

Upper Delaware Council  
**WATER USE/RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMM. MEETING MINUTES**  
**June 17, 2014**

Committee Members Present: Tony Ritter, Al Henry, Andy Boyar  
Committee Members Absent: John McKay, Pat Jeffer, Joe Demalderis  
NPS Partner: Don Hamilton  
Staff: Laurie Ramie, Travis O'Dell, Cindy Odell  
Guests: None

The UDC's Water Use/Resource Management Committee held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, June 17, 2014 at the Council office in Narrowsburg, NY. Chairperson Ritter called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

**Presentation by NPS Chief Ranger Joe Hinkes – May 25<sup>th</sup> Drowning Analysis:** Hinkes shared details of the efforts being made on the local and national levels regarding water safety and drowning prevention. He shared a PowerPoint presentation that he had just shown the week before to the NPS Office of Public Risk Management's Drowning Prevention Board of which he is a member. He noted that the Water Safety program being conducted here in the Upper Delaware is a community and evidence based approach, meaning the Park Service is reaching out to the communities up and down the river for participation and using tactics that are effective. Drowning is the number one cause of visitor fatalities in the National Park Service. Hinkes reported that the majority of drownings that occur in the Upper Delaware are swimming-related. Regarding the NPS Wear It! program, Hinkes said the primary message is that life jackets save lives and people are encouraged to wear them while swimming, boating, fishing, or floating. He stated that no one has drowned on the Upper Delaware since 1980 that was wearing a properly fitted and fastened life jacket. Hinkes noted that getting the Wear It! message out where as many people can see it has been a priority. He shared a list of stakeholders in this effort and spoke of the success of the lawn signs created a couple of years ago. Hinkes said that a covert life jacket wear use study is being conducted to try and determine if the campaign is being effective. 2013 showed what to be an almost 10% increase in life jacket wear. He shared some of the methods in which the message is getting out to the public. Hinkes played the NPS life jacket public service announcement available on You Tube. It can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTHhEShLuLo>.

Ramie said staff recently hung a 4 x 4 foot Wear It! banner on the office porch in an effort to help get the message out about wearing life jackets. Within two hours, a phone call was received from the Town of Tusten advising us it had to be taken down due to rules on display of banners in this district.

Hinkes noted it is important to get a consistent message out about life jacket use along the whole length of the Delaware, including the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. He hopes that consistent messaging will make a difference.

T. O'Dell questioned if a designated swimming area would be an effective tool in preventing drowning. Hinkes said that with no science backing him up, based on anecdotal evidence only, his answer to that would be no.

Hinkes provided members with a brief overview of the May 25<sup>th</sup> drowning which occurred very close to the Corwin Farms Ranger Station in the Town of Lumberland. He said that NPS personnel were on scene almost immediately. Hinkes reported that the victim was from Jersey City, New Jersey and had just graduated from college with an undergraduate degree in chemistry. Hinkes noted this was not a stupid young man. The victim was visiting the area for his first time but was with a group of friends who have been here multiple times. The party rented their rafts from one of the more reputable liveries on the river. Every one of the group members interviewed said they had received a safety talk before they were sent out on the river. The safety talk was delivered by a veteran employee of the livery who has participated in training with the NPS. Based on witness statements, the employee gave a good safety talk. The individual who drowned did not know how to swim. Members of the party had exited the raft up river from where the drowning occurred and were able to touch bottom. The victim, who was described as very athletic, decided he wanted to go in the river and removed his life jacket at the Handsome Eddy section of the river. It is not known if the individual had a false belief that he would be able to touch the bottom. Hinkes said the victim rolled off the back of the raft and went underwater immediately. He briefly reappeared and then submerged again. Members of the party he was with unsuccessfully tried to locate him as the water was murky due to a recent rain. Where the victim entered the river, the water was approximately 15 feet deep.

Hinkes stated that he does not feel the success of the Water Safety Campaign can be measured by the number of fatalities that occur; he thinks another measure needs to be found. One thing is for sure, he reiterated, there has not been a fatality from 1980 to date of a person wearing a fitted and fastened life jacket. If the use of life jackets during the spectrum of water activities on the Upper Delaware can be increased, he said, we should decrease the chances of fatalities.

Boyar referred to Hinkes' presentation as "powerful" and suggested that the full Council could benefit from it. Henry questioned if, referring to the Wear It! banner that had been hung by the Council and asked to be taken down, if there are any exemptions for public safety messages. He suggested a letter be written to the Town concerning the matter. Boyar noted that the Town of Highland does have some prohibition against banners, but there are exemptions.

Ramie noted that Hinkes is already scheduled for the August full Council meeting to talk about emergency response. She asked Hinkes if he could also give this water safety presentation. Hinkes agreed. Ramie agrees that a bigger audience would be beneficial.

Hamilton asked Hinkes what some of the other parks are doing to address water safety. Hinkes shared some ways other parks are getting the message out. He said some park units are using "fear messaging", but are approaching the method in a careful manner. He noted that Yosemite is using signage to warn visitors of the dangers of the waterfalls.

Ritter noted that during high water events, he goes to [www.noaa.gov](http://www.noaa.gov) to get information on river crest levels. He suggested that is a good resource for visitors to learn of the conditions. He spoke of flags on beaches that alert swimmers to certain dangers. Hinkes said the river safety page has been updated to make it more user-friendly and does contain links to gages. Hinkes spoke of how the word gets out when the river reaches the level that the life jacket mandatory wear is triggered. A discussion about cfs (cubic feet per second) and river levels took place. Henry noted that his motto regarding life jacket wear is "in, on or near the water" regardless of the activity.

A motion by Boyar seconded by Henry to approve the May 20 meeting minutes was carried. There was no public comment on the agenda.

### **Old Business:**

**Upper DelAWARE Roundtable June 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting Update:** T. O'Dell reported that the NACL Weather Project was discussed. A short video from the February climate change symposium was shown and discussed. O'Dell said that an August 9<sup>th</sup> Weather Project pre-show exhibition that will include focus on renewable energy, science and art is planned. Exhibitors and vendors are being sought. Ramie added that the free outdoor pageant play about the weather and climate change with over 100 community participants will be held at the ball field in Yulan, NY. Grounds open at 5pm and the performance begins at 6:30.

O'Dell said that Laura Moran spoke of the Confluence Project. An outcome of Common Waters and the Roundtable's focus on natural economies, this project will encompass regional oral traditions and cultural heritage tourism. Moran will look to put together a website that will document traditions up and down the corridor for each community.

O'Dell noted that Steve Schwartz updated attendees on the upcoming Upper Delaware BioBlitz scheduled for June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.

O'Dell said a brief discussion about farming miscanthus for use in wood-burning boilers took place.

The next meeting of the Upper DelAWARE Roundtable is scheduled for August 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) June 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting Report:** T. O'Dell said that on June 12<sup>th</sup> a meeting was held at the UDC office. The consultants presented the draft form plans for the accesses. O'Dell noted that Sullivan County Associate Planner Heather Jacksy will present on the six Sullivan County river accesses at the July 3<sup>rd</sup> full Council meeting.

Ritter noted that his letter to the editor was printed in the June 17<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Sullivan County Democrat* regarding the removal of trash receptacles from river accesses along the Delaware. He said he has seen brown and white signs in their places requesting visitors to "carry out what they carry in." Ritter said there used to be dumpsters at the accesses from Memorial Day through Labor Day. He does not understand who made the decision to remove the dumpsters. He believes it was the Park Service that put the signs at the accesses. Hamilton confirmed it was a Park Service decision not to put dumpsters out. He

said they have gradually been reducing the number of accesses where they did put dumpsters. He added they are trying to encourage people to carry out what they carry in. Hamilton stated that the vast majority of trash dumped at these dumpsters has been household trash despite signage stating that doing so is illegal. Ritter said he understands that people will take advantage of the situation, but feels something should be available for people using the river to leave their trash. Henry said that “pack it in, pack it out” is the trend in most state parks nowadays for a variety of reasons. Henry spoke of his experiences with dumpsters as the Chief Ranger for Upper Delaware years ago. It is Henry’s opinion that the accesses are actually cleaner since they did away with the dumpsters. A very lengthy discussion took place regarding trash. Boyar spoke of the St. Lawrence Seaway Trail which he considers pristine and they have the pack out what you pack in rule. Henry suggested that the Park Service be contacted and asked for the figures of what it has cost in the past to maintain the dumpsters. Ramie said that may determine if the decision to remove the dumpsters was financial or philosophical. She offered to write a letter requesting answers to the numerous questions regarding trash that have been raised. Ritter noted that time will tell if the “carry out what you carry in” program is successful or not.

**Zane Grey Catch-and-Release Fishing Derby Update:** Ramie reminded members that July 6<sup>th</sup> is the deadline for entries. Publicity efforts continue, she added. Ramie said that currently, entries are few in numbers. Boyar said there are many wonderful prizes available.

**Reply from Paul Rush, NYC DEP Deputy Commissioner: FFMP & OST:** Ritter referred to the copy of the letter provided in members’ packets. Ramie noted it was handed out at the June full Council where it was referred back to the WU/RM Committee for further discussion. Boyar offered to draft a letter for discussion at the July WU/RM Committee. Ramie stated having something to react to is easier than trying to invent it at the meeting. The original letter was discussed. Ritter noted that in the second to the last paragraph, Rush encourages the UDC to reach out to the DRBC. He views this as kicking our concerns over to the DRBC. Henry spoke of the presentation by Thomas Murphy and the OST. He agreed that Boyar could draft a letter for the committee to react to at the next committee meeting.

**Other:** Ramie shared a newsletter received by the UDC on June 16<sup>th</sup> entitled “Pond Eddy News” from Pennsylvania DOT and New York State DOT. It provides information on the Pond Eddy Bridge Replacement project including a timeline of where they are and projected dates for future steps leading up to construction projected to begin in the summer of 2016. The newsletter also contains information for anyone who may be interested in acquiring the old bridge. Pennsylvania operates a bridge marketing program to try to find new homes for historic truss bridges that must be replaced. Henry questioned if someone can find out what will actually happen regarding causeways during construction. Ramie said that has not yet been determined. The design of the causeway is part of the design/build contract and there is nothing on paper because they have not progressed that far in the planning. Henry suggested that finding out the design early in the process may be beneficial in that positive input could be offered and people’s fears could be extinguished. Ramie noted that the UDC is an active member of the Design Advisory Committee and we intend to be fully involved as we have throughout the process.

### **New Business:**

**American Eel Regulations June 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting:** Ramie announced that the NYS DEC is hosting a public informational meeting for the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) on Draft Addendum IV to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for American Eel at the UDC office on June 30<sup>th</sup> beginning at 7:00 p.m. Ramie told members to feel free to attend the meeting.

**Delaware River Flow and Storage Data Report:** Ritter referenced the copy of New York City’s reservoirs levels in members’ packets. He stated that the Cannonsville is at 97.6% and Pepacton is at 99.2%. These levels being very close to the normal level of 97%. Ritter said the water temperature today was 73 degrees at Callicoon with a release of 494 cfs out of Cannonsville. A brief discussion about water temperatures took place.

**Other:** Ramie referred to the two additional handouts in members' packets. The first provides information on a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant opportunity for habitat restoration in the Upper Delaware River watershed. The information has been circulated to various organizations. The closing date for this grant opportunity is September 1, 2014. The second handout is a Cornell Cooperative Extension press release regarding the Upper Delaware BioBlitz. She noted the UDC is a sponsor for this event and will have a booth on site Sunday, June 29<sup>th</sup>. Hamilton thanked the UDC for its donation.

**Public Comment:** None

**Adjournment:** A motion by Boyar seconded by Henry to adjourn the meeting at 8:51 p.m. was carried.

*Minutes prepared by Cindy Odell, 6/23/14*