



March 21, 2011

Dear Friends:

I'm writing to share some very exciting news and to, once again, ask for your help.

For the first time ever, a coalition of key conservation groups has formed to speak with one voice on behalf of the Delaware Watershed. We are uniting behind a proposal that would replace the flawed plan that now governs water releases from New York City-owned reservoirs: the infamous Flexible Flow Management Program (FFMP), due to expire (finally and mercifully) on June 1.

The Delaware Watershed Conservation Coalition (DWCC), which grew out of an historic meeting last November, was formally introduced in March. Coalition members have agreed to support the fundamentals of the Joint Fishery White Paper as a one-year alternative to the Flexible Flow plan. The White Paper was produced last year by the New York Department of Environmental Conservation and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission as an alternative to the FFMP.

The White Paper is not perfect. But it's much better than the inadequate, irrational yo-yo releases our precious rivers have experienced under the FFMP. Here is what a few of our allies had to say about the White Paper plan:

"Though it's imperfect, the White Paper is a good starting point for improved resource management for the coming year," said Stephen Lieb of Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, a New York City-based angling organization that is one of the coalition groups.

Glenn Erikson of the Federation of Fly Fishers, another venerable coalition member, said the increased flow of 20 cubic feet per second recommended in the White Paper for fall and winter would have a positive impact. Speaking about the East Branch, he said the increase would diminish the likelihood of "anchor ice" during winter and would help keep the river cooler in the early fall, when limited flow can cause dangerous temperature spikes.

Like Lieb, Erikson said the plan is not perfect - for example, flow levels could decrease in early September. "This is a real problem," he said, adding that a proposal that resolves that glitch "should be closely considered."

"I believe that improving the other rivers is important, but the East Branch already took a hit when the current flow-management plan was implemented, and I would hate to see it take another," Lieb said.

Before I delve into the background of the new coalition, let me get to the second part of the purpose of this letter: your help.

Even though the White Paper is based on solid science and was created by two government agencies responsible for the health and well-being of the rivers, its approval as the official flow plan is far from assured. Those of us who have observed the mysterious methods of the Delaware River Basin Commission and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection over the years understand that nothing is certain when it comes to water issues.

So we need public support, and we need it now. We are barely two months away from the expiration of the FFMP, so the timing is critical.

We ask that individuals or groups join us in supporting the White Paper plan. It is by far the best choice currently available to replace the FFMP, and it would make a real difference in keeping our ecosystem, habitat and fishery alive. Please contact me at [catskilldan@mac.com](mailto:catskilldan@mac.com) to join us or for information on how you can help. We are open to all suggestions, including petitions, chain emails, letters to the editor and DRBC commission members, and personal contacts with politicians.

And now some background on the new Delaware Watershed Conservation Coalition. I'm pleased to say that the members now include Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Trout Unlimited National, New Jersey State Council of Trout Unlimited, New York State Council of Trout Unlimited, Pennsylvania State Council of Trout Unlimited, Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, the Federation of Fly Fishers and Wild Trout Flyrodders. Other groups are expected to join us, and a number of government entities that cannot publicly acknowledge their support are pulling for us behind the scenes.

I asked leaders of some of the coalition partners to share their thoughts about this effort. Here are a few responses:

"The conservation community encompasses a diverse set of organizations, though we share common goals," said Lieb of the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers. "It is important that decision-makers understand that we have come together on this issue."

"I feel there are two primary benefits," said Erikson of the Federation of Fly Fishers. "First is the opportunity for increased discussion between all of us on how we can find the best route to our shared goal, while at the same time respecting the diversity of opinion among us. Second is the potential for added impact if we can truly learn to speak with one voice (without quarreling). I don't believe I have to add how closely related these two are."

The power of the coalition is already clear. We were publicly credited with prompting the March 8 Regulated Flow Advisory Committee meeting.

"We wouldn't be here today discussing any of this if it wasn't for all of you getting together to make this happen," said Joe Miri of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and former chair of the committee.

As many of you know, the various groups that advocate on behalf of the Delaware River system have not always agreed on everything. Advocates do not tend to be shy people, and perhaps we have spent too much time and energy focused on our differences rather than our common goals.

At the encouragement of two of our friends, Pete Grannis, former commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and John Arway, executive director for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, we convened a meeting of more than 30 leaders of the various conservation groups last November, after most fly-rodders had put away their gear for the season.

The meeting, called "Water, Water Everywhere: The Future of the Upper Delaware River System," was held at the Delaware River Club in Starlight, Pa. We had one theme on the agenda: How do we get more cold, clean water in our local rivers? Friends of the Upper Delaware River, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting and preserving the ecosystem and cold water fishery of the Upper Delaware system, served as

host. In addition to the coalition members named above, participants included representatives from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the National Park Service, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, New York DEC, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Fish and Wildlife Services, Upper Delaware Council, the U.S. Geological Service, Columbia University and a number of local river guides.

A meeting like this had never happened before, and it was long overdue. We wanted to get as many of the key conservation groups as we could in one room to flush out our differences, capitalize on where we agree, and try to create a single, unified voice that could be used to help save this world-class fishery and bring some much-deserved attention to the area.

The meeting was costly, at \$7,000, and complicated to organize. But it was money and time well spent. The session was led by a professional facilitator, Alicia Korten, of Washington, D.C., who was brought in to ensure an effective exchange with a neutral moderator. Korten pre-interviewed many of the players and researched the issues thoroughly, including a review of the 1954 Supreme Court Decree that defines the legal water rights and a careful look at the Flexible Flow Management Program. Participants were locked in the meeting room for 10 hours, even voting to work through lunch. Everyone wanted to take advantage of our precious time discussing a topic they are all very passionate about.

Presentations outlined release plans and legal options. Many topics were discussed openly that had not been touched on in any prior public forum. I believe a new trust was established between certain groups that had been divided by old fissures. Momentum began to build for the united groups to finally achieve their common goal: more water. When the meeting was adjourned and doors unlocked, the group went outside for some much-welcomed fresh air. Outside the lodge in a maple tree, we had hung an 8' x 10' canvas painting of an American flag with a leaping trout painted where the stars would normally be. The bottom of the canvas bore the words, "Give Us Water or Give Us Death." A group photo was taken in front of the flag.

Five months after the "Water, Water" meeting, and after numerous conference calls, emails and many meetings (both private and public), we have a new coalition. We also have an opportunity to strike real change by supporting a common-sense alternative to the FFMP.

Please join us in the fight and pledge your support for the Joint Fisheries White Paper. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Dan Plummer

FUDR Board Chairman