

Canadian Companies Buy Deerfield Power Operations

After months of suspense and rumors, the bankruptcy of PG&E and USGenNE has led to new owners for most of the dams on the Deerfield. At the end of January FERC approved a transfer of the license for the Deerfield Project (five of the seven dams on the river) to Trans-Canada Hydro Northeast., a subsidiary of a Nevada corporation called TransCanada Pipeline USA, which is a division of TransCanada, a large gas pipeline and power company headquartered in Alberta.

In addition, the Bear Swamp Project (the Fife Brook Dam and associated pump storage facility) has been sold to a new corporation based in Delaware called the Bear Swamp Power Co. which is owned jointly by Brascan (a power company based in Toronto) and Emera (a power supplier in Nova Scotia). The Deerfield has certainly entered the era of globalization.

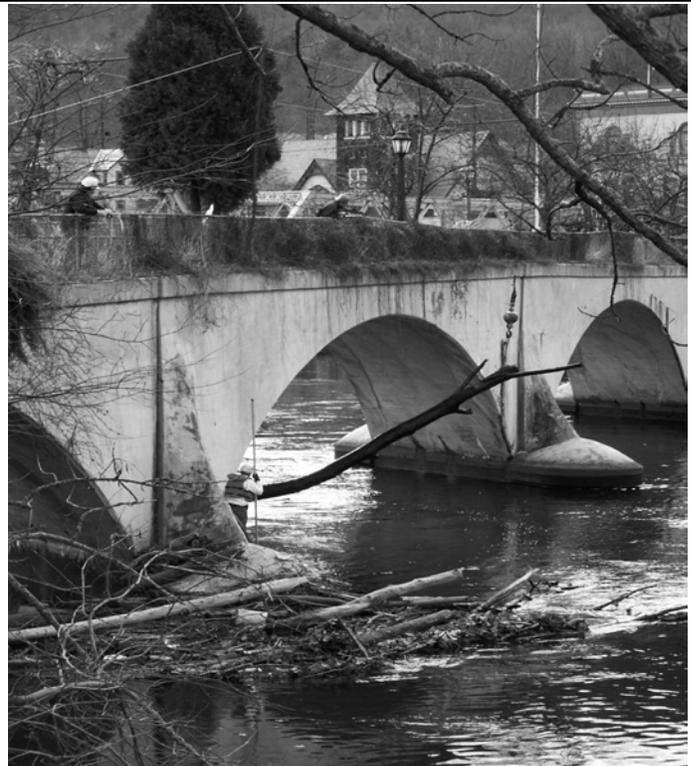
Both TransCanada and Brascan own and operate a number of hydropower concerns in Canada and the US, many of them very similar to the Deerfield hydropower dams, so neither company is a newcomer to the business of operating small dams and generating facilities.

The new licensees have agreed to observe the terms of the present Federal license, so the DRWA is not concerned that there will be changes in such things as minimum flows or scheduled whitewater releases. And the new owners hope to keep the current operating staff. But the price paid for the operations —\$92 million for Bear Swamp and \$48.6 million for the five Deerfield dams— is causing some concern about whether there will be serious impacts on town tax revenues due to revaluations based on the sales prices. We will continue to monitor the situation.

Robert May

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Clearing the logjam. It took a maximum sized crane to move the pile of logs collected at one of the piers supporting the Bridge of Flowers in Shelburne Falls. The loosened logs floated down to the Number 3 dam where a smaller crane pulled them out.

Area Students Report Projects at DRWA Annual meeting

At the annual meeting last October 18, four school groups presented their environmental work in the watershed. The Four Rivers Charter School in Greenfield sent two teams. The eighth grade reported on the Storm Drain Stenciling project they undertook last spring in downtown Greenfield. The seventh grade described their fall “expedition”, where they learned how to created nature-based quests in the Green River Swimming area in Greenfield. Greenfield High Schoolers talked about nature guides they are developing for the Highland Park area in Greenfield. And finally, Jill Baum from the Student Conservation Association in Hawley highlighted the work they are doing in elementary schools in the hill towns. It was great to hear about all those good projects; keep them

What's a Vernal Pool?

Vernal pools are temporary wetlands that dot the New England landscape. Most are the product of glaciers gouging out shallow depressions in the landscape as they retreated through the northeast over 12,000 years ago. All vernal pools share the following set of general characteristics: a vernal pool is a shallow depression in the landscape, anywhere from a few yards to an acre or more across, that typically fills with water during the spring, and later dries up during the summer months. However, not every vernal pool dries up completely during any given year. Still, in order to be classified as a vernal pool (or vernal pond) according to the Commonwealth's definition, this temporary wetland must hold water for at least eight weeks during the year. Vernal pools do not contain any populations of breeding fish.

In order to be classified as a vernal pool, the temporary wetland must also contain one or more native species that are considered "obligate species"—that is, species that are largely dependent on the temporary, fish-free habitat of vernal pools in order to maintain their foothold in the landscape. These species all lay their eggs in vernal pools—habitats where egg-eating fish cannot attack their hatching progeny. Obligate species include, but are not limited to: 2-1/2-inch, masked, wood frog; inch-long fairy shrimp; or any of a suite of species known as the "mole salamanders"—including Spotted, Jefferson's, Blue-spotted, and Marbled salamanders. If you can verify the existence of any of these species, or document the presence of their sometimes-fist-sized egg masses (in the case of the wood frog and mole salamander species) in one of these temporary wetlands, you are standing at the edge of a bonafide vernal pool.

Vernal pools are one essential element in our mix of land and water habitats that maintain balance, biological integrity and diversity in our Watershed. They are also an essential part of what makes the wooded New England landscape feel like home to many of us. To learn more about vernal pools, including how to begin the process of protecting one by certifying it under the Commonwealth's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, visit: www.vernalpool.org.

Karl Meyer

President's Message

Greetings from your new president! At the annual meeting last October, the membership voted in a new slate of board members: We said goodbye to Gisela Walker and hello to Catherine Reid of Buckland and Joan Adler of Greenfield. At our next board meeting I was elected president, Carrie Banks vice-president, Catherine Reid secretary, and Joan Adler treasurer.

After many years on the board and the last few as our leader, Gisela Walker stepped down to concentrate on planning issues in her town of Charlemont. She did not leave us before completing a thorough Plan of Work to guide us in the coming years. This plan can be found on our web site. Gisela's energy, efficiency, and smart insights into our watershed's issues will be missed. We appreciate her efforts and accomplishments (a strategic plan, several successful forums, negotiations with Mount Snow over her years on the board and four years as president.

Another transition this year is leadership of our water quality monitoring program: after six years of heading this successful DRWA program, I am delighted to hand it over to new member Michael Cole, who has just relocated to Greenfield from Oregon. Mike has a PhD in aquatic entomology, and on top of our regular water quality surveys, he will organize our first macroinvertebrate survey this coming fall. Hurray and welcome, Mike!

The board is very excited about the new Watershed School Mini Grants. Thanks to a generous private donation, we were able to create a grant program to help local schools conduct environmental studies in the watershed. Details on page 4.

DRWA strives to highlight the beauty of our watershed through our many programs, and I hope to see some of you by the river, whether it's monitoring, hiking, or during Riverfest.

Marie-Françoise Walk

Mahican-Mohawk Trail News

Last year we were lucky to have Jim Vieira as our trail maintainer. Jim with his volunteers got the trail back into the shape we like to see it in with blow downs cleared and wet spots improved. This winter is sure to leave its mark so any of you wishing to help clean up the damage should call Jim at 628-3881. Two dates for volunteer crews are set for Saturday April 23 and Saturday April 30 but Jim would be glad to hear from you any time.

Crossing the South River in Conway continues to be a problem. At this point, DRWA and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation are working with the power company toward putting in a fiberglass bridge using the stone piers in the bottom of the river. If you are not familiar with this area, it is worth a trip just to look into the nearly 200 foot deep canyon where there once was a 550 foot long railroad bridge. It is particularly impressive now since Jim and crews have removed many of the trees opening up a view of the site. To get to South River, take the M-M trail north from Hoosac Road in Deerfield or south from Bardwell Ferry. The site can be reached by car (when the roads dry out) by taking Station Road from the Bardwell Ferry Road in Conway. Happy Hiking.

Polly Bartlett

Become a DRWA Member!

Name

Street.....

City.....State.....Zip.....

E-Mail.....

Individual \$15, Family/Business \$25
Contributing \$50, Sustaining \$100,
DRWA PO Box 13, Shelburne Falls MA 01370

DRWA Water Quality Monitoring Activities for 2005

Expanded programs mean more jobs for volunteers

Monitoring the streams' acidity

We will again sample our traditional 12 sites for pH and alkalinity in April. If we go out soon after the snow melt, we might catch some interesting results (more acidified conditions).

Bacteria Sampling

This year we are changing our water quality monitoring program a bit, to reflect our participation in a state-funded project awarded to the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. DRWA will be responsible for monitoring *E. coli* (a bacteria indicative of pathogens pollution) in the North, South, and Chickley Rivers. Those three rivers have a history of high bacteria pollution, at least during wet weather. This is a two-year study. This year we will monitor 6 sites on each stream, trying to bracket the pollution. We hope to sample during 3 dry and 3 wet weather events. As such, all sampling dates cannot be predetermined. Sampling will again take place in the summer, although we might go into September if we don't get enough wet-weather events. Next year, with analysis of this year's data completed, we should be able to track the pollution more closely by moving the sample sites.

Volunteers Needed for Bacteria Monitoring

We hope that past volunteer monitors will help out again this year, but due to the increased number of sites and the new location of some sites, we will need some new volunteers. The time commitment is not huge: Go out and take samples 6 times between May and September, and bring them back to our lab in Shelburne Falls. Taking the sample is a matter of a couple of minutes. Driving to and

from the site is more time-consuming, depending where you live. The sites will be along the North River in Colrain, the South River in Conway, and the Chickley River in Hawley. We have picked 1 Sunday in June, July and August. The other 3 dates will be dependent on the weather. Subs are needed for when regular volunteers are not available. A training session will be held at a place and date to be announced.

Attendance is required to participate in the project. For more information or to volunteer for this project, please contact Marjo Iken at 413-369-4902.

New Project:

Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring

It is finally happening! Thanks to our new member Michael Cole, who is a professional aquatic entomologist, DRWA will embark on bug monitoring in the watershed this year. With the help of MA Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP), Mike will develop a volunteer-based program for the watershed that will further characterize biological conditions of surface waters in the watershed and introduce area citizens to biological monitoring to increase awareness of and support for watershed enhancement and protection activities. The hope is that this program augments MA DEP's biomonitoring efforts in the watershed by intensively sampling one or two subwatersheds each year. This year, we plan to initiate the program in the Green River watershed, sampling macroinvertebrates and physical habitat from selected reaches in the river and its tributaries. Sampling would occur during two weekends in September 2005. Interested participants in the project should contact Mike Cole at 413-774-5515.

Marie-Françoise Walk

The 2005 Hike and Bike Program Kicks off with a Walk in Dubuque State Forest

On February 20, participants joined biologist Jennifer Strules for a walk in Dubuque State Forest in Hawley on a perfect winter day – sunny and a little breezy, although it was on the cold side. We looked for signs of the mammals that are active at this time of year, such as tracks in the snow and browse marks on twigs and cones. We were rewarded with the tracks of fisher, deer or white-footed mice, flying squirrel, gray fox, and red squirrel, to name a few. We found a beaver lodge in a fairly new wetland that was created by these creatures, and a den where a porcupine spent some time. Participants also learned that gray foxes climb trees and the differences between moles, voles, and shrews! By the end of the walk, we all had a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by our resident mammals in winter. A big thank you to Jennifer for sharing her knowledge of and enthusiasm for mammals with us!

We have other fun-filled and exciting trips coming up, which are listed on page 4. These will be posted on our website. Please note that some of the events don't have locations yet and others will be added, so be sure to check the website for updates. For people who would like to participate in adventurous activities at the last minute, send us your email address. We'll contact you when we go out to observe displaying woodcocks, watch for the first spotted salamanders and wood frogs migrating to vernal pools in early spring, or find an awesome fall-out of migrating birds.

Pat Serrentino (contact: pserr@crocker.com)

Tools for Schools

The DRWA has established a Watershed School Mini-Grant Program, thanks to the generous donation from a private individual through the American Express "Just Give" program.

Starting this year, DRWA will distribute up to \$1,000 in grants annually to K-12 schools located in the Deerfield River watershed. The program's goal is to help watershed schools work on environmental projects, to educate both students and the general public about the watershed and its health, and to help protect our natural resources.

Requests for funding for projects can be up to \$300 each, and as many grants as possible will be awarded until the \$1,000 annual figure is reached. More details and the application form are available at www.deerfieldriver.org/minigrants.htm or by mail request and should be submitted to the DRWA.

There is no deadline; applications will be reviewed by a grants committee monthly until the yearly ceiling has been reached. Examples of school-based environmental projects include stormdrain stenciling, monitoring the water quality of the Green River, conducting a macroinvertebrate survey of small tributaries, doing a shoreline survey of a nearby stream, creating nature quests, creating or maintaining nature trails, developing displays or interpretation tables for local parks, etc.

We encourage the students to write the proposals themselves, as that is part of the learning process. A required element of the grants is for the students to record what they have learned through their project, and also, very importantly, how they will report their results or final project to their audience. We do hope that they share the results of their work with the public at large.

A watershed school is any school located in the Deerfield River watershed--the land area that drains to the Deerfield River. Entire towns such as Colrain are located within the watershed. Others, like Ashfield or Guilford, are partially in our watershed. The rest of the town is located in an adjacent watershed, such as the Westfield River watershed. If you don't know whether your school is in our watershed or not, check the map at <http://www.Deerfieldriver.org>.

DEERFIELD RIVER CURRENT

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Editors Ted Merrill, Françoise Walk

The Deerfield River Watershed Association is a volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation, protection and care of the Deerfield River and its tributaries in the interest of its adjacent communities. Its activities include water quality monitoring, educational programs, trail maintenance, administration of volunteer programs and participation in regulatory matters.

Officers:

Françoise Walk, *President*; Carrie Banks, *Vice President*

Catherine Reid, *Secretary*; Joan Adler, *Treasurer*

Board Members:

Polly Bartlett, Peter Buell, Robert May,

Karl Meyer, Ted Merrill

www.deerfieldriver.org

DRWA Hikes and Bikes: 2005 Schedule

April 24, Sunday, 10:00 AM: Join Karl Meyer and Pat Serrentino for an exploration of vernal pools in Highland Park, located in Greenfield. Be prepared to get wet. Please register with Pat (413) 772-0520.

May 7, Saturday, 9:00 AM: Spring Wildflower and Bird Walk on the Mahican-Mohawk Trail, led by Polly Bartlett and Pat. Register with Polly (413) 625-6628.

May 14, Saturday, 10:00 AM: Look for early spring wildflowers in the Catamount State Forest in Colrain with Muriel Russell. Bring flashlight and a lunch to enjoy at the lake. Register with Muriel Russell (413) 624-3920.

June 4, Saturday, 8:00 AM: Join Pat Serrentino on a Spring Birding Trip in the lower Deerfield River Valley. Meet at Staples in Greenfield to carpool. Register with Pat, (413) 772-0520.

June 18 Saturday, 10:30 AM: Hike the Negus Ridge above the Deerfield River to see spectacular views and the mountain laurel in bloom. Bring lunch and meet at the Shunpike Park on Rte. 2, west of Charlemont Center. Please register with Polly Bartlett, (413) 625-6628.

June 25, Saturday, 8:30 PM: Join biologist Alex Haro for a unique evening outing looking for moths, bats, frogs, and other creatures that are active at night. Location to-be-announced.

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PO Box 13

Shelburne Falls, MA 01370