

June 14, 2008

## Press Release: Upper Delaware River Temperature Crisis Has a Solution

The Flexible Flow Management Program (FFMP) that is now being used to manage the water releases from the three New York City reservoirs on the upper Delaware River must be changed immediately to release more water into the river. The ecological crisis on the upper Delaware over the last week proves the inadequacy of the current FFMP program.

Here is what has happened. After a period of relatively cool weather, on June 6<sup>th</sup> air temperatures throughout the region shot up into the 90s. With the minimum “conservation” releases in effect under FFMP, only 260 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water was being released from the Cannonsville reservoir into the West Branch of the Delaware. With so little cold water being released, the water temperatures shot up into the high 70s and beyond to the 80s, -- a range which is lethal to the trout. For example, by June 11<sup>th</sup> water temperatures at the Lordville USGS gage reached 81.7 °F. All the while, Cannonsville and the other New York City reservoirs stood at over 95% of capacity.

This intolerable situation is no surprise and could easily have been avoided. A coalition of conservation organizations, including Trout Unlimited, Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, The Nature Conservancy Eastern New York Chapter and The Delaware River Foundation, which is devoted to maintaining and improving the aquatic ecology of the upper river, in partnership with Columbia University developed the mathematical framework that underlies the FFMP. But the coalition’s model called for substantially larger cold water releases from the dams -- precisely in order to avoid the type of crisis we currently face. When the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) implemented the FFMP, it replaced those releases with its own inadequate program of low water releases. As a result, the coalition’s mathematical models predicted exactly what has come to pass – dangerously high water temperatures.

A simple solution is available. The higher water release levels that were originally suggested by the conservation coalition under its “CP 2” proposal have already been demonstrated to provide substantial benefit to the River with *no increased risk* to the City’s water supply. The DRBC and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection who jointly control the Delaware releases need only implement the CP 2 releases immediately. Instead of the paltry 260 cfs release now authorized from Cannonsville under FFMP, the CP 2 release would be 350 CFS. Although this would not entirely solve the current crisis, it would greatly mitigate the situation by extending the reach of cold water down into the West Branch and main stem Delaware Rivers. And, increasing the Cannonsville reservoir release to the coalition’s newer “CP 3” proposal of 450 CFS would protect the Delaware River further downstream.

Resistance to increased water releases comes principally from New York City. The City would prefer to hoard water behind its dams regardless of the needs of stakeholders in the region. Extensive computer based statistical analysis of the upper Delaware carried out at Columbia University has shown that New York City’s hoarding policy is entirely unjustified. The modest increases in water releases into the River suggested above would not in any appreciable way increase drought risks for New York City, or for any of the other users of Delaware River water. The three New York City dams on the upper Delaware, Cannonsville, Pepacton and Neversink currently stand at over 93% capacity and the Rondout reservoir stands at 98%. Increasing water releases to CP 2 or CP 3 levels would reduce the water storage in the reservoirs by 1% or less -- literally a drop in the bucket!

The higher releases would provide another important benefit to River communities – increased reservoir voids. Higher summertime releases will result in more space in the reservoirs by early September which creates a buffer against the very real potential of hurricane caused flooding. The upper river communities below the New York City reservoirs which have experienced three “100-year” floods in the past five years deserve increased protection.

The bottom line is that the policies that the coalition proposes would have no real impact on water storage yet would yield a substantial benefit to the environment and to the river communities. There is no reason for further delay. The scientific evidence supporting such a change has been well documented and made available to the authorities at the DRBC and New York City.

Sincerely,

Trout Unlimited  
Theodore Gordon Flyfishers  
The Delaware River Foundation