

COWANESQUE RESERVOIR WATER STORAGE PROJECT Storing Water For Low Flows

"The commission shall have power to acquire, construct, operate, and control projects and facilities for the storage and release of waters for the regulation of flows and supplies of surface and ground waters of the basin, for the protection of public health, stream quality control, economic development, improvement of fisheries, recreation, dilution and abatement of pollution, the prevention of undue salinity, and other purposes."

-- Section 4.2(a) of the Susquehanna River Basin Compact, P.L. 91-575; 84 Stat. 1509 et seq.

Do SRBC regulations require large water users to compensate for the quantity of water they use?

Yes, during times of low flows in the Susquehanna River. The Susquehanna River Basin Commission's (SRBC's) regulations on consumptive water uses (803.42) require large water users, consuming water in excess of 20,000 gallons per day over a 30-day average, to compensate for their water uses during low flows.

Consumptive water use means the water will be used and not returned to the Susquehanna River system, usually because it evaporates or is incorporated into a product. For instance, just one electric generating plant in the Susquehanna River basin consumptively uses an estimated 40 million gallons of water each day.

By requiring large water users to compensate for their water use, SRBC insures that fresh water will be available for many uses, including: (1) downstream users; (2) habitat preservation; and (3) maintaining flows to the Chesapeake Bay.

What is the Cowanesque Water Storage Project

In the late 1970s, two large utility companies in Pennsylvania needed to find a source of water to meet SRBC's low flow water makeup requirement. Rather than construct their own water storage facility, the two companies agreed to pay SRBC to purchase water

storage for them at the Cowanesque Reservoir in Tioga County, Pa., just south of the New York state line. The reservoir is a federal facility--constructed and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In 1986, SRBC entered into a contract with the Army Corps and purchased about 25,000 acre feet of water storage at Cowanesque on behalf of the utility companies. The companies could not contract directly with the Army Corps because a 1958 federal law, the Water Supply Act, allows only non-federal public agencies to purchase water storage at federally-owned reservoirs. Because of specific language in SRBC's compact (shown above in italics), the commission is able to acquire water storage for private entities at federally-owned reservoirs.

Who determines when the stored water is released to the Susquehanna River Basin?

SRBC monitors the water flows of the Susquehanna. When SRBC determines that flows have reached a critical level, it directs the Army Corps to release the quantities of water identified in a separate, predetermined release plan.

How does SRBC return money to the federal government from this project?

As part of the water storage project, the Corps assessed SRBC a portion of the federal government's original

cost to construct the Cowanesque facility and requires SRBC to pay a portion of the annual operation and maintenance (O&M) costs for the project. To date, SRBC has repaid the federal government \$85 million toward the construction costs and pays about \$870,000 annually for the O&M costs.

This is new money the federal government would not have received if SRBC had not initiated this water storage project.

SRBC also paid the federal government \$6 million in construction costs for another existing water storage project at the Curwensville Lake Water Storage Project in Clearfield County, Pa. For the two water storage projects combined, SRBC has paid the federal government \$91 million, and pays an additional \$900,000 annually toward O&M.

What additional benefits does the Cowanesque Project provide?

The water storage project also has enhanced the recreational opportunities at the reservoir by increasing the size of the water pool from 410 acres to 1,090 acres. Each year, since the water storage project began in 1990, about 25,000 more people enjoy Cowanesque's recreational facilities.