



LCFA's Position on Francis. E. Walter Dam Re-evaluation Study

On September 25th, 2019 an agreement was signed to re-evaluate the management and use of water storage in the Francis E. Walter (F.E.W.) Dam on the Lehigh River. This has the potential to significantly impact and alter recreation and the ecological health of the Lehigh River for generations to come.

The study is being managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), who own and manage F.E.W Dam. New York City (NYC) is the primary non-Federal sponsor (\$1.4 million) along with Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) (\$25,000). The DRBC & NYC wish to explore allocating water storage in the F.E.W Reservoir for use in the Delaware River basin flow plan. Currently the DRBC can only request storage in F.E.W Reservoir when drought conditions are declared, otherwise water storage in the reservoir is up to the discretion of USACE for flood control, recreation, and conservation uses.

Background information

The F.E.W. Dam was constructed on the Lehigh River in 1961 for the purpose of flood control, and was not designed to support the Lehigh River's cold-water ecosystem. In 1988, recreation became a congressionally authorized purpose of F.E.W Dam. Collaboration between the USACE, conservation groups, and the public, led to the creation of flow plans resulting in a robust white-water boating industry along with only modest improvements to the wild and stocked trout fishery. Significant further improvements to the wild fishery and countless invertebrates are hindered by the dam's structural inability to provide year round cold-water releases, which are depleted by approximately July 1st on an annual basis.

Two separate water quality studies (2009 and 2013) have shown that by raising the operating level (capacity) of F.E.W Dam and installing a multi-level release tower would allow the F.E.W. Dam to conserve the cold-water pool at the bottom of the reservoir and provide consistent cold-water releases during the warmest months of the year. The results of the study have shown that a thirty-mile wild trout fishery could be created from F.E.W Dam downstream to Jim Thorpe, PA. These studies have indicated that we can accomplish these significant improvements to the trout fishery without jeopardizing the whitewater rafting industry.

In comparison, the upper Delaware River tailwater was responsible for an estimated \$414 million in revenue in 2014 that was directly related to their trout fishery. Further expanding and increasing the cold-water ecosystem on the Lehigh River, would provide similar opportunities of community enrichment and economic success. Given the Lehigh River's potential as a destination tailwater fishery, and its close proximity to Philadelphia, New York City and New Jersey, improvements to the fishery should be a high priority.



F.E.W. Dam Re-evaluation Study Fact Sheet:

www.nap.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Francis-E-Walter-Dam/Reevaluation-Study/

The LCFA requests the following conditions of the Re-Evaluation Study:

1. Be consistent in furthering the results and analysis of the USACE Lehigh River Water Quality Phase I (2009) & II (2013) Model studies to provide the USACE with a green environmentally sound project.

www.nap.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Francis-E-Walter-Dam/Lehigh-River-Water-Quality-Model/

2. Investigate creation of a Habitat Protection Program (HPP) for the Lehigh River from the outflow of the F.E.W Dam downstream to Jim Thorpe PA. This HPP must include guidance and regulations for all aspects of water management to protect and enhance cold-water fisheries as well as aquatic community diversity within the Lehigh River.
3. Include an examination of structural changes to overcome the F.E.W Dam's inability to properly reserve and utilize the reservoir's hypolimnion, thus limiting the ability to release 68 F degree or lower throughout the year. 68 F degrees is the ideal upper limit for maintaining a healthy environment to support cold-water fish and invertebrates.
4. Ensure the continuation of fishery enhancement releases in annual flow plans to provide sufficient augmented minimum flows to support a healthy wild trout population, aquatic ecosystem and to maintain lower downstream water temperatures.
5. Research local and regional economic impacts of a tailwater wild trout fishery from the outflow of F.E.W Dam to Northampton, PA.
6. Above all, make certain that any additional mandated functions or re-authorization of F.E.W Dam sustain and continue to enhance and protect the existing wild trout fishery within the Lehigh River, and are consistent with the PA Fish & Boat Commission guidance for the creation of a tailwater fishery.



About the Lehigh Coldwater Fishery Alliance:

The Lehigh Coldwater Fishery Alliance (a 501(c) Non-Profit Organization) was founded in 2005 with the mission of obtaining a consistent release of cold-water (55 Deg F) from the Francis E. Walter Reservoir (F.E.W.) through better utilization of F.E.W.'s storage capacity and discharge options in an effort to improve overall flows, protect habitat and enhance the Lehigh River's wild trout fishery.

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For more information visit us at www.thelehighriver.org