

Relicensing Study 3.6.1

RECREATION USE/USER CONTACT SURVEY

Initial Study Report Summary

**Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Project (No. 2485)
and Turners Falls Hydroelectric Project (No. 1889)**

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



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1.1 Study Summary

FirstLight is conducting a study to determine the existing recreational use and demand at the Turners Falls Project and Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage Project (Projects) and an assessment for the need to enhance recreation opportunities and access at the Projects. Data is being collected using on-site visitor counts and intercept surveys at formal and informal public recreation areas at the Projects and mail surveys of adjacent residential landowners. Data from the *Recreation Facilities Inventory and Assessment* (Study No. 3.6.2), the *Whitewater Boating Evaluation* (Study No. 3.6.3), the *Assessment of Day Use and Overnight Facilities Associated with Non-Motorized Boats* (Study No. 3.6.4), and the *Recreation Study at Northfield Mountain, including Assessment of Sufficiency of Trails for Shared Use* (Study No. 3.6.7) will also be used to determine the sufficiency of existing recreation facilities in meeting recreation demand at the Projects and to assess the need to enhance recreation opportunities and access at the Projects.

The recreation use/user contact survey is being conducted to assess the amount of existing recreation use at the Projects. The study interviews will be used to determine user opinions and goals with regard to recreation sites and access at the Projects.

1.2 Study Progress Summary

Task 1: Study Preparation

FirstLight developed a field data collection schedule and trained field staff during December of 2013 and January of 2014. FirstLight trained additional field staff during the summer of 2014. FirstLight developed a mail questionnaire/survey to ascertain recreational use by residential abutters. FirstLight has obtained and reviewed readily available municipal (town recreation departments and open space committees) and non governmental organization (NGO) recreation plans for information regarding recreation use within the Projects' boundaries. FirstLight also requested and received permission to install traffic counters on Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife (MADFW) boat ramps. FirstLight also consulted with the Northfield Open Space Committee in connection with Study No. 3.6.4.

Task 2: Field Work

Field work was initiated in January 2014. Staff is currently conducting calibration counts at each formal Project recreation facility on five (5) days per month, which includes three (3) randomly selected weekdays and two (2) randomly selected weekend days. For months containing a three-day holiday weekend, an additional calibration count is being conducted on one (1) holiday weekend day. Spot counts are being conducted at each formal Project recreation facility on five (5) days per month, which includes three (3) randomly selected weekdays and two (2) randomly selected weekend days. For months containing a three-day holiday weekend, an additional spot count is being conducted on one (1) holiday weekend day. User contact surveys are being administered to one member of each recreation group encountered during the calibration and spot counts.

Traffic counters were installed at selected recreation sites prior to Memorial Day 2014. Data from the counters is being retrieved on Fridays and Mondays to differentiate between weekday and weekend traffic and use.

On July 30, 2014 the residential abutters' survey was mailed to the 211 residences abutting the Turners Falls and Northfield Mountain Projects. On August 22, 2014 reminder postcards were sent to the 211 residences. As of September 1, 2014, 38% of the surveys had been completed and returned.

Task 3: Data Entry and Statistical Analysis

All data being collected is entered into electronic spreadsheets for statistical analysis and will continue until the completion of the study at the end of 2014. Data analysis will be completed by the 2nd quarter of 2015.

Task 4 Report Writing

A final report will be completed during the 4th quarter of 2015.

1.3 Variances from Study Plan and Schedule

In the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s (FERC) September 13, 2013 Study Plan Determination Letter, it made some recommendations regarding Study 3.6.1, including certain modifications to the recreation user survey. Specifically staff recommended that Question 11, which asked users to indicate which activities they participate or have participated in at the Projects be modified to add the qualifier “in the past five years”; Question 15, which asked users to rate amenities, be modified to include “toilets and restrooms” and “river access”; and that a Likert-type question about satisfaction with the number of recreational facilities at the Projects be added to the survey. FERC staff also recommended that Question 13 of the Northfield Mountain trail user survey, which asked users to provide their opinion on a variety of issues about the trails be modified to add the variable of “Hours of Operation” and that it conclude with an open-ended inquiry into how any rated variables be could be improved. Inadvertently, these recommended modifications to the surveys were not made until August 2014. As a result, the surveys administered for the period January through late August 2014 did not include these modified questions. Beginning the last week of August 2014 the field staff conducting the surveys were directed to administer the revised recreation user and Northfield Mountain trail surveys that includes the modified questions recommended by FERC staff.

For a number of reasons, FirstLight believes that this variance from the study plan will not in any way limit the value of the survey information collected through late August 2014. Nor will this variance affect the usefulness of the survey results to provide an accurate assessment of recreation user perceptions of the availability and condition of recreation opportunities and facilities at the Projects.

First and foremost, with the implementation of the modified surveys in August, 2014, there are still over four months during which revised on-site surveys can be administered and collected. During the period January through June 2014, over 600 on-site surveys were obtained. Assuming surveys are collected at approximately the same rate through the remainder of the year, it is anticipated that several hundred modified surveys will be collected as part of the study. From the period January through June, 2014, approximately 79 trail surveys were obtained. Assuming trail surveys are collected at approximately the same rate, it is anticipated that approximately more than 50 of the modified trail surveys will be collected through the remainder of the year.

In addition, several of the questions that are in the original, unmodified surveys that were administered from January to August are open-ended questions that respondents could use to provide their views on the availability and condition of facilities at the Projects. From the initial 600 recreation user surveys collected through June, over 100 respondents took the opportunity to make specific comments about restrooms and project access. From the initial 79 trail surveys collected through June, the vast majority took the opportunity to respond to at least one of the open-ended questions. Roughly five percent used the open-ended questions to provide their comments about the hours of operation of the trails. Given the amount of data already collected and the number of responses to the open-ended questions on both surveys, it is expected that data collected from the modified surveys over the period late August through

December 2014 will provide sufficient data to evaluate user perception, including the questions inadvertently omitted from the surveys administered until late August.

The recreation use/user contact survey also stated that the Western Massachusetts Climbers Coalition would be consulted with regarding appropriate locations for the collection of data from rock climbers. FirstLight used information from the WMCC's website to determine appropriate locations for collection of data from rock climbers, but FirstLight did not consult with WMCC regarding the four locations it selected before beginning to collect data from rock climbers. FirstLight has scheduled a meeting with WMCC for September 19, 2014 to discuss appropriate locations for continued collection of data.

The recreation use/user contact survey also stated that a mail survey would be mailed in the spring to residential abutters. The mail survey was mailed to residential abutters on July 30, 2014. The follow-up reminder cards were mailed two weeks later. The study plan states that it is assumed that approximately 25-40% of the targeted mail surveys would be completed and returned. As noted above, as of September 1, 2014, approximately 38% of the surveys had been returned.

1.4 Remaining Activities

Field work associated with the recreational use counts and user surveys will be completed prior to the end of December 2014. FirstLight will consult with the MA Environmental Police and local police regarding recreational use in the Turners Falls Impoundment, bypass, and further downstream prior to the end of 2014.

Data entry will continue until all the collected information has been compiled. Statistical analysis will begin upon completion of the data entry in 2015.

Data from the other pertinent relicensing studies will be reviewed and assimilated into a final report.