

Draining the Northeast's water

Leif Johnson tracks where Delaware Basin supplies went, and who controls the region's zero-growth water commissions.

The present water crisis in the Northeast is very real. New York City's reservoirs stand less than a third full, down to the perilous levels reached during the 1962-66 drought. If the dry spell which began in July 1980 continues, New York will be very short of water this summer. All that is undeniable—but also very curious.

New York City has the finest water system in the world. Excellent-quality water is brought to New York City through a system of reservoirs and aqueducts that guarantee a full year's supply of water even in the event of no rainfall whatever. In 1980, the city's watershed received 36 inches of rain instead of the normal 45 inches, but still two inches more than the average 34 inch rainfall during the five years of drought in the 1960s. Since the present dry spell occurred only during 1980—the previous decade was the wettest in history—any observer is bound to ask, why is the reservoir level so low?

The answer is both shocking and paradoxical. 135 billion gallons of water, one-quarter of the total reservoir capacity of the City of New York, were released into the Delaware River and smaller streams in New York State primarily to maintain the flows of the Delaware. During the 1960s drought the city released only an average of 44 billion gallons each year into the Delaware.

Release into Delaware

The paradox is that the less rain, the more water New York must release to maintain river flow. Under the 1954 Supreme Court decree regarding water rights of Delaware Basin users, the city could take 800 million gallons per day (mgd) from the Delaware watershed, about half the city's daily consumption, but together with other basin users, must guarantee a stream flow of 1,750 cubic feet per second at a measuring point at Montague, in northern New Jersey. Presently, the city has agreed to take only 520 mgd from the Delaware watershed—but has continued to supply releases into the Delaware. Hence the city is running out of water.

Releasing New York City water into the Delaware is an incalculable absurdity. The dams from which this water is released are connected to the city by the largest high-pressure water tunnel in the world, 19 feet in diameter, running between five hundred and a thousand feet underground, and costing billions to construct. Releasing this reservoir water not only creates a poten-

tial crisis for the city, but negates the enormous capital costs of the aqueduct.

Although New York City Mayor Edward Koch was not obligated to do so, he agreed to release the 135 billion gallons of water because, it was argued, there was no other source to maintain stream flow in the Delaware River. This is true only because the 1960 Army Corps of Engineers plan for water supply and flood control was systematically sabotaged and dismantled in the 20 intervening years.

If the Army Corps plan had been effected according to its timetable, by 1975 New York City's reservoirs would have stored over 300 billion gallons of water, more than half New York City's total storage capacity. Most of this would have been stored upstream of Montague, New Jersey, providing sufficient water to absolve New York City of any releases into the Delaware.

The Delaware River Basin Commission

Yet by 1980, only two small projects of an Army Corps plan of 19 major water-control and storage projects were built. The remainder of the plan was scrapped by the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) established in 1961 to carry out the Army Corps plan—and which is now running the "drought crisis".

The commission was born of a \$131,000 grant from the Ford Foundation given in 1958 to study the "administrative aspects" of basin development and to establish a four-state organization to implement it. Joining the Ford Foundation was Laurance Rockefeller's Resources for the Future, an organization founded in 1952 with assistance from the Ford Foundation.

Written by Roscoe Martin, a former delegate to Unesco, and dean of the Maxwell School of Public Administration at Syracuse University, the report recommended an administrative body of the four Delaware Basin states plus the U. S. Department of the Interior. That body, established as the DRBC in 1961, excluded New York City, which was a key party to the 1954 Supreme Court decree.

In its first year of operation, the DRBC reduced the Army Corps plan from 19 major projects to 5. However, one of those five was the Tocks Island Dam to be built

north of the Delaware Water Gap, holding a third of the entire plan's storage capacity.

In July 1964, during the drought, rather than accelerate or expand new water sources, the DRBC moved to control all ground water as well as surface water, including limiting the amount a property owner could take from his own property, a move aimed ultimately at industrial users.

In 1968 the DRBC adopted a policy to enforce pollution controls against major industries as part of its policy to recycle water rather than to develop new supplies. In the East, as in most of the world, reusing water is far more expensive than developing new supplies. This policy was therefore an economically irrational decision whose brunt was borne by industry.

In 1971 the DRBC moved to kill the Tocks Island dam and hydroelectric project. First the DRBC subjected the hydroelectric features of Tocks Island to "conditions protecting the environment" and barred the use of Sunfish Pond for pumping water for the hydroelectric installation.

The DRBC resolved that the upper branch of the Delaware River be included in the National Scenic and Wild Rivers System, and contracted with the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation of the Department of the Interior to develop a recreational plan for the upper Delaware.

As the DRBC moved to create a Delaware Water Gap National Recreational Area, area-wide environmentalists sued the DRBC to decommission Tocks Island. The two organizations involved were the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Fund, both funded by the Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Rockefeller Family Fund—the same institutions that set up the DRBC!

Environmentalist obstruction

Thus, to the consternation of water engineers and other experts, the DRBC gave enormous weight to these "environmentalists," in one case delaying a pumping project while it carefully investigated all the charges and complaints contained in each of 600 letters protesting that particular project. As an important ancillary operation, these same forces succeeded in replacing the water departments of all four states and New York City with Departments of Environmental Protection. In New York City for example, under the direction of the Emergency Financial Control Board, Mayor Beame was forced in 1976 to gut the personnel in the city's Board of Water Supply, the agency that had since 1905 developed the magnificent city water system. On Jan. 1, 1978, Mayor Koch abolished the board altogether, placing its functions under the Department of Environmental Protection, which will now manage the crisis.

In 1978, so much pressure had been put on Congress

that it finally agreed to destroy the Tocks Island project by declaring that portion of the Delaware River as part of the National Scenic and Wild Rivers System. With that decision, all the states and New York City, the parties to the 1954 Supreme Court decree, lost the ability to get additional water supplies. The 1979 Annual Report of the DRBC virtually gloated: "Water management in the Delaware Basin appears headed to a future that will stress conservation, reuse, restrictions and regulations and rely far less upon structural activity.

The DRBC moved to protect the fishlife in the Delaware Basin. Commenting on the half-million-dollar fish ladder built at the Fairmount Dam on the Schuylkill River: "The facility has proved successful for many species of fish, but the shad, a principal intended beneficiary, to date has not made much use of the ladder. The Commission is experimenting with water velocity and other factors to attract the shad. . . ." Mothers who are being exhorted by the local media to bathe their children in the waste water from their washing machines may be comforted with the thought that the fish are bathed daily in fresh water—135 billion gallons of it released from New York City reservoirs alone.

An important corollary to the planned shortage in the Delaware Basin is the permanent sealing off of one of the best water supplies in the East. On Jan. 16, 1981, the Secretary of the Interior declared the New Jersey Pine Barrens a "National Reserve," the first in the country, forbidding development of a high-quality water supply yielding an estimated 300 mgd—enough to compensate for the 110 mgd overdraft of groundwater in the Burlington, Camden, and Gloucester areas and supply the remainder to northern New Jersey.

Sequestering the Pine Barrens as a national preserve was begun by New Jersey governor Brendan Byrne, who in June 1979 put the Pinelands Protection Act through the state legislature. The act created a Pinelands Commission to which Byrne appointed Terence Moore after receiving a phone call from an influential New Yorker, Laurance Rockefeller.

The role of Laurance Rockefeller and the Ford Foundation in operating both the DRBC and the environmentalists is a matter of record and is conclusive—but insufficient. Laurance Rockefeller is a weak-minded man incapable of implementing any 20-year perspective no matter how much he may personally agree with it. The Ford Foundation is merely an operations front for zero-growthers, who now run the Northeast water hoax. Who else would wish to subject the most heavily populated and industrialized region of our country to the devastating effects of widespread water shortage—after this area was hit by the ravages of the energy crisis and the ruin caused by the Federal Reserve Board?