

OFFICE OF THE CARBON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Chris L. Lukasevich



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Subject: Testimony, Republican Policy Committee, Public Hearing on Francis E. Walter Dam

The waters of the Lehigh River and Bear Creek that fill Francis E. Walter Dam, and their managed control by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, are not only vital to the physical life of the 64,000 residents of Carbon County, but once again as in centuries past, vital to the economic well-being of the county.

The Lehigh, and the gorge it cuts, divides Carbon County geographically; however, our residents' recognition of its value to our physical and economic well-being unites us. And for that reason, we stand together to ensure that New York City cannot exploit this invaluable resource (the waters held by the Francis E. Walter Dam and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), to the detriment of both physical and economic well-being.

The Carbon County Comprehensive and Greenway Plans are our road maps for the protection and optimal use of this county's natural resources. The Lehigh River, one time known as the West Branch of the Delaware River, stands second-to-none as a catalyst and foundational element in the quality of life of residents and the resurgent economic vitality of Carbon County. The Comprehensive and Greenway plans mention the Lehigh River a staggering 132 times, more so than any other natural or manmade characteristic of our county. Additionally, the 2018 Carbon County Return of Environment study emphasizes the river's contribution in generating "...over \$800 million annually in avoided costs..."

The water and banks of the Lehigh served as critical components for the building of a canal that, even prior to the founding of Carbon County in 1843, would serve as that time period's super highway for the movement of anthracite coal that fueled the Industrial Revolution in America. However, this also led to the river's degradation and description as "black flowing lava." It would not be until the time period of the Clean Water Act Amendments of 1972 that the value of the Lehigh's water would be reassessed as not simply an essential of life, but an essential lifeline to an anthracite-centric community that was on the precipice of total collapse.

Over ensuing decades, the revived Lehigh and the water controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from Francis E. Walter Dam has served as a significant driver for our

county's economic revitalization spurred by the activities that the Lehigh enables. We must protect the investment made and the natural asset, water, that sustains both our lives and our economy.

As an elected member of the Carbon County Board of Commissioners, and thus an ardent advocate for this county's residents, I respectfully appeal to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to holistically and objectively consider any modification to operations of the Francis E. Walter Dam that could have even the slightest potential to adversely impact our economy and quality of life.

Respectfully,

Chris L. Lukasevich

Chris L. Lukasevich
Carbon County Commissioner

References:

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Return on Environment, Carbon County, 2018

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