



Release in flood raises concern

Politician seeking better commission coordination.

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By TOM QUIGLEY
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New Jersey State Sen. Leonard Lance is looking for answers about the release of billions of gallons of water into the Delaware River from upriver reservoirs in New York during the recent flooding.

On April 3, about 12.5 billion gallons of water went over the spillways at the Pepacton Reservoir in Delaware County. Lance said Saturday he wants to know if that was a wise decision, being that the river at the time was in the midst of the second worst flood in 100 years downstream.

Questions about whether the release of all that water worsened flooding in the Lehigh Valley and northwest New Jersey remain open. But officials have said the existence of the upriver reservoirs actually works to reduce downriver flooding.

Lance, R-Warren/Hunterdon, said he wrote a letter to New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bradley Campbell after the September floods calling for a review of flood-control measures now in place.

Campbell is the New Jersey alternate member of the Delaware River Basin Commission. The basin commission administers the water releases from those upriver reservoirs and is responsible for flood management along the Delaware River and its tributaries. Member states are New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York and Delaware.

Lance said the basin commission was created after the area's devastating 1955 flood in an effort to better manage the river. He said the basin commission's charge is a regional one and includes knowing how such things as water releases in New York affect downriver residents in New Jersey.

Lance said perhaps those releases could have been done before the heavy flooding. He said the basin commission must take a coordinated approach to flood control.

Lance is calling on the basin commission to examine the whole set of facts linked to the recent flooding and the flooding in September.

A statement on the basin commission's Web site addresses the issue in part.

"It has been nearly 50 years since the towns along the Delaware River experienced flooding of the magnitude that occurred on April 2-5," the statement reads. "It also was the second time in seven months that evacuations were required and severe property damage occurred."

The "primary" causes for the flooding were "saturated conditions, heavy rain and, in the most recent case, snowmelt."

"Basin reservoirs, even those which spilled, prevented flood peaks from being even higher," the statement reads.

The basin commission's statement goes on to say the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, under the basin commission's sponsorship, completed a detailed study of Delaware River damage potential and local flood control measures that could be implemented in river towns through local partnerships with the federal government.

The basin commission statement notes most of the river towns opted against sharing in the cost of such projects. Cost sharing at the local level is required.

"There is no single, easy remedy," the statement reads. "Ultimately, with local cost shares necessary to receive federal funding, decisions on how to reduce flood losses must be made at the county and community level"

In Pennsylvania, officials of PPL Corp., which owns Lake Wallenpaupack, said the company had to release water right after the April 1-2 storm because the level threatened the top of the dam there.

An official said there were two releases, the first from 3:30 a.m. on April 3 until 9 a.m. April 4. The second release started at 5 p.m. on April 4 and ended at 8:30 a.m. April 8. During the first release, water poured from the dam at a rate of 1,400 cubic feet per second, reaching a maximum rate of 6,300 cubic feet per second.

A company spokesman said PPL engineers had calculated that, even with the releases, the Lakawaxen River that the lake's water flows into would have been 4 or 5 feet higher if the dam hadn't been there.

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