

WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES

October 15, 2024

Committee Members Present: Bill Dudko, Fred Peckham (Zoom), Christine Martin (Zoom), Jim Rodgers

Committee Members Absent: Evan Padua, Pat Jeffer, Al Henry

Staff: Laurie Ramie, Kerry Engelhardt, Stephanie Driscoll (Zoom)

NPS Partner: Lindsey Kurnath- Superintendent; Tom Kearns- Natural and Cultural Resources Manager

Guests: Ginny Dudko

The UDC's Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, October 15, 2024. Vice-chairperson Bill Dudko called the meeting to order at 6:47 pm.

Approval of the September 17, 2024 meeting minutes: A motion Rodgers seconded by Martin approving the 9/17 meeting minutes carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

New Business:

Calkins Creek Bridge Replacement Comments due by 10/21: Ramie said this bridge is located in Milanville near the NPS office and the Milanville General Store. Peter Becker from the Tri-County Independent had done an article about the bridge replacement in a recent issue that Ramie had sent around via email. Kurnath said the bridge falls under Section 4(f) of the U.S. DOT Act of 1966. The state is seeking to temporarily use land that is set aside for public recreation (the parking lot at the NPS Milanville office). UPDE is okay with this request, but the public has a chance to comment on it as well. PennDOT plans to use that space temporarily to stage the area and then return it to NPS. There is a fence currently in place there that is rotting and will have to be removed for PennDOT to do the work; a new fence will be installed after the work is done. Ramie added that they will be painting the bridge "Park Service brown" and improving the shoulder for pedestrians. The article in the Tri-County Independent did not include a start date. Ramie said she assumes PennDOT needs to get their permits in order before releasing a start date. Kurnath said she doesn't think they plan to start the project until after next summer, with a possible 6-9-month timeframe. That was the plan that was submitted to UPDE, but it may have changed since then. Ramie said the WU/RM Committee can opt to take a vote on whether or not to send a letter making no objections to the proposed bridge replacement and ask for a timeframe. The UDC has opted to send time sensitive letters out of committees before. A motion by Martin, seconded by Rodgers, to send a comment letter to PennDOT asking for a timeframe, carried.

Skidders Falls Bridge Emergency Repairs Underway: Ramie commented that AECOM was at Skidders Falls Bridge this morning to start the emergency repair inspections and that work will proceed through the fall to put up the netting, address any other safety concerns, and implement the Aid to Navigation Plan for signage and buoys. Kurnath said the inspections of the bridge that have been happening are more "hands-on" and in-depth than what they were previously doing every Friday. We should expect to see a good amount of activity at Skidders Falls Bridge for some time.

Update on Upper Delaware River Accesses: Ramie said Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) has been working on accesses on the PA side on the Upper Delaware, first at Damascus, then at Darbytown. Matamoras Access improvements have been completed most recently. B. Dudko said Orange & Rockland Utilities has been replacing power lines on the Matamoras Bridge. Ramie said one outstanding river accesses issue is at the NYS DEC's Mongaup Access. Kurnath said she's not aware of any action there yet. B. Dudko said he hasn't gotten a chance to look at the status of the pothole and the river path at the Mongaup Access.

Delaware River Flow & Storage Report: B. Dudko asked if they started to draw down for the aqueduct repairs? Engelhardt said they started to draw down over the summer, and the repairs started on 10/1. The report is in the packet for review.

Other: Kurnath said USGS was supposed to turn on all functions at the Barryville Bridge gage on 10/1. She checked last week and noticed that flow had not been had not been reinstated. She is thinking, since that needs to be done manually by a person, that they might be waiting to do that until someone is available to come up here. It may take a week or two. It should update retroactively back to 10/1 once it is turned back on. She plans to keep an eye on it. The flow comes from a formula based on river height, so we could potentially get the data back from April, barring there were no big events (like Hurricane Debby) that would change the flow in the river that would change the calculation.

Old Business:

9/19 Eagle Conservation Committee Meeting: Engelhardt reported that they discussed the bus tours and who would be leading those this year. Volunteer training will be held at the Highlights Foundation on 12/14. Rodgers asked what they train on? Engelhardt said the Eagle Conservation Committee is a volunteer program partnership between UPDE and the Delaware Highlands Conservancy. They place volunteers on different parts of the river to count visitors, birds, provide information on eagles, and provide spotting scopes. Rodgers asked how many times a volunteer does this a year? Engelhardt said it's up to the person; as many times as they want. They go out every Saturday and Sunday in January and February. Rodgers asked how far north they go? Engelhardt said Ten Mile River. There is a new blind at Mongaup Reservoir and at places like the Zane Grey Museum, you can go inside to warm up. At Ten Mile River, there is no relief from the elements. B. Dudko said he had driven the bus for the Eagle Institute, and that it is amazing to see.

9/20 Water Safety Partners Post Season Meeting: Driscoll said that representatives from UPDE and UDC staff, Port Jervis Fire Department, Deerpark Emergency Services, and Northeast Wilderness Experience were present. There was good back and forth. A lot of discussion was on signage. Kurnath said this is the second time they have held a fall meeting, typically only doing meetings in the spring. She finds the fall meetings helpful to find out what needs to be done over the winter. She commented that a fruitful conversation was had, and they were able to hear from people that they might not always get a chance to hear from during meetings with larger attendances. Rodgers said he thinks stickers for CUA holder identification is a good idea. Kurnath said that's a hard task, since only one vehicle is registered with the CUA. They need to come up with something that is fixed to the vehicle and can't be moved around. B. Dudko said liveries are still renting on Friday afternoons in September, so perhaps moving the fall meeting later into the season might make them more available to attend the post season meeting. Kurnath said it's something they could consider. Ramie said the spring meeting is when UPDE distributes their river safety signage and prepares for the upcoming season. They go over regulations and new policies at that meeting as well. Kurnath said the last discussion had about the CUA fee schedule was the email she sent out. She hasn't heard anything since. The CUA holders were invited to come to tonight's WU/RM meeting. Rodgers said the issue seems to have fizzled out.

9/23 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Meeting: B. Dudko said the minutes are included in tonight's packet for review. Rodgers said he hasn't seen the replacement UDSB "highest elevation" marker sign along Route 97 in Hancock. Ramie said they are working on it. NYS DOT has ordered it and said it could take several months.

9/26-27 Delaware River Watershed Forum Conference Report: Engelhardt provided a detailed written report on the conference. She said if anyone finds anything particularly interesting, let her know and they can discuss. There were some representatives from NPS River Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program out of Philadelphia, PA. They don't directly provide funding for projects, but they assist in getting funding and with project coordination. She plans to look into that program. Rodgers asked if that includes building trails? Engelhardt said she believes so. Ramie commented that the NPS RTCA helped out at the Junction Pool Access expansion and improvement in Hancock, doing site plans for Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR) and helping to walk them through the process.

Engelhardt said she attended and enjoyed the session on dam removals, led by a representative from American Rivers and Wildlands Conservancy. In Pennsylvania there are a lot of dams, with the average age of the dam being around 77 years old and 74% privately owned. PA is the nationwide leader in dam removals. You can get grants to remove dams, but not repair or improve them since there is a liability risk with dam failure. One of the field trips was to a dam removal site on Bushkill Creek.

Engelhardt also attended a session on Friday called “Empowering Environmental Justice Communities through Faith-Responsive Approaches”, where they discussed approaching faith-based groups for conservation programs. These communities are already organized, stewards to resources, and have aligning values. At the beginning of the session, they were encouraged to speak to the person next to them. Engelhardt said she chatted with a woman of Presbyterian faith who had attended a faith-based summer camp where her love for conservation started. Engelhardt said it was encouraging and a positive way to think about it.

She also attended a session led by the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) where Kristen Bowman Kavanagh, Amy Shallcross, and Avery Lentini spoke on climate resiliency and how they are dealing with climate change and the plan they are developing.

Engelhardt attended another session on stream repair and restoration; how the work they have been doing might not actually be helping. There were some researchers for that session from Stroud Water Research Center that said we need to re-think what we are currently doing. It’s probably not all about sediment control, and we should be looking at pollutants as well. There was a lot of progress made in the 1970’s, and since it’s gone static. Rodgers said that doesn’t sound good. Engelhardt said following up is hard, things are done on a smaller scale. Kurnath added that when they say things have “plateaued”, they are thinking they did a good job implanting their findings in the 70’s and haven’t made much progress since. It hasn’t gotten worse, but it hasn’t gotten better. Rodgers said his daughter lives in Asheville, NC; they are concerned about re-opening schools there with the water quality since the storm. The electric was turned back on, but not the water.

G. Dudko said on page 2, Engelhardt referenced geofencing; what is that? Engelhardt said if you have an app or GPS and visited different parts of National Parks, it would give you information in different sections. In order to make something like that work, you need to create digital fencing. Kurnath said she has heard geofencing discussed for UPDE in the NPS app, but there has been no movement on that. G. Dudko said it could be good to have for English and Spanish. B. Dudko said in places like Gettysburg, they are using geofencing for information.

10/8 Sojourn Steering Committee Meeting: Engelhardt hadn’t been able to attend the last couple of Sojourn meetings due to various reasons. The chairperson had emailed her previously about going back to a similar Sojourn schedule that was done in 2023. They plan to get rid of the Clean Up day they tried to do this year at the beginning of the Sojourn since it was a bit of a burden and others are handling that. Days 1, 2, and 3 will be at Northeast Wilderness Experience. They also have some more people joining the upper day planning team. They will organize a meeting soon to nail down a schedule. This year will mark the 30th Sojourn paddle with the theme being “30 Years on Sojourn Time”. It is also the 200th anniversary of Warren County, NJ. They are hoping to make some stops in Warren County to celebrate that as well. B. Dudko asked if they are not finding enough to clean up to do the clean-up day? Engelhardt said no, it was just a bit of a burden to plan and not a lot of people came. Rodgers asked how many days the Sojourn is? Engelhardt said the whole trip is six or seven days, with three days in the Upper Delaware. Ramie asked if dates have been determined? Engelhardt said yes, they were just announced; June 14-21, 2025.

10/9 Water Safety Committee Meeting: Kurnath has some edits for these notes she didn’t have a chance to provide in advance to Driscoll. The first is that Law Enforcement Ranger Ron Babus has not transferred permanently from UPDE; he is currently on a detail for a couple months at Independence National Park. Chief Ranger Winslow will be leading the Water Safety meetings going forward until Babus returns.

Peterec had set up a calendar and action items through the UPDE Microsoft Teams, to keep on top of tasks that need to be done. That includes the UDC awards nominations. UPDE is only funded through 12/22/24 with no update on the Fiscal Year 2025 budget at this time. UPDE plans to have a unit wide meeting to discuss budget in November. They are anticipating costs going up, and funding staying the same.

The CUA meeting Driscoll referenced is not open to the public. It is an internal meeting for UPDE staff only to discuss the conditions that are built into the CUA. Someone from the UDC can be present if they choose.

They plan to do a better job with press releases in 2025 with attention focused on “no glass”, “wear your life jacket”, and other safety topics.

They discussed life jacket loaner return stations and developing a new brochure for AirBnB and landowners on water safety. B. Dudko asked how many loaner life jackets were lost this year? Kurnath said they aren't sure yet, they are still compiling the data. If they are to put another station out, they plan to put one at Sparrowbush. That is still being discussed since the units themselves are extremely heavy and hard to move.

Kurnath reported that a Ranger at Voyagers National Park had passed away while making a rescue on Sunday, 10/6. Any on duty death requires an investigation which is currently taking place. This announcement started some interesting discussion on life jackets and weight ratings.

G. Dudko asked if they can see if people not wearing life jackets are coming from AirBnB's? Kurnath said coincidentally, Wear It Watchers were stationed right next to The Coop (an AirBnB in Pond Eddy along the river on Route 97). Evidence shows that no one from The Coop wears lifejackets. Does that mean they just don't have them? They aren't sure. G. Dudko said liveries are doing a good job making sure their guests are wearing their lifejackets.

Other: None.

Public Comment: None.

Adjourn: A Motion by Rodgers seconded by Martin to adjourn the meeting at 7:36 p.m. was carried.

Meeting minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 10/21/2024