



Contact: Maggie Mooney-Seus
NOAA Fisheries Service
978-281-9175
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Diana Weaver
413-253-8329
Lori Severino
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
518-402-8000

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NOAA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State of New York Announce Settlement Agreement on Hydropower Expansion Project

Provides Access to Historic Habitats for River Herring and Eels, Protects Habitat of for Endangered Shortnose Sturgeon

NOAA Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation today announced measures to restore access to former habitats for several migratory fish species and protect shortnose sturgeon spawning habitat in the Hudson River. The measures are included in a settlement agreement with the Green Island Power Authority, which is seeking to expand hydropower capacity on the river.

The Green Island Power Authority operates a 6 megawatt hydropower facility on the Hudson River at a federal dam located 5 miles north of Albany, N.Y. The Authority is proposing to add 8 new turbines and increase its total capacity to 48 megawatts. The project must be approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The three natural resource agencies provide technical advice on energy projects like this to ensure that impacts on fish and wildlife are avoided or minimized.

“By working together we have been able to come up with some concrete measures that will help restore historic migrations of fish stocks while protecting key habitat for endangered shortnose sturgeon in the Hudson River,” said Patricia Kurkul, regional administrator, NOAA Fisheries Service Northeast Region.

Shortnose sturgeon are thought to spawn annually below the dam in waters that represent the historic upstream extent of the species in the Hudson River. Therefore, the focus of monitoring and mitigation will be to minimize any potential risk to the species or its habitat, particularly during the project construction phase.

Fish passage facilities will be installed to ensure safe and effective upstream passage for migratory fishes such as blueback herring, American shad, American eel and other species. Engineers and biologists from the three agencies reviewed Green Island Power Authority’s proposed designs and provided recommendations to improve the effectiveness of these fish passageways. An innovative screening device known as FISHIS™ also will be tested to determine its effectiveness in preventing fish from entering the turbines, which are known to injure or kill fish if they are allowed to pass through them. Fish movements will be tracked using radio tags implanted in some fish, video monitoring at the dam and counting surveys to determine how well the fish passageways and new technology are working.

Currently, there are no dedicated fish passage structures at the dam, although fish are known to incidentally pass through the navigation lock, which is owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for navigation. The adjacent lock system allows vessels to transit within the Hudson River and between the Hudson River, the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain.

“This agreement is a great model for energy development projects,” said Marvin Moriarty, regional director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Region. “It significantly increases energy capacity, provides fish passage and protection, and opens important habitat for migratory fish. It also provides monitoring to ensure that the fishways are operating as designed to safely and effectively pass fish.”

“The agreement contains a comprehensive operation and maintenance plan to ensure that the fish passage systems continue to function as agreed to over the license term,” said New York Department of Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis. “It represents a long-term commitment on the part of all signatories and satisfies the environmental issues by requiring full and complete evaluation of the efficiency of the new systems.”

The quality of our environment is fundamental to our concern for the quality of life. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the State of New York to conserve, improve and protect its natural resources and environment and to prevent, abate and control water, land and air pollution, in order to enhance the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state and their overall economic and social well-being. For more information please visit our website at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and a trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information about our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit <http://www.noaa.gov>.