

**PA House Majority Policy Committee Meeting  
Francis E. Walter Dam  
Thursday, March 18, 2021**

Testimony of  
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Nature is one of Carbon County's major competitive advantages.

The Central Carbon County Regional Comprehensive Plan was put in place to protect and preserve the natural and historic features that the region enjoys.

The natural and cultural resources of the Central Carbon County region are critical in how land uses and the economy have evolved in the area. These resources also provide the framework for preserving valuable community amenities.

The PA Municipalities Planning Code requires that comprehensive plans address the protection of natural and historic resources. This includes, but is not limited to, wetlands and aquifer recharge zones, woodlands, steep slopes, prime agricultural land, floodplains, unique natural areas and historic sites.

It is obvious from the inventory of natural features and historic resources that the region has an impressive array of assets that can be used to help provide much needed downtown revitalization and economic development particularly along the Lehigh River. This multi-use resource serves as the backbone for recreation and economic development planning in the region, linking it to other resources to create an inter-connected and inter-related network of greenways and recreational facilities.

Since New York City is heavily invested in studying the feasibility of acquiring ownership of Pennsylvania water, our concern is that the study may lean in their favor. If NYC gains control of the water behind the dam, recreation and other businesses that operate on or near the Lehigh River will be negatively impacted. NYC should take responsibility in upgrading their own system before relying on other states to come to their aid. Sacrificing Pennsylvania's control over Pennsylvania water will jeopardize economic development opportunities in the Commonwealth for generations to come.

Concerns have also risen that if the level of the Lehigh River is raised to help control salt from moving up the basin, historical areas near the river could be underwater.

**Impact on Businesses**

- Any changes to the F.E. Walter Dam could have repercussions on the businesses that are served by the Lehigh River.
- The tourism industry generates roughly \$3.9 billion annually in the Pocono Mountains.

- Responsible for approximately 35,000 jobs.
- Many of these businesses, especially the whitewater rafting industry, rely on water releases from the dam to operate.
- The whitewater rafting industry is a \$37 million per year industry and responsible for 1,000 jobs.

This plan would jeopardize not only Delaware River stream flows but it would also jeopardize the successful Recreational Flow Releases from Francis E. Walter that support the economically vital recreation economy on and around the Lehigh River. New York's ownership of 15% of Francis E. Walter's storage capacity would effectively remove storage opportunities at the dam for downstream.

We support efforts to advance long term economic-sensitive strategies for sustainable energy efficiency initiatives, environmental protection and infrastructure development that will improve the economic climate and quality of life for businesses and people of Carbon County and the Lehigh Valley region.

That no initiatives should be pursued at the detriment to other businesses or residents of the community, i.e. recreation and tourism activities businesses should not be dismissed and/or damaged as a result of the study's finding and resulting changes to the Francis E. Walter Dam.

That the Francis E. Walter Dam study should include comprehensive solutions to the root causes and corrective actions that are inclusive of all affected communities, i.e. up-stream and down-stream root causes be addressed as well.

What measures/metrics will be utilized for future determination of the expected outcomes of the improvements and their success?

Our concern is if the study will include New York City's system of dams and reservoirs so as not to skew the study in New York's favor and place responsibility for them to upgrade their own system before relying on other states to come to their aid.