

# INFORMATION SHEET

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Susquehanna River Basin Commission • 1721 North Front Street • Harrisburg, PA 17102 • 717-238-0423 • www.srbc.net

## WHITNEY POINT LAKE ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION PROJECT

*"The commission shall have power to acquire, construct, operate, and control projects and facilities for the storage and release of waters for the regulation of flows and supplies of surface and ground waters of the basin, for the protection of public health, stream quality control, economic development, improvement of fisheries, recreation, dilution and abatement of pollution, the prevention of undue salinity, and other purposes."*

--Section 4.2(a) of the Susquehanna River Basin Compact, P.L. 91-575; 84 Stat. 1509 et seq.

### **Where is Whitney Point Lake and what are its current uses?**

Whitney Point Lake is a reservoir behind the Whitney Point Dam on the Otselic River near the Village of Whitney Point in Broome County, N.Y. The 95-foot high dam, which was operationally complete in 1942, was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) primarily for flood control purposes. The project also provides a 1,200-acre recreation and wildlife management lake for summer use. The lake is currently lowered 7 feet and reduced in size to 901 acres during the winter months. At spillway crest, the flood pool is about 3,340 acres in size and extends about 12 miles upstream into Cortland County.

### **Why use a portion of the Whitney Point Lake storage?**

During times of low stream flow, the aquatic ecosystem in and along the streams of the Susquehanna River Basin becomes stressed. Water released from upstream reservoirs (like Whitney Point Lake) during these low flow periods can help sustain the instream biota and their habitat. A study has indicated the Whitney Point Lake project has storage that can provide

these needed releases during low stream flow periods.

### **Which rivers would benefit from Whitney Point Lake releases and what would be the benefits?**

Releases from Whitney Point Lake during times of low flows would benefit many rivers downstream of the dam. The rivers receiving the benefits are (in downstream order):

- Otselic River
- Tioughnioga River
- Chenango River
- Susquehanna River

As a result of the releases, the health of the aquatic ecosystem would be maintained and have better recovery from drought events. The biomass would increase and macroinvertebrate production and richness would increase.

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### **How would the Whitney Point Lake be affected by the releases?**

Currently, the elevation of the lake is lowered each December by 7 feet. The proposed plan would maintain the summer pool elevation year-round. It has been determined that maintaining this elevation would strengthen the fish and aquatic vegetation in the pool. With the proposed plan in place, there would be periodic lake drawdowns. However, drawdowns of the lake during the recreation season would not reach maximum until Labor Day. There would be no drawdowns during the recreation season in 2 out of every 3 years; with drawdowns greater than 2 feet only once in 10 years. Maximum drawdown of about 8 feet would occur about once every 100 years, in late November.

### **Will the wetlands around the lake be affected?**

The constructed wetlands managed by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation will not be affected by the environmental restoration project. However, the study shows that the hydrology of the naturally-occurring wetlands at the upper end of the lake will be slightly affected by the proposed drawdowns. These wetlands have adapted to an annual drawdown of 7 feet during the winter and will be able to continue their ecological functions with a bi-annual drawdown of 0.23 foot during the growing season.

### **What additional benefits would be associated with the Whitney Point Environmental Restoration Project?**

In addition to providing a more stable pool elevation, there are improvements to the park's recreation facilities being proposed:

- a new water treatment facility will be constructed;
- beach and boat ramps will be improved and lengthened;
- park roads will be widened and paved;

- buildings such as restrooms and bathhouses will be improved;
- fish habitat structures will be constructed in the lake;
- lake vegetation will be improved;
- escape routes will be constructed for the fish in shallow areas; and
- waterfowl nesting and rearing island will be constructed.

### **Will this environmental restoration project affect flood control?**

The downstream flood damage reduction capabilities of the project will not be reduced because of the storage modification. The flood storage behind the dam will remain the same.

### **Who will pay for the project?**

The cost of the feasibility studies, design and construction of the improvements is shared by the federal government and SRBC, the non-federal sponsor for the project.

In 2005, under the leadership of New York State Senator Thomas Libous, the state approved a \$2 million appropriation to SRBC to cover the non-federal share of the project. The federal government must now authorize and appropriate its share of the costs before the environmental restoration project can proceed.