

July 28, 2023

Via Electronic filing

**Subject: Project 2572 Response to Great Lake Hydro America filing:
20230721 Ripogenus Project P-2572; July 8, 2023 Whitewater
Recreation Flow Excursion Report**

On July 7, 2023 the water all but stopped flowing for 22 miles below McKay Station on the West Branch of the Penobscot River (West Branch). Brookfield's Safewaters website listed McKay Flows at 100 cfs at 7 PM. The current Licensee, Great Lakes Hydro America, is entrusted with the management of this precious public resource. Two weeks after this event, the Licensee filed a letter on July 21, 2023 that mentioned the July 7th lightning strikes but dealt with the July 8th impacts to boating that resulted from flow excursions below McKay Station on the West Branch.

The above referenced recreation flow excursion report is an attempt to obfuscate damage to fish and aquatic communities during the outage of July 7, 2023. The report dealt with a two hour impact on boaters rather than the four plus hour impact to fish and aquatic communities, ie., recently emerged landlocked salmon (salmon) and adult salmon summer food source; caddis, mayflies, and stoneflies. Photos and reports from campers along the river indicated flows remained low at 11 PM on July 7th. The impact to fish and aquatic communities will be long lasting. On the morning of July 8th a boater reported approximately 10 dead sub adult salmon in a small pool on the edge of the McKay Station. Other mortalities were likely concealed by nighttime darkness.

The Licensee's account of July 7th is rather confusing. I struggle to understand how *"all of GLHA's hydro stations on the Penobscot River tripped offline due to a lightning strike to the local utility's (Versant Power's) transmission line."* could destroy two McKay Station turbine 30 miles upstream. Bearing oil seems to be a focus of the outage. It would be helpful if a recent maintenance schedule could be provided. The Licensee fails to mention the implementation, if any, of emergency McKay turbine outflow or how that flow was provided with two disabled turbines. The Licensee has provided graphic West Branch flow details of July 8th. They should do the same for July 7th beginning at 3PM.

In pleading guilty to a two hour interruption in boating flows the Licensee attempts to deflect attention away from the more environmentally disastrous, four plus hour, low flow event, that impacted the West Branch salmon fishery and aquatic communities. The Licensee's July 21, 2023 filing fails to mention the time the trip event began (an attached July 10 Email from K. Bernier states the outage began at 1759 h), when deep gates were opened, and why McKay Station energy outage flow measures appeared to fail. Rather than discuss environmental and recreational impacts, the Licensee goes into great details concerning turbine damage. Outages are an annual event. The magnitude and duration of the July 7th event is historic.

The Licensee has yet to file a July 7th outage report. The July 21, 2023 filing is a separate event and deals with boating flow excursions on July 8 rather July 7, the day of the lightning strike(s). In addition to a July 7th outage report that includes flow over time, a second report that deals with the dewatering of the Holbrook bypass stream (article 406) needs to be filed. The loss of the 2023 (young-of-the-year) salmon age class, produced by this mitigation measure, will impact the West Branch salmon population for several years

The apparent response time of the Licensee on July 7th is inexcusable as is the failure to have auxiliary generators in the Ripogenus Dam Gate house capable of lifting a deep gate during emergency outages.

Technologies such as automatic transfer switches which sense power failure in line supply and switch to back-up sources and Liquid Propane-fired back up generators are available. Beginning on June 11, 2021 with the Pre-Application Document the Licensee has touted protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures (PM&E). The diastrophic event of July 7th produced a trifecta of failed PM&E measures.

A complete factual accounting of flows over time and Ripogenus Dam gate changes during the July 7th outage is needed in order to assess "lighting strike" impacts. The agencies, stakeholders, and FERC need a full accounting of the events of July 7, 2023. The Licensee should make this information available in a timely manner.

The loss of West Branch flow on July 7, 2023 is an actionable event. Fish and aquatic communities were impacted. Due to low flow conditions boaters and anglers lost time on the river. The Ripogenus Impoundment, Ripogenus Dam, McKay Station and downstream West Branch make up the Licensee's Ripogenus Project. Environmental and recreational disasters are the Licensee's responsibility. The Licensee needs to be held accountable. FERC has an opportunity to prevent this going forward in the ongoing (re) licensing. In the meantime, FERC compliance staff should require fish and aquatic communities' mitigation and issue civil penalties significant enough to get the attention of the leadership of this huge multinational enterprise.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I urge FERC to take quick and decisive action.

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