

OPERATION of GREAT SACANDAGA LAKE – Q & A

Q. What rules govern how the Great Sacandaga Lake is operated? Specifically how much water is let out, and when?

A. An agreement between interested parties and stakeholder organizations was reached in 2000 and became part of a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license for the Great Sacandaga Lake in 2002. This agreement is known as the “Offer of Settlement” and governs how much water is to be released each day for all combinations of reservoir elevation and downstream flows.

Q. What prompted the need for this agreement?

A. A relicensing of the hydroelectric power plant at the Conklingville Dam with FERC required the development of an operating plan with appropriate long-term environmental protection measures that would meet diverse objectives for maintaining a balance of interests in the Upper Hudson River Basin.

Q. What groups signed on to the agreement?

A. A total of 29 organizations approved the agreement. In addition to the Hudson River – Black River Regulating District, they were: Great Sacandaga Lake Association, Fulton County Board of Supervisors, Saratoga County Board of Supervisors, Town of Hadley, Glens Falls Feeder Alliance, Adirondack Boardsailing Club, Adirondack Council, Great Sacandaga Fisheries Association, Erie Boulevard Hydropower, Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation, Adirondack Mountain Club, Glens Falls Chapter of Adirondack Mountain Club, Great Sacandaga Lake Marinas, Adirondack Park Agency, Adirondack River Outfitters, American Rivers, Hudson River Rafting Company, International Paper, American Whitewater, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, NYS Conservation Council, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, Sacandaga Outdoor Center, Wild Waters Outdoor Center, and New York Council of Trout Unlimited.

Q. What factors drove the primary changes prescribed by the agreement in the way the elevation of the Great Sacandaga Lake was managed?

A. The signatories to the agreement sought to address four main water management goals in developing the rules for reservoir operation:

- Maintain the Great Sacandaga Lake at certain targeted elevations during the late winter consistent with the use of storage for flow augmentation;
- Maintain Hudson River and Sacandaga River flows for water quality and fish habitat purposes;
- Target Great Sacandaga Lake elevations that are higher than historic levels for enhancement of fall lake recreation;
- Minimize energy losses to affected hydro projects by an “aggressive use of storage” while maintaining other objectives; and
- Release water from reservoir storage to enhance Sacandaga River whitewater recreation and other objectives.

Q. What is the primary difference in how the reservoir is operated now, in contrast to how it was traditionally operated prior to the agreement?

A. The reservoir is used to provide more water storage at higher levels. Broadly, this means that water levels are kept higher than they traditionally have been for much of the year, and are not drawn down quite as much over the winter months.

Q. Why can't valves at the Conklingville Dam simply be opened to let more water out when the elevation of the reservoir is well above the target elevation?

A. The maximum amount of water that can be released from the reservoir on any given day is limited by the agreement and is dependent upon the flow in the Hudson River below the confluence of the Hudson River and the Sacandaga River, and in the Sacandaga River between the reservoir and the confluence. If opening Dow valves at the Conklingville Dam would exceed that allowable flow, then doing so would be a violation of the agreement.

Q. How is the target elevation applied in determining releases from the reservoir?

A. The Regulating District seeks to release the maximum amount of water allowable from the reservoir when the reservoir is above the target elevation. When the reservoir is below the target elevation, the Regulating District seeks to release the minimum required by the agreement.

Q. Doesn't the reservoir lose the ability to provide its primary purpose – providing flood protection to downstream communities – when the elevation is at or above the spillway crest?

A. No. The reservoir continues to provide storage - and by extension, downstream flood protection – even as water is being conveyed over the spillway and the elevation continues to increase. (For instance, the reservoir provides 1 billion cubic feet of storage for each foot the reservoir rises above the spillway.) As long as the daily average inflow into the reservoir exceeds the daily average releases at the Conklingville Dam, including releases over the spillway, the reservoir is providing flood protection to downstream communities in accordance with the Regulating District's mission and statutory authority.

Q. Are there any conditions under which the Regulating District can exceed the allowable releases out of the reservoir under the agreement?

A. Yes. The agreement allows the Regulating District to exceed maximum releases for reasons including, but not limited to:

- Maintenance, repair or reconstruction of the Conklingville Dam;
- Observation of lake elevations rising above 771 feet and anticipation of unusual flooding around Great Sacandaga Lake; and
- Any emergency situations related to dam safety, human life and property, or rescue activities.

Q. When is the reservoir considered "full" under the 2002 agreement?

A. The term "full" is not incorporated into the agreement, though an elevation of 771 feet does trigger the ability for the Regulating District to release more water from the reservoir than otherwise allowed. Minor flood stage for the reservoir is 773 feet, or two feet above the spillway crest.

Q. When water begins to flow over the spillway, does the Regulating District lose “control” of the reservoir?

A. No, the Regulating District can operate (and has) Dow valves at elevations exceeding the spillway crest, providing dynamic control of the reservoir. Additionally, the Conklingville Dam is equipped with siphon spillways, capable of releasing additional water out of the reservoir at elevations above the spillway crest. These siphons are engaged at elevations between 775-776 feet.

Q. How many times in history since its completion in 1930 has Conklingville Dam overtopped?

A. The dam has never been overtopped. The dam itself is a 1,100-foot-long earthen embankment, a structure with a function and purpose different than a spillway. Overtopping is a serious condition where water flows over a dam, as opposed to water being conveyed over a spillway, which is specifically constructed as part of the facility to convey excess water. Water has been conveyed over the spillway at Conklingville 11 times since the dam’s completion in 1930.

Q. For how long is the agreement in effect? When could the rules governing operation of the reservoir be revisited?

A. The agreement runs concurrent with the license issued by FERC to the Regulating District and the hydroelectric power company, which expires in 2042. The relicensing process, and the opportunity for public input regarding changes to rules governing the operation of the reservoir, would begin several years ahead of the license expiration.