

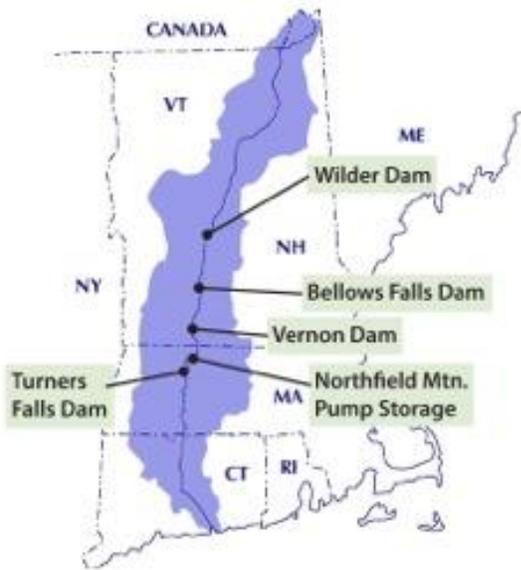


Clean water. Healthy habitat. Thriving communities.

**Connecticut River
Conservancy**

Take Action
for Your Rivers

April 2022: Hydropower Updates



This month's email is long – but we promise you'll want to read to the end!

Quick Glance

We've got some good news:

In Massachusetts, river recreation access and whitewater flow are looking good in the initial agreements with FirstLight Power.

We've got some not-so-good news:

Both the fish passage AND the river flow plans FirstLight Power has proposed get a solid thumbs down from CRC. And did you hear about the oil spill at FirstLight Power's dam in Turners Falls?

In Vermont and New Hampshire, the Great River Hydro (GRH) relicensing process continues to be delayed.

And a little bit of both:

Andrea Donlon is heading out to new adventures while passing the River Steward torch (including hydro advocacy!) to our own Kelsey Wentling.

Remember: CRC River Stewards Kathy, Kelsey, and Andrea are available to update your local town board or interested group on the relicensing process and CRC's concerns about the river. It is vital that community members stay engaged as we come into this final stretch of a once-in-a-lifetime relicensing process!

Updates on FirstLight Power Facilities in MA

Turners Falls Dam & Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage

First, the good news!

A proposal for **Whitewater Boating Releases and Recreation** improvements has been agreed upon. How did this happen? We worked hard, with many community members and partners, to create and get a seat at the bargaining table. FirstLight Power listened. **Together, we created some great recreational improvements - after negotiating strongly.**

On February 28, FirstLight Power filed an initial agreement to address Whitewater Boating Releases and Recreation Improvements. ([Click here](#) for the detailed document).

Some great improvements have been proposed: an improved ADA-accessible dock at Northfield, the addition of trails on conserved land, mountain biking trails, camping sites, pocket parks, conservation of climbing ledges, new boat access on the Miller's River at Cabot Camp and at Unity Park in Turners Falls, plus a few smaller improvements.

These would all be in place within 5 years of the license being reissued. In addition to the recreation improvements, the whitewater boating releases will provide recreational whitewater flows for many weekends between July and October. CRC was not involved directly in the whitewater negotiations, but we do support it.

CRC has been a voice in bringing community needs for access to a healthy river to the negotiations table and we aren't done yet!

And now, the not-so-good news.

CRC simply cannot support the proposed initial agreements on two crucial topics: fish passage and river flows. FirstLight Power filed these proposals on March 18 ([Click here](#) for the detailed document).

There are some good changes being proposed in these agreements. We do support changes in water flow at the Cabot generating station, which will offer some improvement in river health below the power canal. We also support the new releases of water at the Turners Falls Dam during the fish migration season.

So what's wrong?

- FirstLight Power is proposing **unnecessarily lengthy timeframes** to install fish passage projects and a barrier net at Northfield Mountain.
- **Nothing** has been agreed upon to address impacts from Northfield Mountain beyond a minimally helpful barrier net and a fund for remedying impacts to fish eggs. In fact, this agreement allows FirstLight to use a **larger operating range** in the upper reservoir which will **increase negative impacts on flow, fish habitat and passage, and erosion.**
- **There is nothing in place to prevent** FirstLight Power from dewatering parts of Barton Cove. Last summer, excessive pumping at Northfield Mountain left boats stranded.
- **Simply put, the flow is too low.** To meet the baseline of water quality standards, water flow needs to be increased in summer, fall, and winter from the Turners Falls dam to support healthy aquatic life and through-paddling in the river.

Here is what we know: the now years-long delay in the relicensing process and in the negotiation of agreements are no good for the river, the fish, the watershed, or the community. The delay has been good in one notable way: in helping FirstLight Power generate more money with limited accountability.

A few things to keep in mind:

- No one owns the river.
- First Light Power is an important community partner.

- Local, state, and federal folks are working hard to ensure a smart, equitable, and sustainable relicensing process.
- FirstLight Power can afford to do this work – as soon as the plans are designed and permitted in the relicensing process. The profits FirstLight Power has generated in these staggering delays can be applied to offset the revenue impacts of the changes proposed for a healthy river and watershed. FirstLight Power’s owner is PSP Investments, a multi-national, sophisticated investment firm cognizant of anticipated costs for healthy use of resources – and of utilizing delay tactics for their benefit.

FirstLight Power has indicated that it will file a final, comprehensive proposed relicensing agreement this summer. The federal agency that will evaluate the proposal (the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, or FERC) will likely hold off on its next step until after that agreement proposal is filed. It is after that stage that the state will be involved in evaluating the relicensing agreement.

This time-consuming process is long past time for resolution. Our voices – **your voice** – will make a difference in achieving healthy, equitable, and clean relicensing guidelines. What does that mean? **Scroll down for how to stay involved.**

Speaking of FirstLight, did you hear about the months-long oil leak at the Turners Fall dam?

The Montague Reporter has a good write up. [Click here](#) to read along. While we acknowledge that this site has challenging conditions in the winter, once again FirstLight Power showed a lack of proactive engagement with keeping the river healthy – a responsibility owed not just to the river, but to all in the watershed.

Great River Hydro Facilities in VT & NH

Wilder, Bellows Falls, and Vernon Dams

The Great River Hydro (GRH) relicensing process continues to be delayed with settlement discussions. Sound familiar?

GRH submitted a letter to FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) in February asking for the federal go-ahead for the Wilder, Bellows Falls, and Vernon projects. GRH indicated that they have been engaged in discussions to

address healthy fish passages with US Fish and Wildlife Service, NH Fish & Game, and VT Fish & Wildlife. They stated anticipating an agreement by the end of February. This has not yet happened.

GRH also indicated that once they file the agreement on fish passage, “there will be no outstanding information necessary for the Commission to perform its environmental analysis” of their projects, and that the federal commission should feel free to go ahead with the next steps.

CRC disagrees – there **absolutely** needs to be more information provided to address recreation concerns. There is also a need for GRH to be proactive and responsive to landowner’s concerns for the potential of operational changes not successfully mitigating continued land erosion along the river.

It seems likely that FERC will wait to move forward until further discussions have been completed. FERC will be required to consider the cumulative impact of the hydro-relicensing under their Environmental Analysis. This means FERC needs to have complete information regarding the scope of what will be provided for mitigation under the new license. We will keep you informed and let you know next steps as they evolve. **Stay tuned!**

Passing the torch to a new hydro advocate!

In a very exciting move for her - and very sad for us - Andrea Donlon is moving to a Senior Land Use and Natural Resource Planner position at the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG). We are very grateful for Andrea’s 18-year legacy at CRC and that her work will continue to intersect with ours. FRCOG is a strong partner of CRC and an active stakeholder in the hydropower relicensing process. Andrea will be staying on two days a week until June 30th when she will go full time at FRCOG.

Fortunately, Kelsey Wentling, who has been CRC’s Connecticut River Steward for 3 years is stepping up to take over this role as our new MA River Steward. Kelsey has been tracking the relicensing from her downstream vantage point for years and is eager to migrate upstream to bring her expertise to this effort. Welcome to MA, Kelsey!



You've read this far. Wonder what YOU can do?

There's no simple answer right now (believe us, we hate to deliver this news). **We – and the health of the river for the next 30 to 50 years – need you to stay involved!** CRC continues to keep tabs on and be involved in the relicensing process.

There are a few things you can do right now to keep this conversation alive:

- Let your legislators know you are paying attention and care about this process
- Do the same with your local administration
- Talk it up – let your community know what's going on and share why this tangled process matters for all of us
- Write a letter to the editor – keep letting the media know hydro relicensing is important to follow
- Forward this newsletter to someone who would be glad to learn more

Most importantly, stay in touch. We will keep you informed. We are looking forward to the official public comment stage, where you can voice your concerns and cares directly. Once the process has arrived at that stage, CRC will be sure to let you know.

Need a refresh about hydropower?

Five hydropower facilities along the Connecticut River are up for relicensing. The guidelines established now in the relicensing process will last for the next 30-50 years and will impact hundreds of miles of the Connecticut River. FirstLight Power, owner of the Turners Falls Dam and Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage in MA, and Great River Hydro, owner of the Wilder, Bellows Falls, and Vernon Dams in VT and NH continue to negotiate – and delay – the relicensing. Remember: our voices – **your voice** – will make a difference in achieving healthy, equitable, and clean relicensing guidelines. Check out our [Watchdogging Hydropower](#) page for more background info.

Additional Resources

Full License Applications submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in December 2020:

- **Great River Hydro**: Open “80 - Amended Final License Application” folder. Most information is in “Exhibit E.”
- **FirstLight Power**: The Executive Summary is a concise summary of what the application package includes, although CRC believes the total costs associated with their proposed environmental measures are inflated. (NOTE: Ongoing settlement negotiations may result in different proposed measures than those initially submitted.)

You can learn by exploring our videos:

Details of the FirstLight Power application by viewing our 2021 LiveStream virtual presentation.

Details of the Great River Hydro application by viewing our 2021 LiveStream virtual presentation.

Some of our concerns about **riverbank erosion**.

Some of our concerns about **recreation**.

If you have any questions or comments, please be in touch:



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