



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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Governor

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Lt. Governor

SHAWN M. LATOURETTE

Commissioner

April 29, 2022

Mayor Ray Arroyo
Borough of Westwood
101 Washington Avenue
Westwood, NJ 07675

Re: Pascack Valley Flooding and S-790

Dear Mayor Arroyo,

Thank you for your letter following up on my correspondence with Senator Schepisi in December 2021. I appreciate your attention to the flooding in your community and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is in receipt of your request for an evaluation of 18 months of weather data and a simulation of the reservoir levels and dam operations during the reconstruction period when the reservoir was essentially empty. DEP also acknowledges your request to undertake a study to conduct a cost benefit analysis of the lake lowering and compensation for lost water for flood mitigation releases.

As noted in your letter, the Woodcliff Lake Reservoir is a water supply reservoir and previous studies have concluded that the dam does not play a role in downstream flooding during storm events. As a water supply reservoir, the dam is not designed or equipped to act in a flood control capacity. The 2014 to 2015 lowering of the lake was necessary to facilitate a major dam rehabilitation, which was required to bring the dam into compliance with the Safe Dam Act (N.J.S.A. 58:4-1). This lowering of the reservoir was performed over an extended period to minimize negative impacts to the embankment slope. The existing outlet works are not capable of a rapid drawdown to facilitate draining of the impoundment on forecast-driven basis, and current forecasting methods are not sufficient to provide the lead time that would be necessary even if the outlets were capable of the task. As a result, the reservoir would not provide a source of flood storage under any normal circumstance.

Another important consideration is the safe yield of the water system that this reservoir serves. Suez New Jersey must maintain the safe yield of its system in order to provide a secure and resilient water supply for northeastern New Jersey. Any modification of Woodcliff Lake Reservoir's operating procedure to create seasonal voids will increase the challenges of meeting water supply needs. While I understand your request for analysis of the reservoir simulation and weather data from 2014 to 2015, and your recommendation to conduct study in-house for cost

savings, resources for such a study are not presently available and it appears unlikely that such a study would alter DEP's assessment at this time given the current technological and practical constraints explained above. Should the Borough proceed with an independent study, we would be happy to make DEP's experts available to review the study findings and discuss any opportunities such a study might identify.

Should you wish to discuss this matter or collaborate on other opportunities to address flood risk, I invite you to contact Vincent Mazzei, Assistant Commissioner for Watershed and Land Management at (609) 292-2178.

My DEP colleagues and I thank you for your advocacy on behalf of the residents of Westwood and your commitment to reducing flood risks.

Sincerely,



Shawn M. LaTourette
Commissioner

c: Vincent Mazzei, Assistant Commissioner, Watershed & Land Management
Dennis Reinknecht, Director, Resilience Engineering & Construction

