

To: Hampshire Gazette

Re: Connecticut River Relicensing Projects

Turners Falls Dam, MA

Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage, MA

Vernon Dam, VT/NH

Bellows Falls Dam, VT/NH,

Wilder Dam, VT/NH

Federal relicensing of five dams on the Connecticut River (2 in Massachusetts, 3 on the Vermont/New Hampshire border) is happening right now. It is likely that by the end of the year these 5 dams will continue to operate for the next 40-50 years under regulations to be approved this year.

One of the major goals of this process should be protection and improvement of the natural environment in which these dams are located. Key features of that environment are the fisheries and fish migrations up and down the river. Dams have been major impediments to historic large fish runs. These relicensing applications should be revised to provide for adequate restoration of significant fish migrations, whether through additional ladders, lifts or other means.

In addition, action is needed to reduce erosion of the river banks. Widely fluctuating levels and volumes of water releases from the dams contribute to erosion of the river banks. This undermines the natural vegetation that is essential for stable banks and sustaining wildlife habitat.

Further, public access to the river should be improved and expanded. Substantial public involvement is needed that will explore existing facilities; determine what new facilities are needed; what areas need more and safer public access to the river; and what additional safety measures and programs are needed. To date, applicants have proposed insufficient funds and plans to provide for the needed recreational improvements.

Finally, the relicensing applicants should make much greater efforts to involve the public in these relicensing discussions - especially indigenous peoples and organizations having particular connections with the river.

Public meetings and other outreach methods for acquiring public input should occur prior to approval of the relicensing applications so that community opinions and resources can be significantly addressed and included in these applications.

League of Women Voters of Amherst
Jessica Ryan, Spokesperson
Elizabeth Davis, Chair Connecticut River Committee