

PHILPOTT LAKE, VA (SECTION 216) STUDY
RECREATION WORK GROUP MEETING
NOVEMBER 5, 2007

DRAFT MINUTES

The Recreation Work Group met at the Philpott Reservoir Visitors Assistance Center on November 5, 2007. Committee members present were Kevin McDaniels, USACOE, Frank Snipes, USACOE, Mike Annand, USACOE, (by conf. phone), Benny Summerlin, Henry County, Scott Martin, Franklin County, David Rotenizer, Martinsville-Henry Co. Tourism, Katherine Mull, Dan River Basin Association, and Bob Munson, VDCR. Ben Lane, USACOE and Bud Laroche, DGIF, from the Project Management Team also attended.

After introductions of attendees, Kevin McDaniels gave a presentation on the operation of the Philpott hydro-electric generation operations and how power generation affected water quantity, temperature, and quality in the Smith River below the dam. Ben Lane explained the Section 216 study purpose and the way in which the study results would be used by the Corps and congress. He explained that the Recreation Workgroup would be focusing their analysis on the downstream affects of the project only. The committee is to identify any direct and indirect recreational, historic or cultural resources or opportunities along the Smith River -both on stream and off- that a change in project operation might impact. An analysis of these impacts would then be used to help shape the recommendations in the 216 study.

One of the critical points made in Kevin's presentation was that the water released from the reservoir during power generation is usually very cold, ranging from 36 to 48 degrees Fahrenheit. Contact recreation at the lower temperatures is very limited to persons with wet suits. Wade fishing, canoeing/kayaking, and swimming were all affected by water temperature. The further downstream from the dam, the warmer the water, but flow rates and frequency of releases affected the suitability of any one section of the river for the various recreational activities. When both generators are working at capacity, the water level is too high to fish. Likewise, when both are releasing, white water boating is best. When the normal flow by of 30 cfs is being released, the river is good for fishing but not for boating. With one generator producing, flow rates rise to 625 +/- cfs and fishing becomes more difficult while novice canoeing is good. The two generators now operating in the project are old and can not be operated at less than full capacity.

Bud Laroche mentioned that DGIF may be conducting a creel study of the Smith River below the dam in March of 2008. Information from this study can help determine the amount of fishing use the river gets now and perhaps provide data for extrapolating future use under varying conditions. Frank reminded everyone that survey questions specific to the 216 study should be reviewed up line and approved before use.

Committee members discussed the various activities that could be impacted by changes in the way the project is operated in the future. It was agreed that the river had great

potential for recreational use for fishing, canoeing, tubing, nature study, and wading or swimming. Contact recreation would be enhanced if the water temperature was warmer. Modifications to the operation would be required to warm the water temperature. Water enhanced recreation such as picnicking, hiking, camping, and nature study were all noted as key opportunities for the corridor along the Smith River. It was noted that local governments had plans for a greenway along the Smith River. A greenway corridor with a trail and a series of public access points along the Smith River could enhance river access for fishing and boating; improve water quality and wildlife habitat through the establishment and maintenance of a functioning riparian buffer, encourage eco-tourism, and stimulate appreciation for the river and the environment. The river should also be accessible to school groups and persons with disabilities. A river corridor management plan was suggested. It was also suggested that a blueway be developed on the river.

It was noted that operation of the Philpott project needed to be predictable so that businesses would know that there would be enough days of suitable releases to support their business. For fishing guides lower releases were preferred while for liveries a higher flow rate would be preferred. Knowing when the project was generating power and at what release rate were determined to be key information for trip planning. A suggestion was made to consider staggered alternate weekend releases with one weekend being for boaters while the next weekend would be for fishermen.

It was noted that the Natural Resource Committee was studying the effects of the project on trout, Roanoke logperch, and the biological health of the river. It was suggested that if habitat improvements were needed, that they be designed to enhance recreation also.

The committee agreed that they would develop a scope of work that would identify all of the recreational, historic, and cultural resources along the Smith River that could be impacted by a change in operation of the project. The study area was defined to be from the Philpott dam to the confluence with the Dan River. It was agreed that much of the information needed can be gathered by staff at DCR, DGIF, the Corps, local governments, or by local organizations such as the Dan River Basin Association, Trout Unlimited, and the Martinsville-Henry County Trails organization. Analysis of the information will be done by the Recreation Study Committee members and Corps planning staff.

Scott Martin agreed to contact river paddling groups to solicit information on frequency and numbers of paddlers using the Smith River.

Katherine Mull agreed to check with her membership and contacts for information about the types of uses and frequency of use.

Kevin will contact Al Kittridge about fishing the Smith River. Specific information about impacts of release rates on each stretch of the river and how it is accessed and fished is of interest. Numbers of fishermen and the days of the week when they fish should be determined. The local Trout Unlimited chapter will also be questioned.

Bud will check DGIF records to see what information they have about fishing use of the river in the study area. The results of the creel study will also be available for use once it has been completed.

Bob will look at the findings from the 2006 Virginia Outdoors Survey to determine recreational demand for the region and to try to extrapolate those findings to this project area.

One question that was asked is “how long does it take for a slug of water from the generator to reach each stretch downstream.”

Another question that we should try to answer is to determine the best strategy for taking advantage of the high quality cold water fishery the dam offers.

If the Corps decides at some future date to replace the generators, they should be capable of operating over a wide range of flow rates and they should be able to mix water from various levels in the lake to control the temperature of the releases.

It was agreed that Bob would do a draft set of minutes and distribute to the committee for review and comment. Then a draft scope of work will be prepared and distributed to the committee for comment. The scope of work should be completed by the end of November.