

2011 LICENSE REVIEW PROCESS

The first “Overview” article said that BEPCO was requesting Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company (WVIC) to change their operating procedures to provide enough water in the Big Eau Pleine (BEP) reservoir at both the beginning and the end of winter to prevent fish kills. This change in procedure requires a change in WVIC’s operating license that can only happen during a once-every-5-year “License Review”. The License Review is an official, documented and highly structured back-and-forth process that is happening from March through July of 2011.

FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) issues WVIC’s operating license and approves any changes to it. Per the license, WVIC must control the water flow in the Wisconsin River and control the reservoir water releases using a computer model described in the license. The license covers the entire system of 21 reservoirs in northern Wisconsin including the Big Eau Pleine.

As described in the license, for change to be considered during the “license review” there must be “new information” or “needed changes”. “Any interested party directly affected by project operations” can participate in this license review. Typically agencies such as the DNR, US Fish and Wildlife Service, BEPCO, other lake associations and some individuals do participate. The process begins in March by WVIC sending an open letter, followed by interested parties replying to WVIC that they wish to participate.

BEPCO has a plan to stop the fish kills on the Big Eau Pleine. Because of repetitive fish kills throughout the history of the BEP, BEPCO did extensive investigations into what works and what doesn’t work. We have read and understand WVIC’s operating license, the Environmental Impact Statement book that goes along with the license, and many other studies.

BEPCO initiated discussions with WVIC and the DNR in early 2010 in order to better understand how WVIC operated the reservoir system, and to work together to find answers to the fish kills. In June of 2010, BEPCO discussed with WVIC several specific operating changes, which WVIC agreed to investigate. WVIC repeatedly promised, but has not gotten back to us with any results. As a requirement of the license review process, WVIC must investigate BEPCO’s suggested operating improvements and hold further discussions this spring. The most important improvement was discussed in the previous FISH KILL DATA GRAPH article. This is to have the reservoir at least 60% full at the start of every winter and to not drop the level below 20% full at the end of winter. This provides enough oxygen throughout the winter so that the fish can survive. For the 41 years (1970-2010) for which we have the data, no fish kills have occurred when these reservoir levels are met! Importantly, we have shown that this is do-able.

You can help! Ask WVIC to step up as a good environmentally concerned neighbor and improve their operating model to “Provide Enough Water for the Fish to Live!” Send a message to your legislators also.

Insanity: Doing the same thing, over and over, and expecting different results. Albert Einstein.

The BEPCO Board of Directors.

More information at www.bigeaupleine.org including legislative contacts