WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES
September 15, 2026

Committee Members Present:	Bill Dudko, Al Henry, Christine Martin (Zoom), Pat Jeffer (6:50pm), Jim Serio
Committee Members Absent:	Evan Padua, Jim Rodgers, Bob Lindquist
Staff:	Laurie Ramie, Stephanie Driscoll, Julie Pais
NPS Partner:	Michelle Stevens (Zoom), Kendell Bennett (Zoom)
Guests:	Michael Keller (Zoom, until 7:25pm), Jeff Smith (Zoom)

The UDC's Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, September 15, 2026. Vice-chair Dudko called the meeting to order at 6:50 pm.

Approval of the August 18, 2026 meeting minutes: A motion by Henry seconded by Jeffer approving the 8/18 meeting minutes carried.

Public Comment on Agenda: None.

New Business:

Request for Regional Feasibility Discussion: Upper Delaware Rail-with-Trail Parallel Greenway: Members discussed whether the UDC would be an appropriate organization to convene an initial regional discussion. Ramie said the concept is consistent with the UDC's planning goals. Previous five-year and annual plans have included an action item to assess the feasibility of an Upper Delaware trail system incorporating footpaths, bicycle trails, and roadway components to interpret the valley's resources and expand recreational opportunities. The River Management Plan also contains references to walking trails and resource interpretation. Given the UDC's geographic coverage and history with this issue, members agreed there is a logical basis for the UDC to participate in or organize a feasibility discussion. Dudko said there will be challenges, particularly because the railroad remains active and railroad companies have historically been very restrictive about allowing public access on or near their property. Although portions of the corridor once contained two tracks and some sections of the second track have been removed, the property may still be railroad-owned or needed for siding and other operations. Safety, liability, and adequate separation from active tracks would therefore be major considerations. Henry suggested that a feasibility study should begin by identifying existing trails, public lands, abandoned roads, and other potential connections rather than assuming the entire route would follow the railroad. Private property would be another significant obstacle, since some landowners may not permit public access and even a single unavailable parcel could interrupt a continuous route. Route 97 is generally unsuitable for hikers or bicyclists where safe off-road alternatives are unavailable. Henry suggested looking at the Pennsylvania side of the river, where rural and abandoned township roads may offer more opportunities for a hiking route in certain locations. That raised the question of whether the proposal is intended specifically to follow the historic second-track railroad alignment on the New York side or whether a broader regional trail network could incorporate routes on both sides of the Delaware. If both states are considered, bridge and river crossings would also have to be evaluated. Members concluded that a feasibility discussion would need to address railroad cooperation and ownership, active-rail safety and liability, private property, existing public trails and lands, potential Pennsylvania routes, Route 97 limitations, and connections across the Delaware River before determining what type of regional trail system could realistically be developed.

Henry said the first step should be realistic and preliminary, using the knowledge of UDC members, the National Park Service, municipalities, agencies, landowners, railroad representatives, and other interested parties before considering whether there is any need to hire a consultant or spend money. He said the National Park Service should be an important potential partner, noting its involvement with existing trails such as the Ten Mile River and Bouchoux trails. Michelle Stevens said she had not yet heard about the proposal through NPS but would check with Carly Marshall to determine whether she had received the outreach. Ramie said Sam Rowe told us he contacted approximately 60 municipalities, agencies, organizations, and other entities about the concept. Martin said she supports having the UDC participate in the feasibility discussion and made a motion for the UDC to become involved in some capacity. During discussion, Henry stressed that the UDC's initial role should be limited and involve no financial commitment. The intent would simply be to bring the appropriate entities together, invite Rowe to explain the proposal, consider possibilities on both sides of the Delaware River, and determine whether the idea has enough potential to warrant further consideration. As Rowe's proposal itself states, no municipality, landowner, railroad, business, agency, or organization is currently being asked to approve construction, provide property,

assume trail ownership, or commit funding. Several members remained skeptical because of the amount of private property, railroad restrictions, and other obstacles discussed earlier, with one member describing support as cautious and limited to a very preliminary investigation. They agree there currently appear to be more obstacles than advantages but felt that convening an initial discussion is the only practical way to determine whether those issues can be overcome. A motion by Martin for the committee to recommend to the full council that the UDC move forward to explore the concept of the Upper Delaware Rail-with-Trail Parallel Greenway and to start discussion of pros and cons, seconded by Henry, carried.

Proposed Letter to NYS DEC re: Barnes Landfill Monitoring Results: Ramie said that the UDC submitted requests dating back to March, NYS DEC provided four reports containing results from its after 2025 monitoring consisting largely of raw sampling data with no interpretation or explanation of what the results mean. UDC subsequently requested by email message an analysis from DEC so that the Council could understand whether the findings are concerning, but no response has yet been received. Ramie recommends formalizing the request through a letter to DEC.

Keller reported that he has begun reviewing the monitoring information independently, stressing that his assessment is preliminary and he is not an environmental professional. He said both shallow and deep monitoring wells have historically detected contaminants associated with the former landfill, including elevated lead, manganese, salts, and other substances. More recent testing also includes PFAS/PFOA compounds and 1,4-dioxane. Based on his own calculations, some 2025 results appeared to substantially exceed New York State guidance values, including one result approximately 37 times a guidance value, another approximately 21 times, and a dioxane result approximately 5.7 times the applicable level. These calculations need to be reviewed and interpreted by an appropriate DEC official. The larger unanswered question is the extent and movement of groundwater contamination. The available information does not establish the size or direction of any contaminant plume, whether nearby residential wells are affected, or whether contaminants are reaching Beaver Brook or ultimately the Delaware River. He recommends asking DEC whether groundwater-plume modeling or additional historical monitoring information exists. He also suggests determining whether agencies or other organizations conduct downstream Delaware River sampling that could help establish whether the landfill is affecting river resources. Members agreed that the issue warrants greater attention and discussed involving not only DEC but also the National Park Service, DRBC, EPA, Town of Highland, Sullivan County, and other appropriate state and federal officials. There was discussion over which agency should take the lead. Henry feels NPS should have a significant role because protecting the river, its environment, and public health and safety falls within its interests in the Upper Delaware corridor. Martin feels DEC should remain principally responsible for explaining its monitoring program and findings, while also noting that Kittatinny and DRBC could have an interest because of their proximity and water-quality responsibilities.

Members viewed and discussed a 2013 video reportedly documenting leachate conditions at the landfill. Members recalled that the video had raised concerns when it originally circulated. Keller cautioned that the video provides historical context, but his concerns are based primarily on the more recent 2025 sampling results. Henry recalled that funds had once been available to have the landfill's collection tanks pumped, but that funding eventually ran out. It is unclear whether regular pumping continues. Martin made a motion for the Project Review Committee to send a formal letter to NYS DEC requesting an explanation and interpretation of the monitoring results, consideration of the findings, and further information regarding oversight of the site, seconded by Jeffer, which carried. Henry recommends that UDC's New York State Representative Ryan Coulter be contacted before the letter is sent as a courtesy and to give him an opportunity to make inquiries within DEC.

Delaware River Flow & Storage Report: Dudko said storage is currently above normal, and operations are under L1 conditions, which provide for a higher release table. Serio said that the release schedule changes on October 1, when releases decrease as reservoir operations begin placing greater emphasis on rebuilding storage. The Atlantic hurricane season has been unusually quiet, with no hurricanes or named storms affecting the region to date and apparently little immediate potential for tropical activity. This could be either beneficial or detrimental, since tropical systems can create flooding concerns but can also provide substantial rainfall and reservoir recharge.

Other: Ramie said the UDC received an update on the EPA Geographic Response Plans being developed as part of the Inland Area Contingency Plan, which EPA representatives previously presented to the UDC about in September 2025. Myles Bartos from the EPA contacted Ramie to confirm that emergency response crews were conducting a field exercise to test the plans and determine whether the information they contain is accurate and useful during an

actual response. EPA will provide the UDC with photographs and explanations from the exercise starting today and will analyze whether any revisions to the plans are necessary. The discussion briefly returned to the Barnes Landfill, with Henry drawing a connection between EPA's emergency response planning efforts and the potential contamination concerns. He argued that, while agencies conduct exercises to prepare for environmental emergencies, the Barnes site represents an existing situation approximately a mile from the Delaware River that deserves professional investigation. He reiterated concern that monitoring alone does not establish whether contaminants are migrating toward the river and stressed that the appropriate agencies need to investigate the site sufficiently to determine the actual level of risk.

Ramie said the UDC was advised that the National Park Service Fall Water Safety Partners Meeting will be held September 29 from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. at Tusten Town Hall, with both in-person and virtual participation available. NPS is seeking suggested agenda items by September 22. Proposed topics include a debriefing of the 2026 river season, including successes and challenges; the future framework of the Water Safety Partners group; participant updates; upcoming meetings and training opportunities; and opportunities for collaboration. Henry requested that staffing, law enforcement presence, and public protection on the river also be added for consideration since Superintendent Kurnath's message requested any additional topics. UDC plans to participate in the meeting.

Old Business:

USGS Delaware River Gage at Barryville: Ramie asked Martin to provide an update, since she's been working on securing funding for the Barryville Gage with Sullivan County Legislators Matt McPhillips and Nadia Rajsz before the National Park Service stops their stop-gap funding for the gage on September 30. Martin said that Rajsz has taken the lead locally and indicated that she may be able to contribute approximately $5,000 from her discretionary funds. Martin is also attempting to involve the Town of Highland Supervisor to determine whether additional local funding might be available. Rajsz had confirmed that day that she continues to work on the issue.

Martin also reported seeing information from a local resident on the Facebook page "Living in Barryville" who contacted USGS and received a lower estimated cost for the gage, approximately $3,000–$4,000 less than the amount previously discussed. The reason for the discrepancy is unclear, so she agreed to forward the information to NPS staff and Rajsz for verification. Martin spoke with NPS Superintendent Lindsey Kurnath, who indicated that she would be willing to assist with communication with USGS and help facilitate the transition if another entity or combination of entities can assume responsibility for the gage. Ramie said that Sullivan County Legislator Matt McPhillips had previously advised Martin that he was working with the area's congressional office to explore options for keeping the gage operating. Martin said she isn't sure where that communication is right now, but that Rajsz is taking a lead. At this point, no replacement funding arrangement has been finalized, but several potential avenues remain under active discussion.

Flexible Flow Management Plan Updates: An article by Jeff Skelding of Friends of the Upper Delaware River explaining the FFMP's Thermal Mitigation Bank is included in the packet. Serio reported that work continues through the FFMP work group and a short presentation is being prepared for the Upper Delaware River Rendezvous on October 16–17.

Henry asked about the Thermal Mitigation Bank's 2,500 cfs-day allocation and how that amount is used to provide additional cold-water releases when river temperatures become problematic. Serio clarified that the allocation does not simply mean 2,500 cubic feet of water or an instantaneous 2,500 cfs release. Rather, it represents the equivalent of maintaining a 2,500 cfs release for a 24-hour period, which can be divided among multiple smaller releases. There are approximately seven thermal mitigation releases during the summer, with DEC generally using the bank conservatively. Releases may be increased by approximately 200, 300, or 400 cfs for a limited period, often beginning around midnight and continuing for approximately 12 hours. This timing allows the colder reservoir water to travel downstream and reach Lordville during the warmer portion of the day, with travel time estimated at approximately eight to ten hours. Henry felt public explanations of the Thermal Mitigation Bank should clearly include this time component, since describing the bank simply as "2,500 cfs" can be confusing and understate the amount of water represented by the allocation. Serio said temperature concerns are not limited to the river reaching a maximum of approximately 75 degrees. Earlier FFMP provisions also recognized concern when river temperatures remain above approximately 72 degrees for a full 24-hour period, meaning prolonged elevated minimum

temperatures can also create problems. Henry said this distinction is useful when explaining the purpose and operation of thermal mitigation releases.

8/24 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Meeting: Ramie reported that the Byway's meeting time has changed from 7:00 to 6:30 p.m. going forward. Two board members have resigned, leaving vacancies for the Town of Highland and Town of Tusten. Because Highland representative Mike Edison had been serving as vice chair, Port Jervis representative Teresa Spradling will assume the position of vice chair until the Byway's annual meeting in April. NYS DOT also reported a personnel change, with Orange County West Resident Engineer Richard Gaupman retiring and being replaced by Ed Ford.

The Byway approved $750 for Delaware Highlands Conservancy's "Promoting Butterflies on the Byway" grant. The project will provide a mobile educational display on monarch butterflies at the Tusten-Cochecton branch of the Western Sullivan Public Library from mid-October through December, featuring information on monarch life cycles and habitat protection. Because the requested amount originally exceeded the remaining grant funds, the project was scaled back from three accompanying educational programs to one.

Ramie provided an update on the vacant Scenic Byway Program Manager position, which has been open since July 15. The position has been advertised as a 12-month, remote independent contractor assignment for $30,000. Four applications were received by the August 31 deadline, and the Byway officers will review the candidates and determine who should be interviewed. Materials from the previous program manager have also been returned to the organization.

Ramie said the Callicoon Depot repair project is still anticipated to begin in December. One of the three project partners, the Callicoon Business Association, still has questions concerning calculations associated with the revised scope of work and has not yet given final approval. The other two partners have signed off. All agree that the roof should be replaced before any other work begins. Funding for the roof, however, has not yet been secured despite grant writing and fundraising efforts. Byway members cautioned asking the railroad to address the roof since that could have unintended consequences, since the railroad previously relinquished responsibility for maintaining the station and could potentially view its condition as justification for demolition rather than rehabilitation.

A potential excursion train between Deposit and Port Jervis was discussed as a creative fundraising possibility for the Depot, but substantial obstacles were identified, including the condition and use of the existing freight tracks, passenger-service requirements, and potentially prohibitive insurance costs. Although railroad personnel and invited passengers have traveled the corridor by train on occasion, that is significantly different from operating regular public passenger excursions.

Regarding Route 97, it was questioned whether the current piecemeal pavement patching would remain in place through the winter or was a precursor to more comprehensive paving. NYS DOT subsequently advised that a paving project is tentatively scheduled from the Callicoon Viaduct to the Fremont town line in 2028, followed by work in Fremont and near County Road 134 in Long Eddy in 2029. These schedules remain tentative.

The Byway provided two letters of support for grant applications. One supported Hancock Partners' Market New York application for the Destination Hancock Tourism Marketing and Management Initiative. The second supported the Callicoon Business Association's applications for historic preservation and tourism capital funding for continued rehabilitation of the Callicoon Depot. The organization continues pursuing multiple funding opportunities for the Depot despite some unsuccessful applications. The next Scenic Byway meeting will be September 28 at 6:30 p.m.

8/26 DRBC Advisory Committee on Climate Change: Pais said this committee continues studying climate trends and modeling within the Delaware River Basin. Results from the ongoing work are expected in the fall. Recent discussions focused particularly on the extreme conditions experienced during the summer, including periods of extreme heat, intense rainfall, and wildfire smoke, and on moving beyond research toward practical measures that communities can use to adapt to changing conditions. Potential adaptation strategies discussed by the committee include modifying planning, infrastructure, and design practices, such as redesigning stormwater systems to accommodate more intense rainfall, improving emergency response preparedness, installing rain gardens and other landscape features, and considering larger infrastructure improvements where necessary. The emphasis is on anticipating potential extreme events and making communities and infrastructure more resilient rather than

responding only after problems occur. They are also working on a water resources resilience study and vulnerability assessment examining how water-resource assets and ecosystems, particularly those interacting with the built environment, can be protected and managed more effectively. Part of the discussion involves evaluating how climate-related changes affect water resources and considering what jurisdictional role DRBC may have in addressing those impacts. Pais encouraged members to complete a DRBC survey associated with the resilience planning effort. The survey provides an opportunity for stakeholders to contribute their perspectives on water-resource resilience and climate adaptation. A handout on where to find the survey is included in the packet.

9/8 Delaware River Sojourn Steering Committee Meeting: Pais said since the most recent Sojourn has only recently concluded, the meeting primarily served as the beginning of the new planning cycle and an opportunity for committee members to become acquainted. Early discussion focused on developing the theme for the next Sojourn, with interest in highlighting the river corridor and, particularly, practical ways that ordinary residents can help protect the river and its surrounding environment. Pais discussed the concept further with NPS and identified a potential opportunity for the UDC to play a significant role by drawing upon the River Management Plan, Land and Water Use Guidelines, and existing design guidance. One idea is to develop a small educational booklet using information from existing UDC resources to explain steps that property owners and other residents can take on their own land. Possible topics include controlling invasive species, planting native vegetation, preventing erosion, and using other environmentally responsible property-management practices. The information would be useful not only to riverfront property owners but to anyone interested in improving environmental conditions within the watershed. Members were encouraged to offer additional ideas for the project.

Other: UPDE's Ecologist, Kendell Bennet, introduced himself. Henry asked if Bennet is seasonal or permanent? Stevens said the group may remember UPDE's previous Ecologist Andy Weber who was permanent, but Bennet is seasonal from June to September as of now.

Public Comment: None.

Adjourn: A Motion by Jeffer seconded by Henry to adjourn the meeting at 8:02 p.m. carried.

Meeting minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 9/21/2026