p.m. was carried.