

From: Cynthia Copeland <cjc@strafford.org>
Sent: Tuesday, June 13, 2017 3:02 PM
To: Monroe, Pamela
Cc: Wayne Burton ; Todd Selig
Subject: re: Eversource requirement

June 13, 2017

Dear SEC Administrator Monroe:

Please find attached the January 3, 2017 letter addressed to Mr. Todd Selig, Town Administrator for the Town of Durham. This is in regard to Strafford Regional Planning Commission's testimony concerning the impact of the proposed Seacoast Reliability Project on the Great Bay Estuary. The final report referenced in the letter can be found at the link listed below. It is our understanding that this letter will be included in the records regarding the Seacoast Reliability Project.

<https://www.des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/coastal/documents/greatbaya-final-report-201611.pdf>

Sincerely,
Cynthia Copeland

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Todd Selig, Town Administrator
8 Newmarket Road
Durham, NH 03824

January 3, 2017

Re: SRPC testimony concerning the impact of the proposed Seacoast Reliability Project on Great Bay

Dear Mr. Selig:

As a regional planning organization, Strafford Regional Planning Commission recognizes that the importance of preserving the environmental health of Great Bay is part of a much larger discussion. The Great Bay Estuary, which encompasses all of Great Bay and Little Bay, lies at the confluence of tidally driven seawater from the Gulf of Maine and freshwater from seven major river systems – Bellamy, Oyster, Lamprey, Exeter/Squamscott, Cocheco, Salmon Falls, and Winnicut, is the largest estuarine system in New Hampshire.¹ It is recognized as one of only 28 areas in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (1989), and one of the nation's most recessed estuaries – seawater from the Gulf of Maine travels 15 miles inland through the Piscataqua River and Little Bay before flowing into Great Bay. In fact, it can take up to 36 tidal cycles, or 18 days, to flush water through the estuary.²

Over the course of the last decade, there has been a concerted effort by state agencies, regional entities, and local municipalities to protect the estuary in the face of increasing development pressure due to population growth. Their accomplishments include, but are not limited to: oyster, saltmarsh, eelgrass, and fishery restoration, as well as land conservation activities, stormwater management improvement, and significant financial investments in updating wastewater treatment infrastructure.

The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Coastal Program, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Eastern Research Group, the New Hampshire Fish and Game Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Partnership, and The Nature Conservancy, is finalizing a report³, which assesses the benefits that people receive from specific habitats in the Great Bay Estuary. The goal of this report is to better understand the ways in which people benefit from Great Bay ecosystems and inform decisions on to sustainably use those benefits while reducing conflict.

The report lays out two hypothetical future scenarios that are conceivable futures for the Great Bay Estuary by 2025; the first scenario (healthy habitats) shows a future with healthy, intact salt marsh, eelgrass, and oyster habitats and the second scenario shows a future in which many of these habitats, which are currently under stress, are lost by 2025 (habitat loss). The reports identifies several different ways people living around the estuary benefit from and value these habitats, such as fisheries production, carbon sequestration, and even the simple existence of healthy Great Bay ecosystems. As just one example of the value of these habitats, the study found that people living around the Great Bay Estuary likely value the existence of the healthy habitat scenario by approximately \$42 million more per year than the habitat loss scenario.

According to this report, physical/human activities, such as dredging, are identified as stressors that may have a negative impact on key habitats due to suspended sediments, though the modeling does not specifically calculate the impacts from individual dredging and underwater transmission line projects. However, the report suggests that careful planning within the confines of the Great Bay Estuary is critical to achieving healthy habitats and maximizing the use of the Estuary in the future. For example, water quality improvements would benefit both eelgrass recovery capacity and the oyster aquaculture industry, which could expand farming sites into currently closed areas.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Copeland, AICP
Executive Director, Strafford Regional Planning Commission

¹ "The Great Bay Estuary – A Natural Treasure in Need of Protection" Peter Wellenberger. Posted on February 26, 2013. Accessed on December 30, 2016. <http://newenglandoceanodyssey.org/the-great-bay-estuary-a-natural-treasure-in-need-of-protection/>

² "About Our Estuaries" Piscataqua Regional Estuaries Partnership. Accessed December 30, 2016. <http://prepeestuaries.org/about-our-estuaries/>

³ Note: The final draft of the Great Bay Ecosystem Services Report should be published in mid-January.