

VII. Maryland's Holistic Approach to Addressing Conowingo Dam's Pollution Impacts

Scientific analysis shows that Bay watershed jurisdictions need to reduce an additional six million pounds of nitrogen and 260,000 pounds of phosphorus to mitigate the water quality impacts of the Conowingo Dam's lost trapping capacity. This lost capacity threatens the ability of both the State and the region to meet their Chesapeake Bay clean up goals.

In 2018, the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership unanimously agreed on the need to develop an additional plan to address loads from Conowingo. This plan, called the Conowingo Watershed Implementation Plan (CWIP), is to specifically reduce pollution associated with the loss of the Conowingo Dam's capacity to trap sediment in the reservoir behind the dam. Recently, EPA took an important step by issuing a Request for Applications (RFA) for work on the CWIP. Furthermore, EPA plans to award one to three cooperative agreements for work that supports the efforts of the watershed jurisdictions, along with other partners, to restore the Bay. The work proposed by the RFA includes facilitating the development and implementation of a Conowingo WIP, the development of a comprehensive financing strategy and implementation plan, and the development of a system for tracking, verifying, and reporting results. The CBP partnership is still developing the CWIP timeline and will release it for public comment sometime after the jurisdictions' WIPs.

Maryland made significant progress toward solving environmental problems stemming from the Conowingo Dam. This progress includes EPA's recognition of the CWIP multi-state strategy. The CWIP involves hiring a third-party fundraiser, project coordinator, and Maryland's selection of a winning bidder to carry out a pilot project for dredging, beneficial reuse, and characterization of sediments behind the dam. Furthermore, the Hogan administration issued a comprehensive set of environmental protection requirements to Exelon Corporation, the owners of Conowingo Dam, as conditions for dam relicensing. These environmental protections, in combination with the CWIP, encompass Maryland's multi-pronged, multi-state, and public-private strategy to address water pollution impacts associated with the Conowingo Dam.

Maryland Environmental Service (MES), in coordination with MDE and the Governor's Bay Cabinet, selected the joint venture Northgate Dutra to carry out a pilot project. This pilot will test the quality of sediment throughout the Conowingo reservoir, as well as dredge and beneficially repurpose a small portion of the reservoir. The purpose of this test is to create a market for the cost-effective recovery of potentially useful material that now threatens water quality in the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay. The proposed pilot project schedule provides for the work to be substantially complete in 2019.

Concurrently, Exelon is seeking a 50-year federal license renewal for the dam's operation. Under federal law, and as part of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's relicensing process, Exelon is required

to obtain a Clean Water Act, Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the State for the continued operation of the dam. The certificate enforces the requirement that the facility's operation complies with State water quality standards.

In 2018, the Hogan administration issued a comprehensive environmental plan for the Conowingo Dam, Susquehanna River, and the Chesapeake Bay to drive major restoration and pollution prevention efforts upstream and downstream of the dam. The plan, contained in a Water Quality Certification issued by MDE, includes special conditions for the proposed dam relicensing. Relicensing requires the applicant, Exelon Generation Company LLC, to reduce water pollution that flows from the dam to the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay. The certification requires Exelon to improve conditions for aquatic life, including changes in its control of water flow from the dam, and installation of equipment to improve migration of fish to upstream spawning areas. Additionally, the certification requires Exelon to improve its management of debris that collects at the dam, including conducting a feasibility study on a solar-powered trash collection wheel.

This multi-pronged, multi-state, public-private strategy to address impacts to Chesapeake Bay from Conowingo Dam ensures all appropriate partners are working together to solve this challenging pollution problem. More information will be provided to the public once it is available.