



May 14, 2024

Debbie-Anne Reese, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Room 1A
Washington, D.C. 20426

RE: project docket #P-1904-078, P-1855-050

Dear Secretary Bose,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the relicensing proposal for the Vernon and Bellows Falls Dam projects, #P-1904-078, P-1855-050. Retreat Farm is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit recreational and cultural hub for Brattleboro and Southern Vermont residents, with 500 acres of conserved forests, agricultural lands, waterways popular for boating and fishing, 11 miles of trails, animals on pasture, and community gardens—all open free daily and actively used by our Brattleboro community. Brattleboro's "Multi-Modal Rt. 30 Gateway Plan" cites Retreat Farm's campus as a "center for agricultural conservation, education, recreation and enterprise with significant historic and cultural value".

The farm campus includes the "Meadows", a 100-acre expanse at the confluence of the West and Connecticut Rivers. The Meadows features a 70-acre "lake" that was created on flooded, prime-bottomland when the Vernon dam was constructed about seven miles to the south in 1908. The unintended permanent flooding of this farmland has established outstanding wildlife habitat and a year-round water resource for water- and land-based recreation by kayakers, hikers, fisherfolk (including ice-fishing) ice-skaters, and birders. The Meadows is cited in the Town Plan as a "four-season water destination and major open space amenity for the community".

Retreat Farm has been hard at work transforming the near 200-year-old farmstead into a regional community center for locals and visitors to experience and appreciate Vermont's landscape, both historically and as it exists today. Preserving the nine historic agricultural barns and buildings that make up our historic farmstead, stewarding conserved forests, maintaining 11 miles of interpretive trails (including a new trail around the Meadows at the confluence of the West and Connecticut Rivers), encouraging regenerative farming on our lands and regionally, and activating our extensive campus for recreational use while removing barriers to participation is our principal focus today.

Beyond maintenance of our trails, forests, and recreational lands for free public enjoyment, some improvements that could enhance the visitor experience and make our lands more accessible to all include the following projects that could benefit from Great River Hydro investment and partnership.

These improvements include:



(2) ADA Accessible Kayak launches and an improved boat launch: We propose to add an ADA accessible kayak launch at the existing boat launch opposite Retreat Farm (and one across the waters at the Brattleboro Outing Club's boat launch), and will include a 16 ft x 5 ft wide gangway (with a maximum slope of 8%), 25 ft x 60" floating dock, and accessible kayak launch. The launch exceeds minimum ADA requirements, featuring a transfer bench and transfer slide boards for users to sit, slide over or drop down into a kayak or canoe, with side rails to pull off or back on. Improvements to the existing launch parking area will ensure a safe, accessible loading lane and staging area adjacent to accessible parking and near the water's edge in coordination with the Town of Brattleboro. Both improvements will make recreation in the West and Connecticut Rivers more accessible than ever.

Improved Parking lot for access to the waterfront just across Rt. 30: As our main parking lot accommodates (and fills up with) many four-season recreational visitors (boating, fishing, birding, etc), we propose to pave and expand an additional side overflow parking lot to ensuring safe parking and crossing of Rt. 30 (on the newly installed crosswalk) to access the waters.

Bridge and sidewalk from parking lot to access waterway: We proposed to install a bridge over a culvert that connects directly from our parking lot to the crosswalk over Rt. 30, leading to the waters (see attached image).

Boat lending program: We propose to partner with the library to create a kayak/canoe lending program that enables Brattleboro residents to have free access to canoes and lifejackets stored on Retreat Farm's campus (accessible by a key secured by participants at the library).

Trail benches and hands-on interpretation at the new Wantastegok Mskodal Ôwdi or West River Meadows Trail: Retreat Farm is currently repairing footbridges and adding boardwalk to this 2 mile trail that wraps around the confluence of the West and Connecticut Rivers (the first half mile is being made ADA accessible), and adding six interpretive signs that include Abenaki phrases and translations. Additional benches, and hands-on interpretive elements would help to make this a truly interactive and educational experience for all visitors.

Lastly, we support the Connecticut River Conservancy's advocacy for a study to be performed around the movement of soil and sediment at the mouth of the Connecticut River, including possible reparations for land owners regarding potential erosion and damages that may result, as this may impact the lands in which we steward as a recreational asset for our community.

Please consider these requests for improvements to the Meadows waters, originally created by the Vernon Dam, as reasonable contributions to the community that would help offset the private benefit received from the public resource of the Connecticut River. Thank you again for the opportunity to



comment and please let me know if we can provide and additional information that would be helpful for your discussions,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kristin Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristin Sullivan
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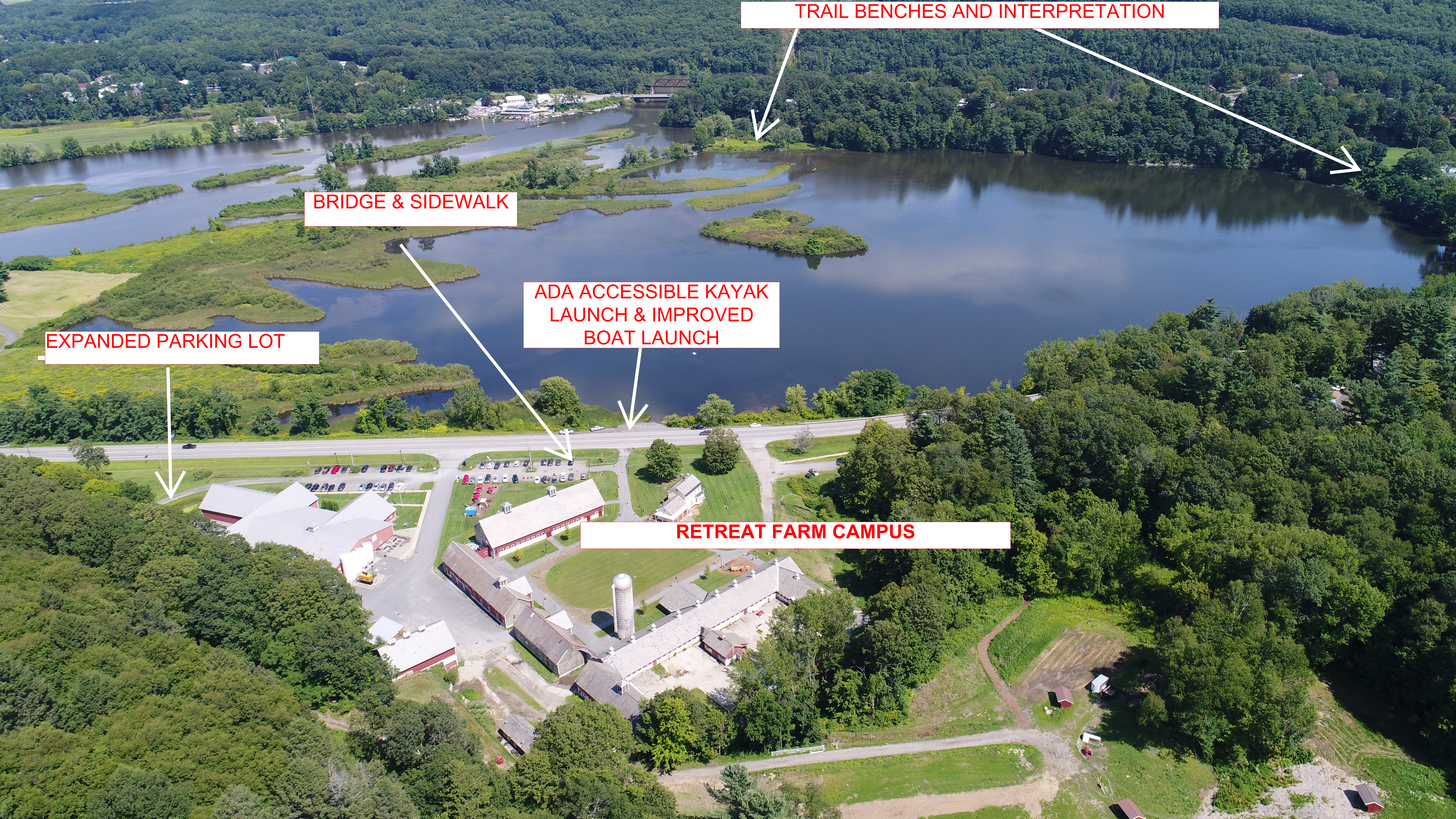
TRAIL BENCHES AND INTERPRETATION

BRIDGE & SIDEWALK

EXPANDED PARKING LOT

**ADA ACCESSIBLE KAYAK
LAUNCH & IMPROVED
BOAT LAUNCH**

RETREAT FARM CAMPUS



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