



Friends of Green River Reservoir

Spring 2022 Newsletter

The Future of Green River Reservoir

Summary of the Recent Webinar

By Eric Nuse with Emma Marvin

On May 10th the Friends of Green River Reservoir and The Nature Conservancy hosted a landmark webinar on the history and future of the Green River Reservoir (GRR) and State Park. Speakers on the panel included some of the top conservation and environmental leaders in Vermont: Julie Moore, Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR); Heather Furman, Vermont Director of The Nature Conservancy (TNC); Anthony Iarrapino, Friends Special Counsel; Michael Snyder, Commissioner of VT Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR); Jon Groveman, Policy and Water Program Director of the VT Natural Resources Council (VNRC); and our own Sally Laughlin, President of the Friends of Green River Reservoir (Friends).

Milford Cushman, co-founder of the Friends, kicked off the evening with a quick look at the history of the Reservoir, the founding of the State Park and the role that the Friends, TNC and VNRC played in funding and setting conservation easements on the land. He also pointed out the positive role that Morrisville Water and Light (MWL) has played by not allowing development around the reservoir, keeping it motorboat free and managing the water levels to promote loon nesting success.

Sally and Milford both pointed to the mission of the Friends: “...dedicated to educating and acting to protect the wilderness-like character and wildlife habitat of Green River Reservoir State Park while preserving its heritage and historical uses for future generations.”

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The subject then moved to what has happened since MWL's Federal Energy Relicensing Commission (FERC) license for hydro production on their four dams expired in 2015. The very condensed version is that the science and knowledge of what is needed to have quality water to sustain fisheries and wildlife habitat has changed considerably since MWL was issued their first license in 1981. It became apparent early on that the old way of generating power was not up to modern standards, especially as it applied to winter drawdowns and minimum flow in the Green River below the dam. MWL felt that they would lose money if they had to comply with the Clean

Water Act, so they have pulled every legal lever within reach. Their primary argument is that power generation is an existing use and therefore the economics of running the hydro facility should be considered in the relicensing process. After years of legal wrangling, courts all the way up to the Vermont Supreme Court agreed with ANR, VNRC, and others that economics are not considered during this part of the relicensing process. The courts also confirmed that the State water scientists and biologists properly applied the results of their studies to the licensing requirements. When asked about balancing green energy such as hydro with immediate environmental issues, Secretary Moore said: *The belief is that managing reservoir water levels similar to a natural lake will produce less green energy, but that is balanced by improved habitat quality for fish and wildlife.* Director Furman added that there can be ecological biological impacts from hydro... there are always tradeoffs and we need to be eyes wide open around our energy sources.

These rulings have prompted MWL to threaten to decommission the Green River facility and possibly drain the reservoir. Needless to say, this is very upsetting to nearly everyone. The reservoir and Park are considered the jewel of Vermont's State Park system and very important to the local economy. Commissioner Snyder pointed out that park visitation is up 200% since 2001 with over 12,000 campers last year, 80% of them being Vermonters.

The reservoir is one of the very few wilderness-like bodies of water with a motorboat ban in Vermont. "The idea of a Friends of Green River Mudflats is revolting," said Sally Laughlin. She reiterated that the mission of the Friends is to preserve GRR and its environmental integrity.

Anthony Iarrapino pointed out that although decommissioning can be scary (this is not a one-size-fits-all approach), and numerous options are available, ranging from totally removing the dam to keeping the dam but removing the hydro equipment and increasing the amount of water that moves through the dam.

MWL has also contended that if they comply with the Clean Water Standards the dam will become unsafe. Based on this contention FERC has ordered them to conduct an in-depth dam safety study. Multiple deadlines have passed and this has not been done. The latest deadline to submit the safety study to FERC was May 2022. MWL is still operating on the old 1981 license, which is good for their bottom line but not good for the environment because they are not meeting minimum standards for clean water. Anthony noted that FERC is starting to lose patience with MWL.

If MWL decides to go the decommissioning route they must notify all relevant agencies and the public on the approach they propose and then they must conduct all reasonable studies. Their proposal must account for accommodating existing uses such as boating, outdoor recreation and fishing. If this happens, the Friends anticipate becoming a formal "intervener" party to the proceedings. Currently, we have participated in FERC meetings informally as members of the general public.

Anthony also pointed out that decommissioning will not be any less expensive for ratepayers and will encompass lots of costs ahead with no return (in the form of generated electricity) in the future. The other takeaway is that decommissioning, if it occurs, will not happen in the near term.

Julie Moore pointed out that the Legislature this year appropriated

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\$350,000 to study the the current condition and anticipated costs of operating and, if necessary, upgrading the dam in the future. ANR is working with MWL to share resources with MWL to the extent that the State's studies generate information that FERC expects to see from MWL. Secretary Moore made clear, however, that MWL remains independently responsible to FERC to produce its own studies that meet FERC's standards. She expects the study to be completed in late 2023, well after MWL's study is due to FERC. The results will guide future decisions by the State on a possible buyout of the dam or other actions.

Heather Furman pointed out that TNC holds the conservation easement on the Park's land, and that this is legally enforceable far into the future. Commissioner Snyder reiterated that this easement drives the Park management and planning.

Commissioner Snyder ended the webinar with thanks to all who pulled the webinar together: the Friends, TNC and Tom Rogers, Friends Board Member and TNC staffer who or-

ganized and moderated the webinar. "Thanks for being good friends of Green River Reservoir. The Friends are part of the secret sauce." This was seconded by President Laughlin with a big thanks to panel members and everyone who tuned in.

It was clear from the panel members and the 150 folks who attended the event that the reservoir is much loved, and that a way will be figured out to keep it healthy and whole into the

future. You can help by staying involved and up to date on developments through the Friends newsletters and on our web site.

Recruiting new members among your friends and fellow paddlers will also help the cause.

A link to the recording of the webinar is now available on the FGRR website.

<http://www.fgrrvt.org/news-events>

Friend of Green River Reservoir Annual Membership Meeting by Zoom

Thursday 28 July 2022, at 7:00 pm.

Annual Meeting by Zoom to elect Board Members, review the accomplishments of the past year, and conduct any necessary business.

Please email FGRR at webmaster@fgrrvt.org with subject **Join the Annual Meeting** for the Zoom link to join the meeting.

*Proposed change to Bylaws: increase the number of Board members to 13 (from 11). **The FGRR Board of Directors proposes to the Annual Meeting of the FGRR Membership this change in our Bylaws:***

Article IV Board of Directors, Section 4.1. Term

The affairs of the Corporation shall be managed by a Board of Directors, of not less than 5 or more than **++ 13** Directors.



FGRR Board Annual Update Meeting with VT Dept of Forest Parks and Recreation

Nick Caputo, the new Vermont Northeast Parks Regional Manager, met with the FGRR Board to give a summary of the 2021 GRRSP season. Accompanying him was John Medose, VFPR. Here are some highlights:

Covid Updates (Lessons learned and Planning for the future):

Procedures in 2021 were much easier than in 2020. Overall GRRSP is easier to manage as it relates to pandemic because it is almost all outdoors, there are fewer shared pieces of equipment, and generally less developed facilities. 2022 will likely be similar to 2021 in terms of management.

Staffing: Ross Bryant will be returning as Park Director, along with three of last year's staff. An additional position will be added for 2022, as more staff is needed to support the parking issues and additional oversight at Zack Woods. Nick said the greatest challenge is finding seasonal staff. Though with four returning staff, the Park will be able to capitalize on the investments of training (it becomes cumulative and can be passed on).

Visitor Attendance was up!

Day use increased 2% and camping went up 27% in 2021 from 2020.

Attendance (Users)

Day use: 2020–6,086; 2021–6,219

Camping: 2020–9,198; 2021–12,312

Parking: The Town of Hyde Park had a Municipal Planning grant last summer, to look at parking issues at GRSP. The amount of parking available was planned to keep visitor numbers at a controlled level – FGRR was very much involved in that planning, and it has worked well.

When the lots are full, visitors must wait until someone leaves before

entering. How to inform people of that before they drive all the way up there is the issue. FPR is investigating the feasibility of electronic signage on Garfield Road. FPR will continue to use the Twitter account and to encourage folks to check it for parking and access information and cancellation of campsites/vacancies. More no parking signs will go up along the Dam Access Road – parking is not allowed along that road. Setting aside designated parking spaces for campers has worked well.

Park Charges: Price increases (1) budget gap exists that needs to be closed, (2) staffing increases (all staff received increases). Staffing was about \$80,000 (share of fulltime, part time, benefits and health insurance). This coming year in seasonal staffing the park will be at over \$100,000.

Change: one-night reservations can be made online now for Monday through Thursdays—that's a big change.

Camping Fees: Regular fees at Green River will be collected in the same way as at other parks. The new fees will start in mid-June and all existing reservations will be honored.:

- \$19 Standard
- \$21 Prime Site – this is going up to \$22 (all Green River sites are Prime. Out of State will now cost \$30 per night. Up to 4 people and then there is a fee per person after that). 12 People will now cost \$70.
- Pet Fee went up to \$2
- Day Use Fees: \$5 adult day use fees; \$2 kids

Zack Woods: FPR is not ready to start charging for Zack Woods. A new computer set up is needed so that

information can be collected.

MWL Dam: The State is aware of how much GRRSP is loved. The Governor's inclusion of the Dam Safety Study in his budget is an important step in getting to resolution.

Ethical Forging: The policy is the same and it is used across all State lands. You can't dig plants, but you can harvest fruiting bodies. No commercial harvesting is allowed.

Infrastructure: (1) Gate at camper parking lot; (2) Staff campsite (so that staff can have more of a presence particularly overnight – off of the lower parking area (not visible from water); (3) Zack Woods site 4 to block that area off and then place a couple of walk-in sites; (4) ADA campsites; (5) ADA Board Walk; (6) Accessible ramp and dock; (7) Solar battery storage

Customer Comments: 50% were visitors who come once per year. 3% were weekly. 97% have used other parks. 74% are return campers. Overall, 3.9 out of 4 rating. The lowest rated item was a 3.4 was for ease of booking. The highest rated value, appearance, helpfulness of staff, ease of check-in.

Other Items:

- Kiosk is up at Zack Woods.
- Bear/Critter Lockers: \$7500 in budget which will get about 3. Looking for a product with a different latching mechanism. There are lockers at Site # 29 to 34 and 10 and 11. Action...get the cost to the Friends and the design that has been selected.
- GRRSP will again offer FGRR merchandise for sale.
- Fishing pole project loan can go ahead again.



Susan Bulmer Retires from VT FPR

A True Friend of Green River Reservoir

By Tom Kastner

On a snowy Friday in early February, four intrepid FGRR board members made the trip to Seyon Lodge in Groton to attend a gathering to honor Susan Bulmer, Vermont Northeast Parks Regional Manager, for her 30 years of service with the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Agency of Natural Resources. Also attending were many colleagues who praised her style and dedication to a career in natural resource management and outdoor recreation. She has had a huge impact on the VT State Parks and the FGRR board will miss working with her. We have hosted her for an annual meeting every year since the founding of the GRRSP in order to coordinate the

many projects accomplished at GRR State Park. In appreciation, the Board made her an honorary board member and presented her with a Ron Kelley loon photo and a Certificate of Appreciation. We wish her every happiness in her well-deserved retirement.

AT RIGHT: FGRR board Vice President Milford Cushman with Susan Bulmer holding her Certificate of Appreciation

BELOW: FGRR board members (L-R) Terri Gregory, Tom Kastner, Bill Bartlett, Milford Cushman with Susan Bulmer holding Ron Kelley's photo.



PHOTOS BY TOM KASTNER





FGRR ANNUAL LECTURE BY ZOOM

Bees of Vermont

Spencer Harvey, Vermont Center for Ecostudies,
project coordinator for the Vermont Wild Bee Atlas

Friday, November 4, 2022 • 7:00 PM

CONTACT FGRR FOR ZOOM LINK

Bees are intimately tied to flowers by their use of pollen as a protein source, making them the most important pollinator taxon in many regions. Ongoing threats to managed, non-native Western Honey Bees (*Apis mellifera*) have raised public awareness of the importance of bees to human wellbeing, and there is concern that some of the approximately 4,000 bee species in the United States may also be declining. Vermont is estimated to have about 350 species of wild bees. The Vermont Wild Bee Survey represents the first step in assessing bee populations across Vermont.



More photos at VCE website:

<https://vtcostudies.org/blog/study-reveals-striking-decline-of-vermonts-bumble-bees/>

A Yellow-banded Bumble Bee (*Bombus terricola*)
nectaring Joe-pye Weed. © K.P. McFarland

