



Schumer urges NYC, DCEC to work

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DELHI _ Sen. Charles E. Schumer is urging the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to stop dragging its feet on generating hydropower at four city-owned Catskill reservoirs.

On Tuesday, Schumer wrote a letter to the DEP urging them to speed negotiations with Delaware County Electric Cooperative regarding DCEC's efforts to build hydroelectric plants and harness overflow at four reservoirs.

Greg Starheim, the co-op chief executive officer, said Tuesday that discussions with the city have not brought conclusions.

"It is high time to get this project moving," Schumer wrote. "Both the DEP and DCEC agree on what the outcome should be, but we need for the DEP to get its act together and speed up negotiations.

"Developing renewable hydroelectric power in New York will help reduce our dependence on fossil fuels at a time when gas prices are back on the rise," Schumer continued. "There is simply no reason for the DEP to be stalling this excellent opportunity to produce renewable power and create jobs, so I am requesting that DEP put its nose to the grindstone and speed up negotiations."

In response, Michael Saucier, DEP public relations director, said, "DEP has not yet received Sen. Schumer's letter, but we would welcome the opportunity to fully brief him on our efforts to pursue the development of hydroelectric power in the watershed and the status of our discussions with DCEC. We remain eager to work with DCEC for the benefit of our watershed neighbors, and we remain optimistic that we can reach an agreement to move forward."

Starheim said that as soon as he received the release about Schumer's letter, he forwarded it to the DEP.

The proposed Western Catskills Hydro Project was introduced in May 2008 by the DCEC in its application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for a permit. DCEC proposed building projects at the Cannonsville, Pepacton, Schoharie and Neversink reservoirs.

The DEP submitted a competing application in November. The DEP is the New York City agency that oversees city-owned reservoirs.

FERC awarded the city the permit in March while denying the DCEC's application, citing preference to municipal applicants. The DEP has since said it has no interest in developing hydroelectric capacity at the sites. It now says it wants to work with DCEC on a project.

Schumer and Starheim said the DEP delay is hurting efforts to pursue federal stimulus funding that could

facilitate hydroelectric projects.

The DCEC's proposed Western Catskills Hydro Project involves installing modular-design independent-intake structures on the reservoirs' dams, Starheim said. The group plans to use water spilling from the reservoirs to generate enough electricity to power about 15,000 homes.

DCEC is a nonprofit electricity cooperative that serves 5,100 members in 21 towns in Delaware, Otsego, Schoharie and Otsego counties, using 800 miles of lines.

Starheim said the DCEC's plan is environmentally sound and safe. DCEC was hoping to get final approval in 2011 and have the hydro plants open within a year or two after that.

The project, as proposed, Starheim said, would create 100 construction jobs and generate between \$400,000 and \$800,000 a year in revenue for watershed municipalities and school districts that are members of the co-op.

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