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May 2, 2016

Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission  
888 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20426

**Subject: Wilder Hydroelectric Project, FERC Project No. 1892**  
**Bellows Falls Hydroelectric Project, FERC Project No. 1855**  
**Vernon Hydroelectric Project, FERC Project No. 1904**  
**Comments on March 2016 Updated Study Report**

Dear Secretary Bose:

Pursuant to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (Commission or FERC) regulations 18 C.F.R. § 5.15(c), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is providing comment on TransCanada Hydro Northeast Inc.'s (TransCanada) Updated Study Report (USR) for the relicensing of the Wilder (FERC No. 1982), Bellows Falls (FERC No. 1855), and Vernon (FERC No. 1904) Hydroelectric Projects, filed on March 1, 2016.

We carefully reviewed two study reports, Study 10 Fish Assemblage Study and Study 12 Tessellated Darter Survey, and one interim study report Study 9 Instream Flow Study. We also provide comments on a limited discussion of Study 24 Dwarf Wedgemussel and Co-occurring Mussel Study that took place at the March 17-18, 2016 Study Report Meeting.

For these and the remaining studies, we also strongly support the comments and recommendations made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife New England Field Office, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game, and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services.

### **Study 9 Instream Flow Study**

As discussed at the March 17-18, 2016 Study Report Meeting, given the volume of data that is generated from this study, we anticipate a series of meetings to further view and discuss the results of this study.

### **Study 10 Fish Assemblage Study**

We have found that TransCanada has completed the study as described in the August 14, 2013 Revised Study Plan and in accordance with FERC's September 13, 2013 Study Plan Determination.

### **Study 12 Tessellated Darter Study**

We have found that TransCanada has completed the study as described in the August 14, 2013 Revised Study Plan and in accordance with FERC's September 13, 2013 Study Plan Determination.

### **Study 24 Dwarf Wedgemussel and Co-occurring Mussel Study**

At the study report meeting on March 17-18, 2016, TransCanada provided an update on Study 24, specifically on the status of the habitat suitability criteria (HSC) development. Although a study report has not been issued on Study 24, we would like to provide some preliminary comments based on some of the content of the discussion of this study.

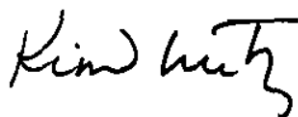
TransCanada stated that they only used four Delphi panelists, and that only three participated. It is our understanding that this number is unnecessarily low. At the Study Report meeting, we (TNC) asked TransCanada to describe the criteria that were used to determine who would qualify as an expert on the panel, but it was not clear from their response what criteria were used. If the criteria include peer-reviewed publications about the habitat requirements of dwarf wedgemussel or similar taxa, this should be specified and followed. If the criteria include field work experience with dwarf wedgemussel or similar taxa, the pool of available experts should be much larger than four individuals. In light of this, we ask that TransCanada please provide justified criteria for expert selection and justification for including only four individuals on the expert panel. Avoiding bias in results is a key characteristic of the Delphi approach, and without adequate documentation of the methods used for development of the Study 24 Delphi panel, it will not be clear how such bias was avoided.

Furthermore, it was brought to our attention that one of the panelists was also a contractor hired by TransCanada who was involved in developing the expert questionnaire. Although TransCanada wisely brought in another individual to facilitate the latter portion of the Delphi process, we assume that the contractor will also be intimately involved with the analysis and preparation of the report. As a result, we are concerned that this close involvement could bring unintentional bias into the study results. In our understanding of the Delphi process, there are

three separate groups: 1) the decision makers; 2) the facilitator(s) who design the initial questionnaire; and 3) the respondent panel. Although we have not seen full documentation of the process, we are concerned that TransCanada has not clearly differentiated among these groups. We ask that TransCanada therefore please provide documentation from the literature that supports the overlapping role of the contractor in the Delphi process.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comment on TransCanada's Updated Study Report and Study Report Meeting content. If you have any questions regarding the preceding comments, please contact Katie Kennedy at the Nature Conservancy's Connecticut River Program office (413-586-2349 or [kkennedy@tnc.org](mailto:kkennedy@tnc.org)).

Sincerely,



Kimberly A. Lutz  
Director, Connecticut River Program  
The Nature Conservancy



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