



# Frequently Asked Questions

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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## [Francis E. Walter Dam Re-evaluation Study](#)

### ***Who are the study partners?***

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Philadelphia District, in partnership with the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) and New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYC DEP), has initiated a feasibility re-evaluation study for the Francis E. Walter Dam. USACE will also be coordinating with federal and state resource agencies throughout the study process.

### ***What is the purpose of this study?***

The primary missions of F.E. Walter Dam are to reduce downstream flood risk and to support recreation, both in lake and downstream. Aside from these two primary missions, this study will also consider fisheries, additional recreational opportunities, water supply, low flow augmentation, and water quality to identify possible improvements to the existing structure, infrastructure, and potential operational changes.

This study will examine whether a need exists for future improvements to infrastructure or operational methods that would allow for existing storage or potentially increased storage in the reservoir to be used for additional purposes. The study will focus on the reservoir's potential to support the Delaware River Basin during declared emergency drought conditions to support/aid in salinity repulsion in the Delaware Estuary, provide low flow augmentation, and protect aquatic life.

USACE's role is to objectively evaluate whether various alternatives to optimize the operation of F.E. Water Reservoir are feasible and beneficial to a wide range of stakeholders. Any proposed changes must be economically justified, environmentally acceptable, and technically sound.

### ***What has been happening since the beginning of the study?***

The study to date has evaluated an array of alternatives and screened out those that do not meet specific criteria in the planning study process, such as raising the dam. Further evaluation of selected alternatives, including structural modifications and operational changes, have been ongoing to understand the impact on the flood risk mission, recreation, and the environment. On September 17, 2024, USACE, DRBC, and NYC DEP signed a feasibility cost sharing agreement amendment. This positions the study to ensure adequate time and resources to complete a full re-evaluation. This includes additional environmental modeling and engineering analysis. The study's refined focus will consider future use of the Francis E. Walter Dam Reservoir during Delaware River Basin emergency drought conditions to support/aid salinity repulsion in the Delaware Estuary, provide low flow augmentation, and protect aquatic life.

## **Why is the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) involved in the study?**

Statement from the Delaware River Basin Commission:

*“The DRBC has broad authority under federal and state laws to provide for the planning, conservation, utilization, development, and management of the water resources throughout the Delaware River Basin. The Lehigh River, its tributaries, and the F.E. Walter Reservoir are located within the Delaware River Basin. The DRBC’s management responsibilities include water supply, flow management, drought management, flood risk management, water quality, recreation, aquatic life, and fisheries. Therefore, any potential changes to the river flows or reservoir uses or operations are of interest to DRBC and its members, including Pennsylvania and the other basin states of Delaware, New Jersey, and New York.”*

## **Why is New York City involved in this study of F.E. Walter Dam?**

Statement from New York City Department of Environmental Protection:

*“New York City owns and operates three large reservoirs on the headwaters of the Delaware River. Those reservoirs are part of a drinking water system of 19 reservoirs that provides high-quality drinking water to 9.6 million people in New York City and New York State. Those reservoirs also release a significant quantity of water downstream to support multiple objectives on the Delaware River, including cold-water fisheries, enhanced flood attenuation, and flow targets that stretch as far south as Montague and Trenton. As such, New York City plays an important role in river management, drought planning and climate change modeling on the Delaware River. New York City does not want to draw drinking water from F.E. Walter Reservoir, have control of its operations, or purchase space within the reservoir. Its interest in the study is related to drought planning in the face of sea-level rise that is accelerating due to climate change, and how the operation of reservoirs throughout the basin can help meet these future challenges.”*

## **Is this study just for show? Is there a pre-determined outcome?**

No, USACE will conduct the study objectively, consider all input, and analyze alternatives with sound science. Any proposed changes must be economically justified, environmentally acceptable, and technically sound.

It is worth noting that some USACE studies result in a no-project recommendation; some result in a recommended plan but don't get authorized by Congress; and some studies/recommendations get authorized by Congress but are not funded and do not get built or implemented.

## **Recreation**

### **What are the expected impacts on recreational water releases from F.E. Walter Dam?**

Recreation is a congressionally authorized purpose of F.E. Walter Dam. USACE has no plans to downsize the current approved recreation program. In fact, if an operational modification occurs, possible future enhancements to the program will be investigated. The economic impact of any potential changes to recreation stemming from this study will be explicitly accounted for and measured quantitatively.

## Structural/Geotechnical

### ***Is something wrong with the dam?***

No. USACE constantly inspects and monitors all aspects of F.E. Walter Dam and prioritizes a variety of actions to manage risk. Public safety is and will remain paramount in all decisions regarding the dam.

## Environmental

### ***What is the geographic scope of your environmental assessment? Will you be looking at impacts throughout the entire Delaware River Basin?***

The current geographic scope of the environmental assessment will consider potential positive and negative impacts of a proposed project at F.E. Walter Dam and the Lehigh River and Delaware River watersheds in proportion to the size and scope of the project alternatives and their potential to impact other areas within the basin.

### ***Is USACE going to do a full Environmental Impact Statement?***

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process begins when a federal agency develops a proposal to take a major federal action. The current level of planning for the evaluation study includes the development of project alternatives, and the extent of potential impacts is unknown at this time. As project alternatives are further defined, the environmental review under NEPA will initially consist of the preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA), which will determine whether a federal action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects. If the EA or project scoping and coordination determines that the environmental impacts of a proposed federal action will be significant, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared. Federal agencies prepare an EIS if a proposed major federal action is determined to significantly affect the quality of the "human environment" (a term interpreted comprehensively to include the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people with that environment).

### ***What sort of environmental impacts will you be looking at? Which agencies do you coordinate with?***

The re-evaluation study will consist of the formulation and evaluation of alternative plans. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, USACE will solicit public and agency comments concerning existing environmental resources and potential environmental issues associated with alternative plans that should be addressed in the course of the NEPA process.

NEPA is a federal law applicable to all federal agencies. It requires USACE to undertake an environmental assessment of the proposed actions before making decisions and taking action. The NEPA process is intended to promote better agency decisions by ensuring high-quality environmental information is available to agency officials and the public before the agency decides whether and how to undertake a federal action. While NEPA does not require an agency to achieve particular environmental results, it does require an agency to take a hard look at the potential environmental impacts of a proposed federal action.

The NEPA process is one opportunity for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to hear and consider the opinions and concerns of potentially affected communities. The NEPA decision-making process allows

USACE, other agencies, and community members to work together to create the best environmental outcomes. Under NEPA, the Philadelphia District will work closely with other federal and state agencies; local and tribal governments; public and private organizations; and the general public to better understand potential environmental impacts. USACE considers many different factors in the natural, economic, and social environments, such as:

Endangered or sensitive species and their habitats

- Cultural resources
- Floodplains and wetlands
- Noise levels, water quality, and air quality
- Human health and safety
- Social and economic impacts to communities
- Cumulative effects of an action
- Environmental justice
- Climate change

In addition, where appropriate, measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate environmental impacts are included in the analysis.

## **Public Comments**

### ***When can I submit a comment in this process?***

Public comments will continue to be accepted on an ongoing basis as the study moves forward and will be incorporated and considered in future phases of the study as deemed appropriate.

## **Costs:**

### ***How is the study funded? How will construction be funded?***

This study is funded 50% by the federal government with Energy and Water appropriations made to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The other 50% is funded by the non-federal study sponsors, the Delaware River Basin Commission and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. The study is estimated to cost approximately \$8.1 million in total. At this time, there is no funding identified to implement any construction recommendations that may result from this study.