

# Coop Exploring Hydro Power From City-Owned Dams

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DELHI -- The Delaware County Electric Cooperative (DCEC) is an organization with an established commitment to exploring and developing renewable energy technologies. Last week, members of the Delaware County Board of Supervisors learned the cooperative is exploring the possibility of establishing hydroelectric facilities at four New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) dams in upstate New York. Two of those dams are located in Delaware County.

Greg Starheim, DCEC CEO and General Manager was present at last week's regular meeting of the Delaware County Board of Supervisors to share details of the plan which he said is in the very early stages of exploration.

Growing up in the town of Gilboa, Schoharie County, very close to the New York City owned and operated Schoharie Reservoir and Gilboa Dam, Starheim said he first had the idea of tapping the flow of water out of the

reservoirs for energy production more than 30 years ago, long before his work with DCEC.

Increased demands for renewable energy sources in recent years and a desire to keep rates low for DCEC members led Starheim to revisit the idea last year and start developing a plan to set a potential project in motion.

Starheim told supervisors he began working with DEP engineers months ago to see what possibilities existed for generating power from the water that would otherwise be spilled over the dams and sent downstream. He said the cooperative hired council from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) four months ago to help determine who would have jurisdiction over the use of that water and learned that power lies in the hands of FERC.

That knowledge, said Starheim, led the cooperative to submit a preliminary permit application with FERC on May 8. The issuance of a pre-

**See Coop on Page A6**

# Coop

Continued from Page A1

liminary permit would not allow the construction of a project, he said, but would allow DCEC to conduct the studies necessary to lay the groundwork for the venture.

Starheim said preliminary plans call for the use of "run of the river" generators at four DEP dams, the Pepacton and Cannonsville dams, in Delaware County, the Gilboa dam in Schoharie County and the Neversink dam in Sullivan County. Those generators would utilize water leaving the dams over their spillways and would use water DEP is required to release due to regulations in the Delaware River Basin. He said it would also use excess water which would be spilled during high water

events.

He said the proposed projects are aimed at being as unobtrusive as possible and would not have an effect on water flow or the DEP's water supply operations. He said instead of water being released over spillways, it would be collected and siphoned over the dams to modular turbines, near the spillway before being released downstream. He said the siphon design would be similar to what is currently in place at the Gilboa Dam.

The potential for energy production is great, said Starheim, and all four sites could add up to a total energy output of 63 megawatts, enough during peak demand

times to power 20,000 to 25,000 typical homes. "This proposal represents the largest hydroelectric renewable energy project in the state," said Starheim. "It would help meet the state's energy portfolio needs."

Starheim said FERC is expected to hold a local scoping meeting sometime in July to figure out what studies need to be completed to allow the project. He said he expects two summers of environmental studies (the summers of 2009 and 2010) and added he would look to see a license issued in 2011.

"It's a long journey," said Starheim. "And it has just begun." If a license for the project is issued in 2011, he

said construction would start a year later and the project could be in commercial operation in 2013.

He also said the cooperative is working on ways to serve more areas of Delaware County and beyond, to allow as many individuals, businesses and organizations to benefit from the potential project as possible.

Following Starheim's presentation Delhi Supervisor Peter Bracci questioned him on what kind of visual impact the projects would have at the dams and surrounding area. Starheim said in addition to the penstocks going over the dam, some transmission lines could be involved. "It depends on the project and their prox-

imity to transmission lines," said Starheim. "I know we would need interconnect lines for the Schoharie and Neversink dams."

When Andes Supervisor Martin Donnelly asked if the projects would represent any new jobs in the area, Starheim said aside from construction, only a handful of people would be needed for ongoing operation and maintenance.

"This sounds like a great idea," said Colchester Supervisor Robert Homovich. "I just hope there is something we can do to support it. I'd like to see it go and I'd like to see it go fast."