

FACT SHEET

Sept. 2014

Conowingo Dam Sediment & The Chesapeake Bay

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER AND THE DAM

- > Conowingo Dam is a hydroelectric dam owned and operated for profit by Exelon Corporation. The drainage area behind the dam is more than 27,000 square miles and extends to Cooperstown, New York.
- > The Susquehanna River provides nearly half of the Bay's freshwater, 41% of the nitrogen, 25% of the phosphorus and 27% of the sediment load.
- > The existence of the dam has caused nearly 200 million tons of sediment, nutrients and other pollutants from the Susquehanna River watershed trapped behind it.
- > During floods caused by large storms like Hurricane Agnes and Tropical Storm Lee, some of the sediment trapped behind the dam is scooped up and sent downstream to the Bay along with the other sediment flowing down the Susquehanna River.
- > While sediment behind the dam has an impact on upper Chesapeake Bay water quality, the health of Maryland's rivers, creeks and streams is driven by local pollution sources.

FEDERAL RELICENSING PROCESS

- > Exelon is asking the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to approve its application for a 30- to 50-year license to operate the dam, affecting the Chesapeake Bay for generations to come.
- > Provisions in the federal Clean Water Act give Maryland a once-in-a-generation opportunity to require Exelon to meet state water quality standards.
- > By January 31, 2015, Maryland must either act on Exelon's Water Quality Certification or require them to resubmit a new application with enough information to make a decision.
- > FERC cannot give Exelon a new long-term license for the Conowingo Dam until Maryland certifies that the dam's operations will meet state water quality standards. Until then, FERC is required by federal law to issue a temporary "annual license" each year, allowing the dam to continue to operate while the regulatory process is completed.



Conowingo Dam is a large hydro-electric dam near the mouth of the Susquehanna River.

(Photo: Jane Thomas, Integration and Application Network, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science)

- > To the extent that scouring of sediment and nutrients from behind Conowingo Dam harms the Bay's water quality, habitat and living resources, Exelon is responsible for addressing the problem.
- > Exelon has requested a 46-year license. New science or technology may become available during that time and a shorter permit cycle or ability to update Exelon's license in the future could increase opportunities to improve water quality.

UNDERSTANDING THE DAM'S IMPACT ON THE BAY

- > An interagency group led by the Army Corps of Engineers will soon release a public draft of the Lower Susquehanna River Watershed Assessment, which will help us to better understand the water quality impacts of the Susquehanna River's sediment and nutrients.
- > Maryland agencies have requested additional information from Exelon to help them measure the impact of the dam on water quality and natural resources in the Bay.
- > Additional information and studies may be necessary to help the State of Maryland and others determine how best to reliably protect crabs, oysters, underwater grasses and the entire Bay ecosystem.