

Exeter Great Dam: To Keep or Remove?

Overview

For several years, we have closely followed the thoughtful and comprehensive process concerning the future of the Exeter Great Dam. The presence of the Exeter River in the downtown area, as a result of the Great Dam, is vitally important to us as it is to many people in our community. Removing the Great Dam will result in a dramatic and adverse change to the quality of life in the Town of Exeter. As a result, we believe that any decision to remove the Great Dam must be supported by compelling reasons. Based on our review of the numerous studies conducted to date, including the recent *Exeter River Great Dam Removal Feasibility and Impact Study*, we do not believe that compelling reasons exist to remove the Great Dam.

The question of whether to keep or remove the Exeter Great Dam exists because the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) has found that the dam does not meet dam safety regulations. While the original focus was on how to bring the dam into compliance, the scope broadened to include dam removal when it was suggested that elimination of the dam was an inexpensive way to “satisfy” dam safety regulations. The NHDES “Initiative to Restore Rivers through Selective Dam Removal” (2003) was never intended to target and capture New Hampshire dams and their impoundments that provide valued recreational uses, historical and cultural benefits and important services such as water supply and fire protection, like the Exeter Great Dam.

We believe the benefits from keeping the dam substantially outweigh any benefits from removing the dam. As important, there is no compelling reason to take the dramatic and irreversible step of removing the Great Dam. Eliminating the Great Dam will adversely change the historical and cultural character and natural beauty of the Town forever. We believe that keeping the Exeter Great Dam is in the best interest of the people of Exeter. Please vote to save the Exeter Great Dam.

On the reverse side are 10 reasons why we should keep the Great Dam.

Save the Exeter Great Dam, LLC
Donald S. Robie, Manager
January 6, 2014

10 Reasons Why We Should Keep the Great Dam

1. **The River** - the presence of the Exeter River in the downtown area, its sound, beauty, reflection, depth, width and flow, which has been enjoyed by generations for almost 400 years, is a major contributing factor to the natural beauty and historic character of our community.
2. **Gone Forever** - Once removed, the dam will never be replaced due to strict governmental regulations.
3. **Drinking Water Supply** - With the prediction of more frequent and longer periods of drought, it makes no sense to substantially reduce a reliable source of drinking water by eliminating the impoundment created by the dam.
4. **Recreation** - Keeping the dam will preserve robust recreational opportunities in and along the Exeter River. Removing the dam would substantially lower water levels upstream of the dam under normal flow conditions. Between the dam and the Little River confluence, the average depth of the river would decrease by more than 50% and the average river width would likewise substantially decrease.
5. **Cost** - While it should not be the sole reason for keeping the dam, cost is important and, stabilizing the dam in place is the least expensive option. Even assuming that 75% of the cost of designing, permitting and removing the dam is covered by a grant and, that the cost of retrofitting private water intake structures is the average of the high/low estimates, the cost of removing the Great Dam will exceed the cost of stabilizing the dam in place by more than \$100,000.
6. **Flooding** - Dam removal does not solve flooding. Most of the area that currently floods along the river would continue to flood, although the depth of flooding would be reduced. The Great Bridge (i.e. High Street Bridge) restricts river flow potentially as much as the dam itself during a high flow, contributing significantly to upstream flooding.
7. **Sediment into the Squamscott River** - dam removal will increase sediment transported from the Exeter/Little River fivefold bringing with it accumulated environmental contamination. This could affect ecological and recreational resources downstream, the cost of which has not been considered.
8. **Water Quality** - measurements of low dissolved oxygen concentrations can be attributed to both decomposition of organic matter in the river bottom and thermal gain within the impoundment during warm and low flow periods. However, in the summer of 2012, there were no violations of water quality standards in the Exeter River at Great Bridge and overall fewer incidences of violations indicating perhaps improvement in water quality conditions.
9. **Historical/Archaeological Impacts** - the Great Dam is a contributing resource to the Exeter waterfront area that is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The area around great dam is sensitive for archaeological resources which could be impacted by dam removal.
10. **Wetlands and Floodplains** - elimination of the Great Dam will impact wetlands including a rare swamp white oak forest community upstream.

Background Information for Petition Volunteers

13 years ago, the NH Department of Environmental Services issued a letter of deficiency to Exeter concerning the Great Dam because it did not meet the state's criteria for a 50 year flood. After 5 years of study by the Town, the state and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, issued the final report addressing the deficiencies, flooding and environmental impacts of the Great Dam was issued this October.

In addition to the state's dam criteria, the 96-year old dam, which has been modified 4 times over the past few decades, has other problems:

- As altered, it has increased flooding of many of your neighbors and has increased flood insurance and everyone's property taxes.
- Has destroyed the natural environment of the river and adjacent lands negatively effecting both land and aquatic wildlife.
- Limits natural fish passage. Those fish that do succeed in overcoming the obstacle find a "dead" river lethal to them due to its impoundment and stagnation. The Exeter River is now officially listed as an "Impaired River" that requires water quality improvement.

Four options were studied. Keep the dam (Stabilize in place), Dam Removal and River Restoration, Dam Modification (Replacement with Metal Dam) and Partial Removal (leaving one foot of dam).

Of these, only one option solved all of the existing problems with no future liability to the taxpayers, Dam Removal and River Restoration. Furthermore, this option is eligible for up to 100% grant funding meaning the Exeter Taxpayers will have little, if any cost, appear on their property tax bills.

This solution was presented to the Board of Selectmen as the highest rated option based upon cost and upon solving all identified problems. Further, a Federal representative of NOAA stated that a one-time grant funding opportunity exists for 2014 to gain a 75% Federal Grant for this project. To qualify for this grant the Town must have a warrant article on the Town Ballot this March to be approved by the voters.

At this time, the Selectmen are divided and have stated they won't make any decision whether to put this issue to the voters until January 6th. We, the Exeter taxpayers, should have the right to decide our future. We should not lose the opportunity to obtain an additional \$450,000 in grant money and possible have a no cost option for the taxpayers.

Since the Board of Selectmen are refusing to give us even a pledge to make a decision one way or the other, we the citizens must take action.

This Petition does not commit anyone to vote one way or the other. It simply will put the issue on the ballot. There will be at least two voter information/education meetings prior to the March 2014 vote so everyone in town will be able to make an educated decision. If you agree, please sign the petition and ask your neighbors and friends to sign it. If you'd like more information or have completed petitions, contact Brian at griselandsons@comcast.net.

Quick Facts

Dam Removal and River Restoration Petition

- 13 Years ago, the State found that Exeter's Great Dam does not meet their standards. Exeter has been studying this issue for a decade.
- The Dam Removal and River Restoration Alternative was listed as the best alternative to solve all river issues in the Final River Study Report.
- The Board of Selectmen have not been able to make a decision nor have they guaranteed they will make one before the January 31st deadline.
- The organizers of this petition cross party lines and just want the citizens to have the right to chose.
- This alternative qualifies for a special 75% grant from the Federal Government, along with other grants.
- We don't want to lose the possibility of getting 75% Federal Grant funding, which requires we have an article on the 2014 March Warrant.
- By signing, you are asking that the issue be put on the ballot for the voters to decide.
- Prior to the voting there will be two voter educational meetings at the Town Hall so everyone can make an informed vote.