



SUSQUEHANNA RIVER
BASIN COMMISSION

4423 N. Front Street | Harrisburg, PA 17110-1788 | 717.238.0423 | srbc.net | [@SRBCnews](https://twitter.com/SRBCnews)

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SENT VIA EMAIL

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Conowingo.mde@maryland.gov

Regulatory and Customer Service Divisions Chief
Wetlands and Waterways Protection Program
Water and Science Administration
1800 Washington Blvd., Suite 430
Baltimore, MD 321230

Attn: Conowingo Dam WQC

The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (Commission) has reviewed documents pertaining to the original Water Quality Certification issued by Maryland Department of the Environment in 2018 to Exelon for FERC licensing of the Conowingo Dam. In particular, the Commission is interested in flow prescriptions that inform how the dam is operated during times of limited flow on the Susquehanna River.

The minimum and maximum outflow rates and the rates of “ramping”, or changing from not generating to peaking and the reverse, are intended to introduce a reasonable semblance of natural river flows for the Susquehanna River downstream of the dam and flowing into the Bay. Unnaturally low flows in the springtime and high flows in the late summer and early autumn interfere with natural cyclic breeding, migration and feeding patterns. Likewise, rapid fluctuations during power generation from unseasonably high flows to minimal flows alter the natural flow regimes and disrupt the ability of the native aquatic species to respond to natural cues and risk stranding or disconnecting species from critical habitat areas.

Although no additional specific studies have been conducted regarding appropriate operations and the downstream flows that result, the river’s varying hydrology and presence of sensitive species have not changed. If anything, the need for appropriate flow management was highlighted through the intervening years as the region experienced both extremely wet years and abnormally dry years. With the expectation of continued and increased extreme conditions in future years, the Water Quality Certificate must incorporate flow prescriptions that are more conducive to natural and resilient hydrologic regimes than have been in place since the 1980s.

The original certificate issued in 2018 included minimum, maximum and ramping rates consistent with SRBC’s recommendations for the most reasonable balance between lower river resiliency and practical hydroelectric generating operations. The negotiated rates contained in the subsequent Settlement Agreement between Maryland and Exelon did not fully adopt all of our recommendations, but nevertheless achieved significant improvement over the inadequate flow requirements contained in the previous license, and that are still in place today due to litigation. The Commission encourages Maryland to give full consideration to the suite of flow recommendations before it and strike a balance that permits beneficial electrical generation while allowing the lower Susquehanna River and upper Chesapeake Bay to function in a natural and resilient fashion.

With regard to an issue that is tangential to flow extremes, the aforementioned recent high flows have raised our attention to the problem of manmade debris on the river and how it is handled at the Conowingo Dam. With upstream tributaries experiencing higher and more frequent flash flooding and flushing flows, more debris is flowing to and accumulating at the dams on the lower River. While the dams obviously do not generate the debris and do have protocols in place to remove it from their forebays when it can be done safely, the Commission believes the Water Quality Certificate process offers an opportunity to revisit needs and responsibilities. Constellation should be involved in measures to reduce the amount of manmade debris accumulating at the dams, raise awareness of advisable practices, and assess its own ability to address the debris that accumulates in its forebay.

*A water resource agency serving
the Susquehanna River Watershed*

The past several seasons have exposed the inadequacy of Conowingo's debris management plan and the debris management conditions in the Settlement Agreement, which were largely a continuation of the status quo. The Commission believes that the debris management provisions that were contained in Maryland's original 401 certification are necessary and should be restored.

Sincerely,



Andrew D. Dehoff
Executive Director

cc: Jason E. Oylar, General Counsel
SRBC