

# WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES

## November 19, 2024

Committee Members Present: Evan Padua (Zoom), Bill Dudko (Zoom), Fred Peckham (Zoom), Christine Martin (Zoom), Jim Rodgers, Al Henry, Pat Jeffer

Committee Members Absent: None

Staff: Laurie Ramie, Kerry Engelhardt, Stephanie Driscoll

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

Guests: Ginny Dudko (Zoom), Jeff Dexter

The UDC's Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, November 19, 2024. Chairperson Padua called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

**Approval of the October 15, 2024 meeting minutes:** A motion by Rodgers seconded by Martin approving the 10/15 meeting minutes carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

### **New Business:**

**11/19 DRBC Drought Hearing:** Engelhardt attended the DRBC's hearing this afternoon on the drought conditions in the Delaware River Basin and how they plan to address it. Engelhardt said Water Resource Operations Manager Amy Shallcross gave a presentation on the drought. There have been State Drought Declarations in all four states within the basin, with New York and New Jersey statewide. Some Pennsylvania counties have declarations. Low reservoir storage was reported during the hearing. The precipitation over the last 90 days has been between 1 and 4 inches; 6-10 inches lower than normal at this time of the year. Most places in the basin are driest on record. Almost all of the tributaries of the Delaware River have flows much below normal.

Lower basin reservoirs are about 75% full and NYC reservoirs are about 35-63% full since drawing down for the aqueduct repair project, which has been paused due to the drought conditions. They will be refilling the aqueduct with water and resuming diversions. The project will be shut down for this year, restarting presumably next year. Henry asked if she was talking about the repair for the leak in the aqueduct? Engelhardt said yes. During the hearing, there was some confusion on when the diversions would resume. Shallcross had said tomorrow (11/20) while Jeff Skelding from Friends of the Upper Delaware River (FUDR) said he was told they would resume sometime mid-December. Shallcross said they will confirm that information.

Engelhardt told everyone to refer to the Delaware River Flow & Storage Report included in the packet. The salt front is pretty far up near mile marker 89, by the Philadelphia International Airport. They haven't had a salt front above the Schuylkill River since the '60s/'70s. Hopefully the salt front will stay below places in Philadelphia where it would cause issues for companies that use that water for heating and cooling systems and drinking water. There is still access to additional storage reservoirs for low flow augmentation.

Engelhardt said the forecast is looking better for this week, with rain coming on Thursday into Friday. They are calling for a warmer/wetter winter this year. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s forecast is projecting for a longer rain season and it does look like it will improve. Delaware River Basin Drought Operations are likely to be initiated soon.

There was time for public comment on how to address the drought. Most people were commenting on a larger picture about how the DRBC should make sure they take climate change into consideration when they review various projects. UDC's Town of Highland Representative Christine Martin was present for the hearing and made a personal comment on the development (Camp FIMFO) in the Town of Highland and how that will affect things. The Delaware Riverkeeper was also present and made comments on stormwater runoff associated with projects approved by the DRBC. There weren't any suggestions made on how to address the drought right now.

Rodgers asked if there was any indication on when the Delaware Aqueduct repairs might resume? Engelhardt said not during this hearing since that's a NYC DEP project, although the DRBC is working closely with them. That also

wasn't mentioned in the news release issued by NYC DEP. However, based on previous presentations on the project, she believes that the project is completely done for this year and will have to be re-started next year. Padua said he thought they were trying to get the reservoirs low for the project. Engelhardt said if it doesn't rain though, they run the risk of running out of water in the reservoir to pull drinking water for NYC. Padua said yes, we do need rain. Ramie asked if when that line is crossed, the entire basin would go automatically into a drought? Does that mean individual restrictions? What are the consequences? Engelhardt said the flow objectives may change to not be as high as they are and they will have access to additional water reserves. There would be voluntary water conservation. Padua said Bowman Kavanagh mentioned flow during the full council meeting on 11/7; we'll see more cuts and releases. They are releasing the max amount out of the Cannonsville Reservoir right now. The upper 30/40 miles of the Delaware River look pretty grey with sediment, but that should change with some rain. Henry asked how that works; releasing foul water when one of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) is the clear and pure water in the Delaware River? Padua said it's just a side effect of having dams. Once they get below a certain point, you can see the sediment from the bottom of the dams. It's to be expected when the reservoirs get too low. He said that fishing seems to be fine. You can see some algae in the water when the reservoirs get too low, but it self regulates. Peckham said the East Branch is running at a trickle; he hasn't seen it this low in years. They aren't letting any water out of the East Branch. Padua said the Pepacton Reservoir releases have been an issue too, since they have been max releases. They are cranking a ton of water out of Cannonsville. It's not a great scenario. The East Branch is taking a hit right now.

**Skinner Falls Bridge Update:** Ramie reported that at the 11/14 virtual meeting PennDOT held to give an update on plans for the Skinner Falls-Milanville Bridge, 77 people were in attendance. This hearing was held after PennDOT released their emergency plans of dismantling the bridge. Vice President of Transportation Planning at AECOM Lisa Brozey said it was essentially the August notifications from the UDC of the bridge's condition and public safety concerns that led PennDOT to their decision. Before making this decision, PennDOT had met with NPS to do an Aid to Navigation plan to get a permit for the more in-depth inspection of the bridge and to install safety netting. It took until 10/22 for PennDOT to get the report on the inspection back.

Ramie said in the inspections the substructure and the overall condition of the bridge scored a 0. The whole bridge is in danger of collapsing into the river. They will need approvals through NEPA, a possible UDC Substantial Conformance Review, permits through NPS and other agencies, and will need to coordinate with the Joint Interstate Bridge Commission before any work can begin.

They did say that rehabilitation of the bridge is still an option, but if the bridge ended up collapsing that option would be gone. A Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) representative said they do want to keep a crossing at that location. We learned during the hearing that the Joint Interstate Bridge Commission has a requirement for 10 crossings between PA and NY. Changing that number would require legislation. They said they will need to bring in a huge crane, make a causeway, and take out the two spans and abutments on either side and the middle in the river, removing every stone. The center pier will be dismantled because the state environmental agencies regard it as an "existing obstruction". All the materials from the bridge will be wrapped, transported, and stored. They still need to meet with local municipalities and all other parties.

They stated that they will be continuing the PEL process, though pausing it now for this emergency action. Even if they chose to use this bridge as a footbridge, it would still need to be rehabilitated. PennDOT and AECOM said if they were to rehabilitate the bridge for any purpose, they still would have needed to dismantle it. Both PA and NY have funds set aside for the project, but not at an adequate level.

There were questions from attendees of the virtual meeting. Someone asked "Does this mean no rehab?" They answered no, nothing has been decided yet. "How did the bridge get this bad?" They said the bridge had been inspected every 6-months, but it was being notified that pieces of the bridge were falling into the river that prompted them to do a more in-depth inspection. "What is the cost associated with dismantling the bridge?" That is not known yet. "Will the river be shut down in that area?" They said no, they do not plan to disrupt the recreational season. "Is the study still to Rehabilitate, Replace, or Remove?" They said that plan has not moved forward yet. "You've been doing studies for 5-years with no action. How can we register our protest?" They said the reflections of the public have been well documented and to include comments in the chat.

Ramie said the [recording](#) is available of the virtual meeting. Padua said it's disappointing that they never said it would need to be dismantled no matter the circumstances. At this point though, the bridge is a safety concern and needs to come down. They had a beautiful long summer to do it, it's surprising they waited until December to start it. Henry said he doesn't understand why they plan to be so delicate dismantling the bridge? If it's so deteriorated, why are they cataloging and storing it? The bridge is "doomed", why won't they just come out and say that? There is no engineer that would say the bridge is worth saving if it scored a 0 on the inspection. Engelhardt said, just to clarify, the superstructure scored a 2 on the inspection, but the substructure rated a 0. Henry said they should be more forthright; they never said anything about dismantling the bridge even if it were to be rehabilitated. Padua said that something needs to be done with the bridge. Cataloging it for historical purposes makes sense. He's seen a lot of middle abutments in other rivers so he assumed they wouldn't take this one out, but according to what Ramie just said they will be removing it. Engelhardt said that during the virtual meeting was the first time she heard anything about removing the middle abutment as well. She feels if they remove it, they will never get permission again to put another obstruction in the river. They will need to build a single span bridge. Henry said he's never once seen anyone run into the middle abutment on the river there. It will cost so much to take out of the river.

Engelhardt said she went through all the reports and inspections done since she's been attending the Joint Interstate Bridge Commission meetings with the UDC. For the Annual Inspections Report for the past three years, all the other bridges had detailed inspection results. For Skinners Falls Bridge all it was marked is "bridge is still closed", which leads her to believe they weren't doing the same kind of in-depth inspections the other bridges were receiving.

Rodgers asked if NPS is going to weigh in? Padua said they've already started work technically. Kearns said that they technically haven't started any work on the bridge itself, they've been taking an inventory of it. He said NPS has been in talks with Federal Highways, PennDOT, and other agencies involved for a Special Use Permit. NPS is looking into what they will need to obtain a Special Use Permit. Even though they haven't applied for one yet, they want to have all their information together. They must meet Secretary of the Interior standards for disassembling a historic bridge. Kearns said right now they are doing some work there with an "emergency loophole". Kearns said there is no commitment on PennDOT's end to put the bridge back, and since it's marked as a cultural and scenic value for the ORVs, how could we say it's not going to make an impact? They will need to re-start the NEPA process.

Henry said that public safety is number one. If NPS knows that bridge is a threat, it would be remiss for them to not issue a permit. He understands the concern about the bridge but safety takes precedent. Kurnath said that NPS's number one concern is public safety. They have nothing to give a permit for yet. There are no plans or paperwork from PennDOT. NPS wants to make sure they have everything lined up for when they do get any plans. Kearns said the causeway will need to be significantly larger than what was done at the Pond Eddy Bridge, spanning 6 acres. The equipment needed at Skinners Falls Bridge would require a much larger causeway. Who knows what the impacts of building that large of a causeway would be. Kearns reminded everyone that this is just a draft; it's all very fluid at this point. Kurnath said their target date of 12/1 to start work isn't realistic. She's thinking maybe after the new year.

Henry asked if NPS has been in touch with PA Representative Jon Fritz? He can get PennDOT moving. Kurnath said no. Ramie said AECOM reported that there are meetings every day on the subject. The UDC has been getting calls from PennDOT with updates. Kurnath said neglect is not a cause for an emergency action permit. Padua said it's sad that PennDOT neglected the bridge for the past five years. At what point is PennDOT held accountable? He feels badly for the people that love that bridge, but something needs to be done. Ramie said she saw on the Upper Delaware Community Network that Damascus Citizens is looking into filing a lawsuit to seek an injunction and is raising funds for a lawyer. Henry asked if the bridge is currently wrapped in netting? Padua said no. Henry asked if there are any signs on the river alerting the public of the danger or buoys saying "don't go beyond this point"? Kurnath said PennDOT was supposed to install buoys and signage yesterday (11/18). NPS UPDE has put an alert on their website that travel underneath the Skinners Falls Bridge is not recommended. Kearns said he was out there today and didn't see any buoys or signage installed. Dexter said the same. Kurnath said that's frustrating. Padua said even if they put buoys in, if we got ice they would be pushed down the river.

**Delaware River Flow & Storage Report:** The report is in the packet for review.

**Other:** Padua said going back to the sedimentation from the reservoirs, you will start to see bigger beaches on the Delaware if we continue to see so much sediment. You will also start to see more sand downstream from Cannonsville. It will change the habitat for native species as well.

**Old Business:**

**10/23 D&H Transportation Heritage Council Meeting:** Ramie attended this meeting on 10/23 held at the D&H Canal Interpretive Center in Summitville. A screening of Chapter 5 of “The Delaware & Hudson Canal and Gravity Railroad: Its History and Legacy” took place. Chapter 5 focuses on the Spring Glen to High Falls section that Ramie was filmed for at the Minsink Battleground. After the screening, the supply of DVD’s was discussed. The person who had been converting DVDs in large scale is now deceased. Ramie asked the committee members if they knew of a DVD vendor? Engelhardt said she may know someone; she will pass along that info. The DHTHC council voted in favor of ordering 50 copies of the new Chapter 5 and 25 copies of Chapters 1-4 once a supplier is identified.

The council had been talking about doing another bus tour to follow the route from Spring Glen to High Falls in November, but all charter companies were booked solid. That will be put off until early spring 2025. The bus tours are very popular, with the last one selling out completely.

The Open Space Institute (OSI) is currently conducting a study seeking to transform the fragmented former O&W Rail Trail and Delaware & Hudson Canal Towpath corridor into a contiguous, 57-mile-long shared use greenway trail stretching from Kingston to Port Jervis. The study is currently at the stage of working on maps for the sites involved to be divided into trails. If you are interested, there is more information on their [website](#).

Sally Talaga from the Wayne County Historical Society asked for advice about visitors using metal detectors at the D&H Canal Park at Lock 31 in Hawley. There are natural gas lines that run under the towpath there which are being picked up instead of treasures. Bill Merchant said the use of metal detectors is prohibited on National Historic Landmark sites. Visitors are also taking the chestnuts home from a chestnut tree located on Lock 31’s property. People don’t know that that is considered stealing.

There is interest in creating a D&H Canal repository of canal information for use by libraries and schools. They are trying to organize information like brochures, maps, and DVDs for those types of institutions.

UPDE Visual Information Specialist Jasmine Leung said the NPS will be repairing the sidewalks on both the NY and PA sides of the Roebling Bridge in the summer of 2025. Access will be restricted to one parking lot then the other as the work progresses. Leung announced that the 2025 Zane Grey Festival will be held on July 12.

Norma Schadt from the Town of Deerpark announced that Deerpark received a \$3,000 grant from the UDC to update its 2011 brochure that includes a variety of historic sites.

Kenny Christianson from the Lackawaxen River Conservancy spoke about the continued work on a National Wild and Scenic Rivers designation bid for the Lackawaxen River. Ramie said a past meeting of DHTHC is how she first became aware that the Conservancy was seeking that designation.

Ramie distributed copies of an illustrated article by Sullivan County Historian John Conway headlined “Explaining the story of the D&H Canal” which appeared in the River Reporter’s Fall 2024 Upper Delaware magazine that included information about the Kate Project in the Town of Highland. At the site they have an extended trail, fence, benches, and a large piece of coal displayed and hope to one day have a life-size bronze statue of a female “hoggee” and mule. She also offered copies of the UDC’s Summer 2024 newsletter.

The next DHTHC Board of Trustees meeting is scheduled for January 22, 2025 at noon at the UDC building in Narrowsburg, NY. The next full membership meeting will be on April 23, 2025 at the Mamakating Historical Society in Summitville.

**10/28 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Meeting:** Ramie reported that the New York State Grant TM11400 for \$24,500 had been paid to the byway on 9/25. That funding will go toward the 2023 6-month contract Program Manager position.

The UDSB approved taking out ads in travel guides for Sullivan County, Orange County, and the equivalent in Delaware County. They hired a graphic designer to do a new ad with the new website information on it. Local graphic designer Eve Fisher made the ad pro bono featuring a photo of the Hawks Nest by Noah Kalina and includes all the new byway information.

The UDSB had 56 applications for the new 6-month independent contract Program Manager position, with 12 being “regional residents”. One of the 12 applicants dropped out after hearing the position wasn’t full time. This position will be paid for from a 2024 Sullivan County Legislative Discretionary Grant. The person would be responsible for grant-writing, event coordination, learning who the contacts are, reaching out to the byway communities to support their needs, and some focus on the UDSB Visitor Center development. A Search Committee of four people held interviews on 11/1 by Zoom with four candidates. The byway will be meeting on 11/25 with the recommended finalist. Rodgers asked when that person would start? Ramie said probably at the start of the new year. They will also need to get the website revamped as an important task.

The 10/20 Butterfly Bike Ride turned out successfully, with 42 participants, 18 of them being walkers. They went from the Cochecton Pumphouse to the Cochecton Firehouse, stopping along the way at designated spots to throw butterfly seed-balls to create pollinator habitat. The Narrowsburg Chamber of Commerce donated water and snacks. The UDSB raised \$326 during the event.

The capital construction grant paperwork for the UDSB Visitor Center at the Callicoon Depot has been submitted to DASNY, after being pending for quite some time. On 11/14 Seminary Hill in Callicoon hosted a mixer for the three partners involved in the project: Callicoon Business Association, Callicoon Depot, Inc., and the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway.

NYS DOT will be doing pavement overlay projects on Route 97 from Narrowsburg (Tusten town line) to Cochecton (County Route 114), due for contract letting on 5/30/25. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities will be improved with newly treated shoulders and new pavement markings. A tree that had been hanging on electrical wires on Route 97 has been removed. Downed guiderails where the orange barrels are overgrown with weeds along Route 97 in Callicoon will hopefully be removed in the month of November.

The DOT also announced they are submitting an application for the FHWA National Scenic Byway Program grants that are due by 12/16 to replace all byway signs state-wide and to do a feasibility study on EV charging stations along byways.

The next UDSB meeting will be held at the UDC office on 11/25.

**10/30 NPS UPDE Fishing Guides Post Season Meeting:** Padua said the meeting was uneventful. A lot of the discussion centered on illegal guiding. It was a good conversation. Ramie said there were 15 people there, including the NPS staff. In terms of illegal guiding, law enforcement said they need more specifics instances to be able to do anything. They felt there is really just one person that has been blatantly doing it for the past 8 years. The DEC officer said he doesn’t get any reports. Chief Ranger Winslow said that illegal guiding is only a violation. The NPS would rather educate the person and help them obtain a CUA. Ramie thought the online tutorial was helpful on how to apply for the CUA since it’s a mandatory new system for the NPS and permittees in 2025. Kurnath said there has been one person using private property to launch from. Feedback like that is super helpful, and it’s great to hear more voices around the table. Henry asked if there is anything on UPDE’s website about educating folks who are guiding illegally? Kurnath said that’s something Leung will be working on. She admits the UPDE website can be hard to navigate. Once it’s set up, the UDC can share it on their page as well. Henry said he recommends letting fishing stores and bait and tackle shops know too. Rodgers asked what percentage of actual fishing guides were there? Kurnath said she’d say about 7 guides. Rodgers asked if there is any other type of guiding on the river, like diving or informational? Kurnath said not at this time; she hasn’t signed a diving CUA since 2023. If any money is exchanged for a service on the river, it would need a CUA. They also have Northeast Wilderness Experience, a guided river trip service. Padua said he’s curious about NEWE’s CUA structure; is their CUA different? Kurnath said it all falls under NEWE, they get one CUA. She isn’t sure how the owner, Dan Corrigan, packages that. She can work on a more thorough answer.

**10/30 PRISM Meeting:** Engelhardt attended a virtual Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management meeting on 10/30 for NYS. Everyone in different regions talked about projects they were working on. There was a presentation on growing native plants for restoration: growing the forest understory. Where do you get the native plants to restore an area? Wild Woods Restoration Project has a lot of volunteers that notice what plants are doing well in a particular or small area. They will store the seeds they collect or the plants themselves to be tended to as living seeds. Over the colder seasons, volunteers will take plants home to care for. Volunteers will then go out and plant them. If there is a large area to be developed with valuable plants, they will get permission to take the plants and seeds from there. Engelhardt said the presentation was interesting; she hasn't heard of a program like that before.

**10/31 Sullivan County Local Emergency Preparedness Committee Meeting:** Ramie said the relatively new Public Safety Commissioner Scott Schulte had committed to resume these meetings after they had been paused for some time. They planned to meet two times a year, in the spring and fall. They started inviting the UDC knowing the role we play for multiple towns and townships in Sullivan County and our overall interest in the river valley.

They reported there is a new email address for all Sullivan County employees of @sullivanny.gov. They have a quarterly meeting of the Sullivan County Threat Assessment Committee for domestic and other forms of terrorism. Sullivan County has a training facility and they are happy to take suggestions for training courses; they don't have to be emergency services or firefighting. An annual evaluation of the Sullivan County Emergency Preparedness Assessment will take place this fall.

There is a lot of new staff at the Sullivan County 911 Dispatch Center. They are currently working on installing a new cell tower in Jeffersonville and are looking at other locations to fill cellular signal reception gaps.

The committee got a chance to tour the brand-new First Responder Vehicle has recently been deployed. They also have a new Mobile Command Unit. If anyone needs light towers, they have them there to loan out. They plan to station some mobile light towers in Callicoon to serve the Western part of the county more conveniently. They also have portable message boards available for loan. They are updating their Hazardous Materials Plan.

Everyone at the table got to speak about current projects or ask questions. Sullivan County Government has joined the Next Door Service to get out emergency alerts through the internet. New York State Police are searching for temporary emergency housing for the winter months. They have been applying for grants for transitional housing around Monticello. Forest Rangers with NYS DEC spoke about the wildfires and the searches that have been and are happening. They have a live dispatcher available 24/7 and gave that phone number (1-844-332-3267).

The NYC DEP reported being on target for the aqueduct repair at that time. Sullivan County Public Health is focusing on vaccine compliance for the summer camps in Sullivan County. UPDE Chief Ranger Winslow reported that NPS would like to conduct a drill for the Spill Response Plan for the Upper Delaware. He will provide more information on that when it's arranged. Callicoon-Damascus Bridge construction will be going on throughout the winter, NYS DOT reported. The committee will meet again next spring.

Henry asked what the status of the Spill Response Plan is? Kurnath said they are waiting on EPA. They did an exercise at Delaware Water Gap (DEWA) last October. The challenge is all of the emergency situations that happen and prevent everyone from getting together. A plan needs to be made and she'll let the UDC know as soon as there's an update.

**11/12 Sojourn Steering Committee Meeting:** Engelhardt reported the Sojourn planning is going well. UPDE's Chief of Interpretation Ingrid Peterec will be taking a step back from the upper day planning this year. She let the rest of the upper day planning team know she is available for any questions or help if needed. They discussed what section of the river they want to paddle. They haven't decided for sure yet, but think they may want to start in Balls Eddy where Northeast Wilderness Experience has a base in Stockport. With NEWE having a launch there, they could keep the boats there overnight to save money. DRBC said they can help with programming if needed. No other decisions were made during this meeting. The theme will be, "30 Years on Sojourn Time".

**11/13 Water Safety Committee Meeting:** Driscoll said the Water Safety Committee didn't have too much to discuss as we transition into the colder months. There are some water safety brochures that UPDE Visual

Information Specialist Jasmine Leung is working on for AirBnB's, river landowners/homeowners, and any property close enough to the river for recreation that has guests. Driscoll said all the brochures were well done and got the message across. They talked about making a QR code that can be ordered on the UPDE website that would take you right to the water safety page when scanned.

Kurnath said they discussed the CUA terms & conditions as well. They want to make sure that the messaging and requirements of liveries are consistent. They realized that fishing guides are getting the same CUA conditions as liveries do, for example, and that may not be appropriate.

**Other:** None.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Adjourn:** A Motion by Henry seconded by Jeffer to adjourn the meeting at 8:01 p.m. was carried.

*Meeting minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 11/22/2024*