

Senator Braun submits comments regarding Lake Freeman

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Monday, September 19, 2022

WASHINGTON -- Today, Senator Mike Braun submitted comments to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in support of the new proposed flow rates at the Oakdale Dam. If approved by the Commission, the new flow rates will help maintain normal water levels during times of low flow and drought conditions.

After hearing from many constituents about the local concern over water levels at Lake Freeman, Senator Braun convened a meeting this summer to hear from local stakeholders and the relevant agencies. Conversations from that meeting and further exchange between relevant parties resulted in the amendment submitted to the commission, which is now under consideration.

Senator Braun issued the following statement:

“Lake Freeman is a valuable commodity to the local economy and when water levels become too low to sustain recreation on the lake, local businesses and livelihoods are negatively impacted. I hope the Commission approves the proposed amendment in a timely manner and local residents and lake-goers can put this issue behind them.” – **Senator Mike Braun**

In the letter, Senator Braun wrote of his personal trips to Lake Freeman to learn about the issue and help bring about a solution:

“Having visited the lake and spoken with business owners, local elected officials, state officials, and homeowners, I know how important this issue is to residents of the City of Monticello and Carroll and White counties. Lake Freeman is both a driver of economic growth and strength and a recreational tool to families who have planted roots in the area. An economic impact study conducted by the Carroll and White County Economic Development Corporations found that the lake level fluctuations negatively impacted the local economy across 25 different industries over the course of multiple peak season interruptions. Addressing the lake level issue will ensure the safety of boaters, lake wildlife, lake businesses, the broader economy, and the endangered mussels downstream for decades to come.”

He also noted the positive experience of working with the local community leaders and groups involved in the conversation:

“I have been assured by community leaders that the flow rates in the proposed amendment will greatly improve the certainty of lake operations going forward and strike an even balance between the needs and long-term prospects of the community and the protections provided to animals on the Endangered Species Act. I am honored to have played a role in these groups coming to a consensus.”

Read the full letter below or on Senator Braun’s [website](#).

September 19, 2022

Dear Secretary Bose and Deputy Secretary Reese,

I write in support of the application filed by the Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) on FERC Docket No. 12514 for Non-Capacity Related Amendment of License and Request for Expedited Approval for Norway-Oakdale Hydroelectric Project. This amendment would represent the end a long and arduous process that has touched multiple agencies, local businesses, and homeowners over the past decade. Should this application be approved, it will strike a healthy balance between local economic concerns and the health and safety of endangered mussels downstream of the Oakdale Dam.

Having visited the lake and spoken with business owners, local elected officials, state officials, and homeowners, I know how important this issue is to residents of the City of Monticello and Carroll and White counties. Lake Freeman is both a driver of economic growth and strength and a recreational tool to families who have planted roots in the area. An economic impact study conducted by the Carroll and White County Economic Development Corporations found that the lake level fluctuations negatively impacted the local economy across 25 different industries over the course of multiple peak season interruptions. Addressing the lake level issue will ensure the safety of boaters, lake wildlife, lake businesses, the broader economy, and the endangered mussels downstream for decades to come.

Local landowners, businesses, the Shafer and Freeman Lakes Environmental Conservation Corporation (SFLECC), and elected officials have been seeking reprieve from the current policy from US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS), Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), and Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NISPCO) for a decade over this issue. Following the meeting I convened at Lake Freeman and conversations I had with USFWS I was pleased to learn that a series of cooperative conversations took place between private and government stakeholders during the summer months. Eventually, those conversations resulted in the amendment submitted to the commission which is under consideration. I have been assured by community leaders that the flow rates in the proposed amendment will greatly improve the certainty of lake operations going forward and strike an even balance between the needs and long-term prospects of the community and the protections provided

to animals on the Endangered Species Act. I am honored to have played a role in these groups coming to a consensus and appreciate all sides agreeing to navigate difficult conversations for the greater good.

Lastly, I would like to thank Commission staff for assisting me and my team in understanding an issue as complex as we have at Lake Freeman. On a number of occasions through the process, multiple stakeholders commented on how this is truly a unique set of circumstances involving two federal agencies, a regulated utility, the ESA, the court system, and local voices. Commission staff were able to help untangle the issue in a way that allowed me and my team to play a productive role.

Please make every fair and reasonable consideration for this application filed by NIPSCO for approval of a Non-capacity Related Amendment of License approved by FERC. My office stands ready to be of assistance until a proper resolution has been agreed and finalized.

Sincerely, Mike Braun

United States Senator

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