

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Joint Resolution 4 (Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Rules and Executive Nominations

Conowingo Dam - Sediment - Dredging

This joint resolution urges the U.S. Congress to authorize and fully fund a project by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to dredge sediment behind the Conowingo Dam in order to preserve the dam's capability to block pollutants in the Susquehanna River from reaching the Chesapeake Bay.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The joint resolution does not directly affect State finances.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: The Conowingo Dam is a large hydroelectric dam in the lower Susquehanna River near the town of Conowingo, Maryland. The dam spans the border between Cecil and Harford counties, sits about 10 miles from the Chesapeake Bay, and is 5 miles south of the Pennsylvania border. It is the last dam on the Susquehanna River before it reaches the Chesapeake Bay. The dam can trap about two million tons of sediment out of the approximately three million tons that reach its reservoir annually.

The dam has nearly reached its storage capacity for sediment, and during large storms, pollutants are flushed from behind the dam into the Chesapeake Bay. According to the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), the Susquehanna River contributes 46% of the nitrogen, 26% of the phosphorous, and 33% of the sediment to the Chesapeake Bay.

MDE advises that it is addressing Conowingo's decreased capacity to block pollutants due to the sediment behind the dam as part of efforts to meet the State's pollution reduction requirements under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (Bay TMDL) and Maryland's Watershed Implementation Plan for the Bay TMDL. MDE is also a project partner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the Lower Susquehanna River Watershed Assessment, a study that began in 2011 and is evaluating both watershed and reservoir contributions to sediment and nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

Conowingo's current license to operate expires in September 2014. The dam's owner, Exelon Corporation, has filed an application with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for a new license. FERC requires that any potential environmental impacts associated with project relicensing be minimized. Thus, environmental studies are currently being developed to address related fisheries, hydrology, and sediment introduction and transport issues.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of the Environment, Exelon, Department of Legislative Services

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ncs/lgc

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