

2/18/2024

Dear Senator McKay,

I am writing to inform you of my opposition to Senate Bill 837. As the owner of Precision Rafting Expeditions, a whitewater rafting outfitter located in Friendsville, Maryland, I am dependent on sufficient water levels in Deep Creek Lake for our whitewater releases which allow whitewater rafting on the Upper Youghiogheny River. Precision rafting is one of six rafting companies that rely on these dam releases along with a tremendous number of recreational kayakers and rafters.

As this bill is written, Deep Creek Lake would be drawn down for a period of at least four weeks between November 30th and February 28th. Although there is the possibility that spring rains will bring the lake up to adequate levels by mid-April when the whitewater release season begins, there is also a chance a dry spring could leave the lake at a lower level, increasing the likelihood of cancelled releases in the summer months. Cancelled releases lead to decreased visitation to Friendsville and surrounding areas which affects more than just the rafting industry. It also would affect vacation rentals, hotels, restaurants, and countless other businesses.

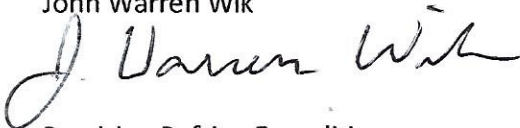
I understand there may be a legitimate need for research regarding aquatic vegetation. I am in favor of controlling invasive plant species, though not necessarily in favor of controlling aquatic nuisance plant species as this is not clearly defined. Does this suggest that native species providing habitat for fish and other aquatic life could be "controlled" to alter the shallow coves of the lake? While this may enhance some recreation could it not also negatively impact other recreation?

More importantly, I feel there has not been appropriate publicity regarding Bill 837. Stakeholders have not been adequately informed of this proposed change and public input has not been solicited regarding the bill. It would make sense that such legislation should be addressed via the triennial review as agreed to in the water appropriation and use permit issued to Brookfield Energy in September 2020. This permit is in effect until August of 2032 and states the maximum and minimum allowable levels for each month of the year. Bill 837 does not state a minimum allowable level during the proposed study time, which makes it even more difficult to predict to what extent it might affect the whitewater industry.

I ask that you please consider more research into this matter before moving forward with this bill. Additionally, I request an open forum in which various stakeholders could offer their input into the matter and those in favor of the bill could provide adequate information rather than the current vague language used in this bill. In doing so, those dependent on both the water levels and recreation opportunities available within Deep Creek Lake as well as those of us reliant upon the dam releases and increased volume in the Youghiogheny River will be in a better and more informed position. I appreciate any consideration.

Sincerely,

John Warren Wik



Precision Rafting Expeditions
P.O. Box 185 Friendsville, MD 21531
Warren@precisionrafting.com