

Response to Silver Lake Dam proposal

On February 13, 1985, the Tilton Conservation Commission sent a letter to the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) stating its opposition to the ACE's proposed flood management plan for Lake Winnepesaukee and the Winnepesaukee River. Two of the members of the Tilton Conservation Commission at the time of that vote currently remain members of the Commission.

The Silver Lake Association has resurrected part of the Army Corps of Engineers plan and is requesting Belknap County provide over \$500,000 in American Rescue Plan funding for the purpose of studying construction of a dam at Route 140 and the dredging of the Winnepesaukee River between Silver Lake and Rt. 140.

On February 20, 2023 The Tilton Conservation Commission unanimously passed a motion indicating its opposition to establishing a hinge dam on the Winnepesaukee River near Route 140 and related dredging. Areas of concern identified and discussed include, but are not limited to:

- As proposed, the plan calls for dredging 6,000 feet (*page 35) of the Winnepesaukee River between Silver Lake and the Route 140 bridge.
- The report states that 38,600 cubic feet of material (*page 35) will need to be removed as part of the dredging process.
 - This amounts to over 2,700 dump truck loads of material (approximately 14 cubic feet per construction vehicle).
 - How or where this material will be disposed of is not addressed.
 - It is not known what if any contaminants the soil may contain.
 - The former Johns Manville plant in Tilton, NH has two known asbestos dumps immediately abutting this section of the Winnepesaukee River. It is not known if material was dumped into the river itself, or on the banks of the river. The NH Department of Environmental Services (NH DES) acknowledges the possibility that other dumping occurred. In identifying the asbestos dumps in Tilton, the NH DES website states "The existence of other dump sites in Tilton (and Meredith) if any, is not known." <https://www.des.nh.gov/waste/asbestos/disposal-sites/faqs#faq32371>
 - Dredging is not a one-time fix. Over time, sediment will naturally fill back in areas that have been dredged. NH DES indicates that any further studies should address the need for periodic future dredging.**
- The proposed project will have significant impact on wetlands. NH DES indicates that IF the project were approved, mitigation fines paid to the Aquatic Resources Management fund due to wetlands impact, could be between \$2 million and 5.5 million dollars.**
- NH DES has indicated the project may result in the possibility of increased flooding in downstream communities of Tilton and Franklin.**
- The proposed installation of a hinge dam just downstream of the Route 140 bridge will eliminate upstream access to the Winnepesaukee River and Silver Lake via the Department of Transportation boat ramp on Shaker Road in Northfield. (Although there is walk in/carry boat access at Silver Lake, the Shaker Road facility is the only public access boat ramp to Silver Lake).
- Establishing a hinge dam on Route 140 and the subsequent rise in water level upstream on the Winnepesaukee River and Tioga River and wetlands will have significant negative impacts

- Charles Barry, the then Executive Director of NH Fish and Game, articulated this clearly in his letter to the Army Corps of Engineers on February 25, 1985. *“The operation of the Bascule gate [hinge dam] to satisfy recreational needs of people at Silver Lake will be to the detriment of the Tioga Wetland, inundating a shallow marsh by an average of (2) two feet. The New Hampshire Fish and Game would oppose any level that would alter the existing Tioga Wetland.”*
- In recent years, this section of the Winnepesaukee River and Tioga Wetland have become prime Bald Eagle habitat, and there is concern the addition of the dam and subsequent raising the level of the Tioga Wetlands will have a negative impact on this habitat.
- A survey published by NH Fish and Game in 2020, identifies the Tioga River as having the highest ranked wildlife habitat in the state.
<https://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/maps/wap/belmont8x11scoring.pdf>
- The same survey identifies the Tioga Wetland, and Winnepesaukee River between Route 140 and Silver Lake as having the highest ranked wildlife habitat in the *region*.
- The proposed dam, and increased water level of the Tioga Wetlands, will significantly decrease the natural ability of the Tioga wetlands to absorb water and prevent flooding.
 - The Tioga River has been known to flood in the area where it crosses and briefly goes alongside Route 140. Altering the water level may increase flooding in this area.
- The area near the Route 140 bridge and the proposed hinge dam has been identified as being an archaeological and culturally sensitive area. (*page 48)
- NH DES acknowledges that the Environmental and Permitting process has changed significantly since the Army Corps of Engineers’ report of 1985 and “the project may be difficult to permit.”**
- NH DES also indicates they recently spoke with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding the proposed project and “they may not make the same recommendations they made nearly 40 years ago.”**

*Army Corps of Engineers Winnepesaukee River Basin Report Sept. 1985

** Letter to Belknap County Commissioners of 12/22/2022 from NH Department of Environmental Services (NH DES) Commissioner Robert Scott

Information compiled by Tilton (NH) Conservation Commission - February 20, 2023