



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2878

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SEP 25 2008

IN REPLY REFER TO:

L7423(4507)

SEP 16 2008

BY:.....

Joe Hoffman, Executive Director
Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin
51 Monroe Street, Suite PE-08
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Mr. Hoffman:

The National Park Service, Northeast Region, assisted in launching the North Branch Potomac River Advisory Committee through our Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. Now that our participation on this project has concluded, we understand that the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) will take on leadership of this project.

The North Branch Potomac River Advisory Committee was formed in 2005 by the agencies collectively responsible for the operations and management of Jennings Randolph and Savage River Dams and the lands surrounding the two reservoirs. The committee was established to provide a forum for public input regarding operations and management of the dams, surrounding public lands and downstream flow levels for all project purposes, especially recreation.

At the request of the managing agencies, the National Park Service provided technical assistance to the committee through our Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program. For the past two years, the committee has met quarterly and has served as a forum for discussions among the managing agencies and the public.

After considerable discussion and debate, the committee reached a consensus on the attached recommendations that they believe will enhance the management of the two projects for all interested parties. The committee made great strides in developing broadly acceptable flow management objectives that can be used in making reservoir release decisions. However, the dry conditions last year proved to be a significant challenge. It was unclear whether there was enough water to make whitewater releases while still supporting fisheries objectives and water quality needs. This showed that more work can and should be done to better describe how stakeholder objectives can be met under different hydrologic scenarios. Other issues remain to be resolved by continued work of this committee.

Consequently, the ICPRB offered to study reservoir operations in detail. ICPRB staff has experience in conducting technical studies in collaboration with stakeholders. Therefore, with the support of the committee and working closely with water control managers from the Army

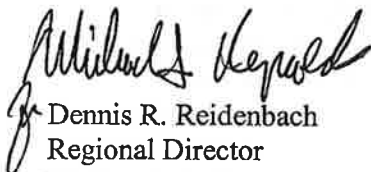
Corps, ICPRB will lead the next phase of this effort. ICPRB will collect existing information about stakeholder needs and objectives so that this information can be incorporated into a simulation model of reservoir operations and river flows. The model will be used to explore how reservoir operations can be changed and what kind of impacts that will have on all the important issues, including water quality, fisheries, recreational fishing, whitewater boating, lake recreation and other issues. ICPRB hopes to find new ideas for operating the reservoirs and identify critical issues that require additional data collection. It is anticipated that the attached flow management recommendations will be modified as a result of the study. We encourage your agency to support and participate in the study.

The staff of the National Park Service is glad to have had the opportunity to assist with this important conservation and recreation project. We appreciate that the committee members are willing to continue this collaborative process under the leadership of the ICPRB.

Identical letters have also been sent to: John R. Griffin, Secretary, MD Department of Natural Resources; Bret Preston, Assistant Chief, WV Department of Commerce; John J. McMullen Jr., Chairman, Upper Potomac River Commission; Colonel Peter W. Mueller, Commander, US Army Corp of Engineers, Baltimore District; and Andrew D. Brunhart, General Manager, Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission.

Thank you for your interest in the National Park Service.

Sincerely,



Dennis R. Reidenbach
Regional Director
Northeast Region

Attachment

cc:

The Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin, US Senate
The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, US Senate
The Honorable Robert C. Byrd, US Senate
The Honorable John D. Rockefeller, US Senate
The Honorable Roscoe G. Bartlett, US House of Representatives
The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan, US House of Representatives
The Honorable George C. Edwards, Maryland State Senate
The Honorable Wendell R. Beitzel, Maryland House of Delegates
The Honorable WV Senator
The Honorable WV Delegate
The Garrett County Commissioners
The Mineral County Commissioners

North Branch Advisory Committee
Recommendations

Goals:

- While maintaining all legally mandated purposes of the projects,
 - Maximize opportunities for fishing and boating in the region.
 - Maximize opportunities for all types of fishing (float, bank, wading).
 - Maximize opportunities for lake swimming and lake boating.
 - Provide opportunities for whitewater paddling at different skill levels.
 - Provide opportunities for two-day weekends of paddling.
 - Maintain optimum habitat for fish populations.

The following proposed schedules assume at least an average flow year, and are contingent upon appropriate water volumes being available so that all legally mandated purposes of the projects can be satisfied.

1. Jennings Randolph Reservoir: Four weekends of whitewater releases between late April and the first weekend in June. On each of the four weekends, there should be an approximate 6-hour release on Saturday and an approximate 6-hour release on Sunday. Whitewater releases should not be scheduled on consecutive (back-to-back) weekends. Whitewater releases on Memorial Day weekend should be scheduled to occur in odd numbered years. Optimal discharge rates should be 800 to 1000 cfs if possible.
2. Jennings Randolph Reservoir: Two weekend releases, either Artificially Varied Flow (AVF) events or whitewater events, between early September and late October. On each of the two weekends, there should be, as a minimum, an approximate 6-hour release on Saturday and an approximate 6-hour release on Sunday. The release should be coordinated with the regional recreational release schedule. Optimal discharge rates should be 800 to 1000 cfs if possible.
3. Savage River Reservoir: Three whitewater releases - one the first Sunday in July, one the first Sunday in August, and one on either the first or second Sunday in September. The September release will occur on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend in even numbered years. On each of the three Sundays, there should be an approximate 6-hour release. Optimum discharge rates should be 800 to 1000 cfs if possible. Lower discharge rates, fewer hours for a release, or event cancellation may be considered if there is an insufficient volume of cold water remaining in storage to maintain a desired minimum flow target of 55 cfs in Savage River from May-September.
4. On non-whitewater weekends in April through October, maintain a minimum flow of 300 cfs at the Luke gauge on Friday-Saturday-Sunday-Monday. The release shall begin Friday morning and continue to Monday morning. This will create four days of various float fishing and paddling opportunities.

5. It is understood that any releases may be cancelled during dry conditions or during floods. If a release must be cancelled due to dry conditions, an advance notice should be posted on the reservoir(s) websites the Monday before the scheduled release. Cancellations due to flooding may occur at any time.

6. It is anticipated that resource agencies and stakeholders will confer at least twice a year to agree on schedules and to address relevant issues. The first meeting should occur in January or early February and will establish the proposed schedule for spring recreational releases on both rivers. At the same time, a tentative schedule should be identified for non-whitewater and non-AVF weekends downstream of Jennings Randolph for the entire upcoming season, considering recreational releases elsewhere in the region. The schedules should be announced by the end of February at the latest, if possible. The second meeting should occur in mid June and will establish the proposed schedule for whitewater releases from Savage River Reservoir. The schedule should be announced by late June. Dates for the September and October AVF/whitewater events at Jennings Randolph should be announced during August if possible, but not less than 30 days beforehand.