

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION**

<b>Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Project New York Power Authority</b>	<b>FERC Project No. 2685</b>
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**AMERICAN WHITEWATER’S COMMENTS IN RESPONSE TO THE REVISED STUDY PLAN  
FILED BY NEW YORK POWER AUTHORITY FOR THE BLENHEIM-GILBOA PUMPED  
STORAGE PROJECT, FERC PROJECT NO. 2685**

(Submitted January 28, 2015)

American Whitewater submits these comments to FERC in response to the Revised Study Plan for the Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Project operated by New York Power Authority (“NYPA” or “Licensee”). Our organization has previously submitted comments in response to the Proposed Study Plan (Accession No. 20141217-5087) asking the licensee to study the impact of its hydroelectric operations on the recreational opportunities available to non-motorized boaters in the project area, and we incorporate our previously submitted comments by reference. We submit these additional comments to address the deficiencies in the Licensee’s Revised Study Plan and respectfully request that FERC direct the Licensee to study the impact of the Licensee current mode of operation on recreational boating opportunities on the Schoharie River.

**General Comments**

Notwithstanding comments previously submitted by American Whitewater and the town boards of Middleburgh and Fulton, NYPA continues in its refusal to study the demand for whitewater boating below the Lower Dam, and refuses to explore whether whitewater boating opportunities would be available under alternate modes of operation. We request that FERC direct the Licensee to conduct a desktop analysis in order to study the feasibility of whitewater boating below the Lower Dam under

various scenarios. If the desktop analysis demonstrates that sufficient flows could be made available to provide scheduled releases from the Lower Dam under a different mode of operation, FERC should then require the Licensee to conduct a full whitewater boating study in a stepwise, or phased, manner following accepted practices outlined by Whittaker et al. (1993, 2005).

NYPA, however, argues that there is no mode of operation under which it could provide scheduled whitewater boating opportunities, stating that it has “no appreciable storage capacity.” We disagree. The Lower Reservoir has a total storage capacity of 16,167 acre-feet according to the PAD (PAD, p. 2). Providing a six-hour release of 1000 cfs above inflows would result in a loss of 495.6 acre-ft., or approximately 3 percent of the total storage capacity of the Lower Reservoir. The Licensee also has an additional 2,627 acre-ft. of additional storage in the Upper Reservoir that could be utilized for recreational releases. The Licensee’s out-of-hand dismissal of the notion that recreational releases cannot be provided because it lacks any appreciable storage capacity is plainly misleading and the Licensee should be required to study alternate modes of operation.

Instead, NYPA’s makes conclusory statements based solely on its current mode of operation rather than exploring alternative store-and-release modes. Furthermore, the Licensee could explore the feasibility of entering into an agreement with the New York DEP that operates the Gilboa Dam five miles upstream from the project in order to provide additional flows through the floodgates or tunnel bypass currently being installed as part of the Gilboa Dam Reconstruction. Given that the project has a significant impact on biological and recreational values on the Schoharie River in that it utilizes the natural river channel as storage for its power generation activities, it has an obligation under the Federal Power Act to explore alternative modes of operation in order to mitigate those impacts.

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## Specific Comments

### **2.4 RECREATION USE/USER CONTACT STUDY AND ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS THE PROJECT HAS ON RECREATION USE**

NYPA persists in its unwillingness to study the demand for whitewater boating below the Lower Dam. Annual events such as the Esopus Whitewater Funfest held in June and the Esopus Slalom held in October demonstrate substantial interest in whitewater boating in the area, and comments previously submitted by the town boards of Middleburgh and Fulton further support our contention that there would be significant public interest in whitewater boating if the Licensee provided scheduled releases. Nevertheless, the Licensee states that it is unwilling to survey whitewater boaters at the annual events on the Esopus or make any attempt whatsoever to determine the public demand for use of this potential resource. Instead, NYPA includes a question on its Proposed Recreation User Survey asking non-whitewater boaters, who have visited the project area for some other purpose, about their interest in whitewater boating on this section of the river when no scheduled releases are provided. This meaningless exercise will yield no useful data on the extent of the demand for whitewater boating below the Lower Dam. In the absence of any meaningful study of this issue, demand for whitewater boating should be presumed when sufficient and predictable flows are provided, and NYPA should not be able to later assert that there is insufficient demand for whitewater boating in and below the project area.

The Licensee also has no interest in studying the extent to which the inadequacy of its recreational facilities deters recreational use, and has no plans to study whether improvements in these facilities might provide opportunities for additional recreational use. For example, the lack of adequate canoe portages and campsites might deter through paddling along the Schoharie River. Surveying existing recreational users on their interest in through paddling would be unlikely to yield meaningful data. FERC should require NYPA to survey the community to determine whether the lack of adequate

facilities serves as a deterrent to recreational use in the project area. The Licensee should engage with conservation and recreation organizations in the area that can reach out to their membership as part of this assessment. NYPA should work with local, regional and national boating organizations including American Whitewater, Appalachian Mountain Club, the Kayak and Canoe Club of New York, and the Adirondack Mountain Club to design user contact surveys and reach out to their respective memberships to better assess demand for recreation in the project boundary and downstream.

The Licensee's basis for declining to study demand or the adequacy of its facilities for whitewater boating is premised on the faulty assumption that whitewater boating could not be enhanced under a different mode of operation. Given the small impact of a scheduled release on reservoir storage, the additional storage capacity in the Upper Reservoir and the possibility of negotiating an agreement with the New York DEP for releases from the Gilboa Dam, FERC should require the Licensee to perform a study to determine whether whitewater boating is feasible under another mode of operation.

Once the Licensee determines that scheduled water releases could be provided under either current or alternate modes of operation, the Licensee should proceed with a whitewater boating evaluation. As described in our prior comments in response to the Preliminary Study Proposal, the Licensee should seek to:

- identify recreational paddling opportunities in the project boundary and downriver in order to determine a full range of boating opportunities available under different modes of operation;
- describe flow-quality relationships and identify acceptable and optimal ranges for boating using various craft;
- describe potential effects of operations and identify boater's sensitivity to current operations and alternate flow regimes;
- broadly characterize recreational paddling-relevant hydrology of the existing operating regime, and qualitatively describe the relationship between paddling opportunities and project operations;
- determine whether current or future demand exists for whitewater boating within the context of regional opportunities and those provided through current operation;
- determine the number of days flows for whitewater boating are available under the projects'

current operation;

- identify resource needs (e.g., aquatic habitat) and competing recreational uses (e.g., canoeing, climbing, or fishing) that are or would be affected by flows suitable for whitewater boating;
- identify public access obstacles; and,
- characterize effects on current project operations associated with providing various flows for recreational paddling.

Given the lack of information available about whitewater boating in the project boundary and downriver from the Lower dam, the Licensee should take the following steps:

- (1) Reach out to the whitewater boating community to assist with surveys of area boaters to determine under what conditions whitewater boating is occurring in the project area. During this initial phase, the Licensee should study the hydrology of the river reach to determine the gradient and identify the presence of ledges, boulders and other structural elements that would indicate a potential opportunity for whitewater boating.
- (2) The Licensee should conduct test flows in collaboration with representatives from the boating community to determine whether various flow levels create whitewater features such as eddies, waves and holes that could be used for instruction, playboating or down river trips if scheduled boating opportunities were provided.
- (3) If these initial phases reveal the presence of a whitewater boating resource, the Licensee should undertake a third phase utilizing the study techniques recommended by Whittaker et al., in *“Flows and Recreation: A guide to studies for river professionals”* (2005) and conduct a full controlled flow study below the lower reservoir dam.

Under the study phases prescribed by Whittaker et al. (2005), study information acquisition would begin with “Level 1” methods (a review of existing information and limited reconnaissance of river segments at a single flow), and will also include “Level 2” (structured interviews with experienced recreation users for target opportunities and on-land boating feasibility assessment). Decisions about whether or not to proceed will be made at the conclusion of each task (level) working towards “Level 3” methods (e.g., on-water single-flow reconnaissance or multiple flow controlled flow study). Taken together, this level of precision/study intensity is expected to provide sufficient quantification of flow ranges or flow fluctuation tolerances to assess broad project effects

from current operations.

**Conclusion**

American Whitewater respectfully requests that FERC accept these comments along with those previously submitted in response to the Preliminary Study Proposal and direct the NYPA to undertake appropriate studies to determine the impact of its operations on whitewater boating opportunities and evaluate whether an alternate mode of operation would mitigate these impacts and enhance recreational opportunities.

Respectfully submitted this 28th day of January, 2015



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**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BEFORE THE  
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION**

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

Pursuant to Rule 2010 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, I hereby certify that I have this day caused the foregoing **American Whitewater's Comments in Response to the New York Power Authority's Proposed Study Plan for the Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Project (P-2685)** to be served upon each person designated on the official service list compiled by the Secretary in this proceeding.

Dated this 28th day of January 2015.



Megan Hooker  
American Whitewater