

Relicensing Study 3.6.7

RECREATION STUDY AT NORTHFIELD MOUNTAIN, INCLUDING ASSESSMENT OF SUFFICIENCY OF TRAILS FOR SHARED USE

Initial Study Report Summary

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

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



SEPTEMBER 2014

1.1 Study Summary

This study is designed to determine the number of existing recreation facilities, the number and types of amenities available at each facility and the overall condition of the facilities associated with the Northfield Mountain Project. This study includes a review of the trail system and climbing ledges located within the Northfield Mountain Project boundary.

On September 13, 2013 the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued its first Study Plan Determination Letter (SPDL) including Study No. 3.6.7. In its SPDL, FERC states relative to Study No. 3.6.7: “*Our review of the study plan indicates that it does not contain a specific methodology to conduct this analysis. Therefore, within 90 days of the date of the issuance of this determination, FirstLight should submit for Commission approval, a proposed methodology for collecting the trail design and condition characteristics listed in the study plan*”.

On December 11, 2013, FirstLight submitted a Modified Revised Study Plan (RSP)¹.

On January 10, 2014, FERC approved the Modified RSP without modifications.

FirstLight is gathering information regarding recreation needs at Northfield Mountain, including trail needs for mountain biking, as part of the user contact and mail surveys proposed in *Recreation Use/User Contact Survey* (Study No. 3.6.1).

1.2 Study Progress Summary

Task 1: Review of Existing Information

A review of best trail management practices and trail guidelines from sources such as the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), United States Forest Service (USFS), and Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (MADCR) has been completed, as well as a preliminary review of other trail opportunities in the Project area. FirstLight’s operation and maintenance guidelines of its trail system have also been reviewed, including GIS shape files for the existing trail system.

Task 2: Field Work

Recreational user data is being collected as part of the *Recreation Use and User Contact Survey* (Study No. 3.6.1) to identify use and recreation users’ opinions of the Northfield Mountain recreation facilities and public education programs offered. The recreation use surveys of users at the Visitors’ Center commenced in January 2014. A preliminary winter trail inspection was conducted in February 2013 on portions of the Hemlock Hill, Oak Ramble, Rose Ledge, Talus Toe, 10th Mountain, and Lower Jug End trails to assess winter trail conditions. A second preliminary trail inspection was conducted in October 2013 on portions of 10th Mountain, Tooleybush, Ecstasy, Ramble, Hemlock Hill, Porcupine, Hidden Quarry, West Slope, Bobcat, Sidewinder, Hill N Dale, Rose Ledge, Lower Rose Ledge, and Jug End trails to assess general conditions of the various types of trails.

A more detailed trail condition assessment is anticipated to occur in October 2014 during leaf-off conditions.

Task 3: Desktop Analysis

This task will be completed in 2015 after field work has been completed.

¹ The Modified RSP was filed after the 90 days required by FERC due to the government shutdown.

Task 4: Report Development

This report will be developed in conjunction with data analysis. A report will be completed in the 2nd quarter of 2015.

1.3 Variances from Study Plan and Schedule

To date, there have been no variances from the approved study plan.

1.4 Remaining Activities

Recreational user surveys of Northfield Mountain’s recreation facilities are on-going and a detailed trail assessment will be conducted in the fall of 2014. This will include a field review of the current trail system, climbing sites, and the existing portion of the New England National Scenic Trail that is within the Project boundary. Trail characteristics, such as grade, cross slope, width, surface material/firmness, width, and drainage, will be assessed for representative sections of trails using standard methodologies adopted from the Universal Trail Assessment Process (UTAP), IMBA guidelines, and/or MADCR guidelines. Representative sections of trails with steep slopes, drainage/erosion issues, and areas subject to regular maintenance will also be assessed. Field staff will conduct on-the-ground measurements to determine trail characteristics and conditions, with particular attention to areas where repair/stabilization measures may be required.

All data will be analyzed and compiled during the 1st quarter of 2015 and a report will be completed in the 2nd quarter of 2015.