

Susquehanna River Basin Commission Information Sheet

Susquehanna River Basin Low Flow Management Study - Assessing Aquatic Ecosystem Needs -



On December 4, 2008, the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) and the Baltimore District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) executed the Feasibility Cost-Sharing Agreement for the Susquehanna River Basin Low Flow Management Study (*agreement signing with SRBC commissioners and deputy director pictured at right*).

The purpose of this basinwide study is to assess aquatic ecosystem needs during low flow conditions and establish ecologically based goals and standards for low flow management.



Project Authorization

The feasibility study is authorized under Section 729 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, as amended in 2000 and 2007. Section 729 authorizes the USACE to assess the water resources needs of river basins and watersheds in the United States, including needs relating to ecosystem protection and restoration. Phase I efforts are expected to last about 27 months at a cost of more than \$380,000.

Project Partners

SRBC and USACE are working with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as the primary partner and with other key agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Project Goals

As stated by the USACE, the specific goal of the basinwide study is to “gain an understanding of how the range of flows affects the aquatic ecosystem within the subwatersheds of the Susquehanna River Basin,



with a particular emphasis on low flow conditions. The objective of the low flow management study is to provide essential information for use in considering long-term changes to flow release schemes for basin reservoirs, environmental restoration, flows to better sustain aquatic habitat, and conservation strategies to offset water demands.”

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Drought conditions in combination with current and projected water demands have the potential to impact the basin's natural ecosystems as well as the upper Chesapeake Bay. There is a clear need to assess and address low flow impacts. To address this need, TNC proposes to design and facilitate a process to set basin-wide ecosystem flow goals that can be implemented within the subwatersheds of the Susquehanna River.

Project Status

An interdisciplinary scientific team will be assembled to compile and interpret existing information from the basin, and similar systems, on ecological health in relation to water flow management. The process will culminate in a scientific workshop where relevant information and best professional judgment will be used to set ecosystem flow goals specific to the range of habitat conditions across the basin, taking into consideration drought flows, seasonal base flows, and some high flow conditions.

The results of the study will allow prioritization of low-flow mitigation needs and development of strategies to offset the growing demands and consumptive uses of water in the basin. This work under Section 729 of the Water Resources Development Act will provide essential information for use in considering long-term changes to flow release schemes for basin reservoirs, environmental restoration, flows to better sustain aquatic habitat and conservation strategies, and represents a critical, major step toward a comprehensive and viable low flow management scheme for the Susquehanna River Basin.