

**Wantastiquet Subcommittee  
of the Connecticut River Joint Commissions**  
Tuesday, March 9, 2021  
Video Conference Call  
Meeting Minutes

**Attendees**

Walpole	Samantha Loch	✓	Westminster	Paul Harlow	
Walpole			Westminster	Jim Calchera	
Westmoreland	Perry Sawyer	✓	Putney		
Westmoreland			Putney		
Chesterfield	Roland Volbehrr		Dummerston	Daniel Marx	
Chesterfield			Dummerston		
Hinsdale	Mike Darcy	✓	Brattleboro	Kathy Urffer	✓
Hinsdale			Brattleboro	Michael Fairchild	
Vernon	Andy White	✓			
Vernon					

Katie Kennedy (The Nature Conservancy); Margo Ghia (Windham Regional Commission); Olivia Uyizeye (Staff)

**Minutes**

1. Welcome & Introductions

Chair Sawyer called the meeting, conducted via conference call, to order at 6:07 PM under the emergency provisions of RSA 91-A, New Hampshire's Right-to-Know law, as allowed by Emergency Order 11 under Executive Order 2020-04 in light of the COVID-19 outbreak. Sawyer conducted a roll call of LAC members, invited any guests to introduce themselves, and welcomed all present.

2. Meeting minutes from January

White makes a motion to accept the minutes as presented. Urffer seconds the motion. The vote passes unanimous by roll call vote.

3. Great River Hydro FERC Application Update: Kathy Urffer (CRC) and Katie Kennedy (TNC)

Sawyer welcomes Urffer and Kennedy to provide an update on the Dam relicensing.

Urffer describes that CRC is publishing a series of op-eds. A recent one about fish and the dams came out in the Keene Sentinel. Kennedy introduces herself as a River Scientist for the Nature Conservancy. She largely works on managed river systems and has been working on the dam relicensing since she started with TNC.

Urffer describes that they have been providing this update presentation to groups around the region for a couple of months now. See attached slides for full details. Additional comments below:

- For the past license, these dams have been peaking facilities whereby they fill up their reservoir and then dispense of that water in the afternoon into the evening. This correlates with the daily fluctuations of the river that people have become accustomed to.
- White responds to the note about the tiger beetle, where he is aware of one island in Massachusetts where they are located. Kennedy responds that one of their big populations is at rainbow beach that is not doing well and is being worked on.
- Provides graphs that compares dam operated flows and estimated natural flows between 2003-2011.
- New operations proposed protocol would be 90% of time where inflow=outflow.
- Goal for winter was to have sufficient base flow that would allow for species to hunker down.
- Current company estimates show that they are able to make just as much energy under this operation plan as the previous operations.
- Describes that mitigation and enhancement activities are a required part of the license and should not be understood as “gift”. Current proposal in the application maintains the status quo.
- None of the CRC recreation recommendations were included in the proposal and are continuing to be advocated for to better reinvest in the recreation economy.
- Also CRC advocating for increase monitoring as a result of this change in operations.
- Members are welcomed to join the HydroPower Coffee Hours hosted by CRC that are monthly. These are to help prepare people to comment on the legally complete permit when that opens up the formal public comment period for 60 days.

Opens up for questions:

- Sawyer explains that the river just below Wilder Dam is very low and is unclear why. Kennedy recommends looking at the NHGS stream gauges. Urffer describes that there is a minimum flow that they have to release, but the year was so low that they could not even reduce that much. White explains that some sections are lower than he has seen for about 30 years. Urffer explains that some locations are also impacted by the pump stations that lower the flow as well.
- White mentions some items that he thinks are not adequately included. Certain species that are not being monitored sufficiently that could drastically impact what GRH would be required to do. Urffer suggests sitting down with White to hear his experience on the river and perspective on the dam proposal. White notes that something changed around 2013/2015 drastically, however Urffer notes that the company does not note any changes in operations then. It might be worth asking about adding a stream gauge in this area as part of the license.
- Loch asks if there is any independent monitoring occurring on the water levels. Kennedy says that is something that you can monitor. Loch follows up asking if citizen collected data would be valid to regulators. Kennedy suggests a partner from a state university to support the calculations to make it more credible.
- Sawyer notes gauges above and below Bellows Falls. Some note of fewer fluctuations than their used to be. Some fluctuation now because of filling in the intermittent supply of wind/solar.
- Loch asks if GRH gives funds to the ARM fund. Urffer responds that they did not, however CRC will be recommending that there be funding bank stabilization projects for landowners along the river.

#### 4. Permit Reviews

##### a. Approved. Hinsdale Bridge & Boat Launch permits.

Two permits related to the Hinsdale boat launch were approved that the LRS previously reviewed. These will allow work to proceed on the construction of a new boat ramp, and to dredge and fill a wetland and

small stream to construct a new bridge along NH Route 119 and make improvements to the boat launch off Prospect St. The latter work will result in a one-time payment to the ARM fund of \$152,260.88.

Darcy explains the ingress and egress into the site. It will be a good site but there will be some substantial disruption through ledge and wetlands to establish the new design. White expresses concern that large boats will not have access.

b. Westmoreland Cheshire Railroad corridor project Emergency Authorization Verification (2021-00210)

Extends emergency authorization work to reestablish flow of 260 foot long 3x2foot stone box culvert under the 65 foot tall Cheshire railroad embankment. Work is allowed with conditions through April 15 1 2021. Sawyer notes this is on an unnamed stream.

c. Chesterfield, Fortier. Wetlands & Shoreland Permits (2021-00567 & 2021-00576)

Sawyer notes that the site plan shows a small wetland. Sawyer reviews application materials – including maps and pictures to show the impact area. Sawyer asks if there are any comments the LRS would like to submit. None are given

d. Update. NorthStar Vermont Yankee NPDES draft discharge permit amendment #3-1199

Reviews changes, or what can be understood as the changes are very specific and difficult to understand. No immediate comments. Urffer has followed up with Chris Campany with Windham Regional Commission to see if there are any concerns that he has heard of.

e. Update. Request for more information submitted on the Wetlands permit 2021-00012 bank stabilization in Walpole.

RFMI from NHDES requires applicant to 1) identify possible impacts to Wood Turtle, along with any needed practices to avoid/minimize impact, 2) be aware that any work to be done above the top of the bank will may require a shoreland permit, and 3) provide a sequence of construction.

Urffer explains that the engineer needs to clarify the way the construction will be done so not to impact the Wood Turtle.

2. Updates & Other Business

a. Hinsdale-Brattleboro Existing Bridges Committee

From Committee Staff

The next meeting of the Hinsdale-Brattleboro Existing Bridges Subcommittee is scheduled for Thursday on March 25<sup>th</sup> starting at 1:30 p.m. Zoom connection information will be posted under the “Other Meetings” section (left side) of the [SWRPC home page](#) when it becomes available.

In addition, please take note that a third Online Public Forum has been scheduled for April 1<sup>st</sup> starting at 6:30 p.m. The focus of the forum will be a presentation on the Subcommittee’s final draft conceptual plan for the Existing Bridges and Island area. To pre-register, click [here](#).

b. Water Quality Testing

For lab testing, Uyizeye recommends collecting water samples from 1 (maybe 2) site in the Wantastiquet region and send them to a lab, as this is a limited time funding option that may not be repeated every year. The sites recommend are on the Connecticut River just downstream of the Ashuelot River, Saxtons River, or Whetstone Brook for total nitrates, total phosphorus and possible chlorides. It will need to be

tested once a month for 5 months and samples need to be received within 24 hours of sampling. There is a courier service in Brattleboro that picks up every Thurs at 11am.

Loch indicates she has access to a meter set for the 2021 season VRAP testing. Urffer is willing to participate, but cannot organize the sampling. Urffer could sample for the lab at the Whetstone Brook. Urffer explains that CRC is already sending sample to the VT state lab on other sampling projects. Uyizeye notes we will need more volunteers and will circulate a schedule to evaluate capacity, along with targeted outreach. Members discuss the option to not complete VRAP this season, or reduce the number of sites. It is decided to make a final decision at the May meeting, with any sampling to begin in June. White recommends posting signage at communities, boat launches, fish ladders, etc.

c. Outreach & Speaker Series

Uyizeye thanks members for their support in the outreach campaign and speaker series and invited members to reach out with questions any time.

The speaker series will include 4 events, each last 1.5 hours and open to the public. The event will start with a brief introduction to CRJC and quick updates from attending subcommittees. The remainder of the event will include presentations from speakers and time for questions. Video recordings of each event will be made available online for 1-2 weeks after each event. Uyizeye hopes that a member will offer to act as the ring leader for each event – inviting guests and introducing speakers. If interested in a specific event, you can reach out to Uyizeye. Uyizeye will be on all the calls to help with managing the event from a technical side.

The first event will be about happening end of March, details below. The full list can be found on the [www.crjc.org/lrs](http://www.crjc.org/lrs) website.

River Paths for Wildlife  
MARCH 23, 6-730PM

d. Commissioners Update

5. Rotating Chair

Sawyer will continue to act as chair, members agree.

6. Adjourn

Darcy makes a motion to adjourn. Urffer seconds the motion. The vote passes unanimous by roll call vote.

*Minutes respectfully submitted by Olivia Uyizeye*