

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

Testimony of Mark Zakutansky
Director of Conservation Policy Engagement, Appalachian Mountain Club

Chairman Causer and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to join you today.

My name is Mark Zakutansky, and I am the Director of Conservation Policy Engagement at the Appalachian Mountain Club. The Appalachian Mountain Club is one of a dozen or so non-profit paddling clubs that focus on both the enjoyment and conservation of our region's whitewater resources, including the Lehigh River. The Appalachian Mountain Club is a conservation organization. We support the best possible outcomes for the environment and our health and recognize the value in studying our region's water resources.

Thousands of whitewater paddlers visit the Lehigh River every year. Our members have had outings to the Lehigh since the 1960's and 1970's, and those same members actively advocated for the establishment of Lehigh Gorge State Park and for establishing the current recreation program at the Francis E. Walter Dam through Congressional action to add recreation as a project purpose and for Congressional funding to relocate the road to the crest of the dam.

The Francis E. Walter Dam Re-Evaluation study is focused on evaluating potential changes to the structure and operations of the dam that could support the ecological health of the Delaware River Basin. The study objectives speak only to evaluating opportunities to enhance flood control; recreational fishing; to meet flow objectives on the Delaware River at Trenton; and potential recreational enhancements in the reservoir such as swimming or camping. Whitewater recreation is listed as a study constraint, but not a study goal or objective.

Any alternative that may be suggested by the re-evaluation study has the potential to impact whitewater recreation, perhaps positively or perhaps through adjustments to the whitewater program such as a different distribution of scheduled whitewater release days or through changing the fall drawdown.

Since enhancing whitewater recreation is not a study goal or objective, it is unclear how impacts to the whitewater program are being evaluated. AMC and other paddling clubs have long advocated for more scheduled whitewater releases and unscheduled "spilling events" at flows in the 1,000 to 2,000 cfs range, and for occasional flows above that range. Adding more demands and authorized uses to the Francis E. Walter Dam conceivably would further allocate the reservoir storage and may impact the quality and quantity of days that the river can be enjoyed for whitewater boating.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions.