

Steven Stocking, Fairlee, VT.

We have a farm on the Connecticut River that we have owned since 1965. We have firsthand experience with how dam management has affected the riverbank and surrounding valley. Over the years we have observed substantial erosion and continue to lose land, while dam operators continue to deny any erosion effects. We are concerned with how the future operation of the dams will affect erosion of the banks, as the rapid speed at which the water levels change creates local currents. An independent assessment of erosion must be done with the relicensing. High water levels and their link to the flooding of crop land during the growing season also needs to be considered.

We did a stream bank revetment project on the banks in 2001, with federal and state agencies (e.g. NRCS). It was a complex engineering job where trees were anchored into the bank and willows planted into the slope. That is completely gone now. Along with that, on the flat land above the slope was a 50 ft wide riparian buffer planted with trees, which is mostly gone now. We have an additional grass buffer and are concerned we will soon be losing that. If a government engineered solution cannot provide relief from the erosion, what can?

The quick change in water levels has had an observable effect. The wetting of bank soils at the high-water mark and the rapid lowering seems to make the saturated banks slough off into the water. There is observed undercutting happening, and the bank slopes cave in. Higher water levels are also having a profound impact on the farmland itself. We now have acres that are unusable due to saturated or wet conditions in the fields, making the planting and harvesting of them impossible. This has been happening on fields that have been in agriculture going back to 1965.

Finally, we would like to state that we support alternative energy, but dam relicensing must consider local environmental impacts. There must be some recourse or remittance for the effects the dams are having on the local community, including our agricultural businesses, which are fundamental to a sustainable future.

Document Content(s)

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