

159 FERC ¶ 62,289
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Village of North Bennington

Project No. 14840-000

ORDER ISSUING PRELIMINARY PERMIT
AND GRANTING PRIORITY TO FILE LICENSE APPLICATION

(June 14, 2017)

1. On February 28, 2017, the Village of North Bennington, Vermont (North Bennington), filed an application for a preliminary permit, pursuant to section 4(f) of the Federal Power Act (FPA),¹ to study the feasibility of the proposed Firehouse Dam Hydroelectric Project No. 14840 (Firehouse Dam Project or project) to be located on Paran Creek, near the Village of North Bennington, in Bennington County, Vermont.

I. Project Proposal

2. The proposed Firehouse Dam Project would consist of: (1) an existing 40-foot-long, 10-foot-high concrete gravity dam (Firehouse Dam) and spillway that would include new 1-foot-high flashboards and/or a new crest control inflatable rubber gate; (2) an existing 1.27-acre impoundment with a normal maximum water surface elevation 614.03 feet above mean sea level; (3) a new intake structure; (4) a new 20-foot-long, 15-foot-wide concrete and wood powerhouse containing a single 36-kilowatt turbine-generator unit; (5) a new 75-foot-long, 12.47-kilovolt transmission line; and (6) appurtenant facilities. The estimated annual generation of the Firehouse Dam Project would be 171.58 megawatt-hours.

II. Background

3. The Commission issued public notice of North Bennington's permit application on March 16, 2017. Comments were filed by the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (Saint Regis Tribe) and Ken Egnaczak, a resident of Cheshire, Massachusetts. The U.S. Department of the Interior filed a letter stating it had no comments.

¹ 16 U.S.C. § 797(f) (2012).

III. Discussion

A. Issues Related to the Cost and Timing of Permitting

4. Mr. Ken Egnaczak expresses support for the project but states that the Commission's permit process is costly and time-consuming, which can discourage development of these types of projects.

5. The cost and time necessary to obtain a preliminary permit is generally not significant. There is no application fee and the time it takes to receive a permit is typically 4 months or less from the time the application is deemed acceptable. However, the cost and time necessary to obtain authorization (i.e., a license or exemption) to construct and operate a project can vary significantly. While some proposed projects may necessitate a lengthy process for application preparation and Commission review due to the complexity of the project and project site, a recent Commission report found that the numerous small hydroelectric projects authorized between 2003 and 2016 took less than two years to prepare the application and receive Commission approval.²

B. Consultation Requirements under the Permit

6. The Saint Regis Tribe states that it has a historical interest in Vermont and requests consultation on projects located in the state, including the Firehouse Dam Project.

7. No consultation is required for a preliminary permit; however, to prepare any development application, North Bennington will need to consult with appropriate state and federal resource agencies and affected Indian tribes, conduct all reasonable studies requested by the agencies and tribes, and solicit comments on any application before it is filed.³ Therefore, it is expected that consultation with the Saint Regis tribe will occur during preparation of any development application that is to be filed with the Commission.

IV. Permit Information

8. Section 4(f) of the FPA authorizes the Commission to issue preliminary permits for the purpose of enabling prospective applicants for a hydropower license to secure the data and perform the acts required by section 9 of the FPA,⁴ which in turn sets forth the

² <https://www.ferc.gov/legal/staff-reports/2017/final-2-year-process.pdf>.

³ See 18 C.F.R. § 4.38 (2016).

⁴ 16 U.S.C. § 802 (2012).

material that must accompany an application for license. The purpose of a preliminary permit is to preserve the right of the permit holder to have the first priority in applying for a license for the project that is being studied.⁵ Because a permit is issued only to allow the permit holder to investigate the feasibility of a project while the permittee conducts investigations and secures necessary data to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and to prepare a license application, it grants no land-disturbing or other property rights.⁶

9. Article 4 of this permit requires the permittee to submit a progress report no later than the last day of each six-month period from the effective date of this permit. The late filing of a report or the supplementation of an earlier report in response to a notice of probable cancellation will not necessarily excuse the failure to comply with the requirements of this article.

10. During the course of the permit, the Commission expects that the permittee will carry out pre-filing consultation and study development leading to the possible development of a license application. The pre-filing process begins with preparation of a Notice of Intent (NOI) and Pre-Application Document (PAD) pursuant to sections 5.5 and 5.6 of the Commission's regulations.⁷ The permittee must use the Integrated Licensing Process unless the Commission grants a request to use an alternative process (Alternative or Traditional Licensing Process). Such a request must accompany the NOI and PAD and set forth specific information justifying the request.⁸ Should the permittee file a development application, notice of the application will be published, and interested persons and agencies will have an opportunity to intervene and to present their views concerning the project and the effects of its construction and operation.

⁵ See, e.g., *Mt. Hope Waterpower Project LLP*, 116 FERC ¶ 61,232 at P 4 (2006) (“The purpose of a preliminary permit is to encourage hydroelectric development by affording its holder priority of application (i.e., guaranteed first-to-file status) with respect to the filing of development applications for the affected site.”).

⁶ Issuance of this preliminary permit is thus not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. A permit holder can only enter lands it does not own with the permission of the landholder, and is required to obtain whatever environmental permits federal, state, and local authorities may require before conducting any studies. See, e.g., *Three Mile Falls Hydro, LLC*, 102 FERC ¶ 61,301 at P 6 (2003); see also *Town of Summersville, W.Va. v. FERC*, 780 F.2d 1034 (D.C. Cir. 1986) (discussing the nature of preliminary permits).

⁷ 18 C.F.R. §§ 5.5 and 5.6 (2016).

⁸ See 18 C.F.R. § 5.3 (2016).

11. A preliminary permit is not transferable. The named permittee is the only party entitled to the priority of the application for license afforded by this preliminary permit. In order to invoke permit-based priority in any subsequent licensing competition, the named permittee must file an application for license as the sole applicant, thereby evidencing its intent to be the sole licensee and to hold all proprietary rights necessary to construct, operate, and maintain the proposed project. Should any other parties intend to hold during the term of any license issued any of these proprietary rights necessary for project purposes, they must be included as joint applicants in any application for license filed. In such an instance, where parties other than the permittee are added as joint applicants for license, the joint application will not be eligible for any permit-based priority.⁹

The Director orders:

(A) A preliminary permit is issued for the Firehouse Dam Hydroelectric Project No. 14840 to the Village of North Bennington, Vermont, for a period effective the first day of the month in which this permit is issued, and ending either 36 months from the effective date or on the date that a development application submitted by the permittee has been accepted for filing, whichever occurs first.

(B) This preliminary permit is subject to the terms and conditions of Part I of the Federal Power Act and related regulations. The permit is also subject to Articles 1 through 4, set forth in the attached standard form P-1.

(C) This order constitutes final agency action. Any party may file a request for rehearing of this order within 30 days of the date of its issuance, as provided in section 313(a) of the Federal Power Act, 16 U.S.C. § 825l (2012), and section 385.713 of the Commission's regulations, 18 C.F.R. § 385.713 (2016).

Bob Easton, Chief
New England Branch
Division of Hydropower Licensing

⁹ See *City of Fayetteville*, 16 FERC ¶ 61,209 (1981).

Form P-1 (Revised April 2011)**FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION****TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF
PRELIMINARY PERMIT**

Article 1. The purpose of the permit is to maintain priority of application for a license during the term of the permit while the permittee conducts investigations and secures data necessary to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and, if the project is found to be feasible, prepares an acceptable application for license. In the course of whatever field studies the permittee undertakes, the permittee shall at all times exercise appropriate measures to prevent irreparable damage to the environment of the proposed project. This permit does not authorize the permittee to conduct any ground-disturbing activities or grant a right of entry onto any lands. The permittee must obtain any necessary authorizations and comply with any applicable laws and regulations to conduct any field studies.

Article 2. The permit is not transferable and may, after notice and opportunity for hearing, be canceled by order of the Commission upon failure of the permittee to prosecute diligently the activities for which a permit is issued, or for any other good cause shown.

Article 3. The priority granted under the permit shall be lost if the permit is canceled pursuant to Article 2 of this permit, or if the permittee fails, on or before the expiration date of the permit, to file with the Commission an application for license for the proposed project in conformity with the Commission's rules and regulations then in effect.

Article 4. No later than the last day of each six-month period from the effective date of this permit, the permittee shall file a progress report. Each progress report must describe, for that reporting period, the nature and timing of what the permittee has done under the pre-filing requirements of 18 C.F.R. sections 4.38 and 5.1-5.31 and other applicable regulations; and, where studies require access to and use of land not owned by the permittee, the status of the permittee's efforts to obtain permission to access and use the land. Progress reports may be filed electronically via the Internet, and the Commission strongly encourages e-filing. Instructions for e-filing are on the Commission's website at <http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/efiling.asp>. To paper-file instead, mail four copies of the progress report to the Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20426.

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