

**MEETING NOTES**  
**Stevens Creek Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2535)**

**Dominion Energy South Carolina**  
**Joint Resource Conservation Group Meeting**

**July 6, 2022**

Final JAG 7/26/22

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**ATTENDEES:**

Alison Jakupca (Kleinschmidt)	Jordan Johnson (Kleinschmidt)
Amy Bresnahan (Dominion)	Keith Whalen (USFS)*
Caleb Gaston (Dominion)	Kelly Kirven (Kleinschmidt)
Chad Hendrix (City of Augusta)*	Kevin Mack (NMFS)*
David Moore (City of Augusta Consultant)*	LeeAnn Wendt (Muscogee Nation)*
Derrick Miller (USFS)*	Melanie Olds (USFWS)*
Elizabeth Toombs (Cherokee Nation)*	Morgan Kern (SCDNR)*
Eric Bauer (USFWS)*	Oscar Flite (City of Augusta)
Hameed Malik (City of Augusta)	Paul Farrow (Columbia Co. Visitors Bureau)
Henry Mealing (Kleinschmidt)	Paul Vidonic (Dominion)
Iris Griffin (Dominion)	Paula Marcinek (GADNR)*
Jamie Sykes (USACE)	Pete Sturke (Dominion)
Jason Bettinger (SCDNR)*	Ray Ammarell (Dominion)
Jason Moak (Kleinschmidt)	Santiago Martinez (GADCA)*
Jay Payne (GADNR)	Shelly Blackburn (Columbia Co. Visitors Bureau)
Jeffery Williams (GADNR)	Tonya Bonitatibus (Savannah Riverkeeper)*
Jenn Güt (Kleinschmidt)	Taylor Allen (Dominion)*
Jennifer Bedell (GADCA)*	Turner Hunt (Muscogee Nation)*
Jessica Crawford (Archeological Conservancy)*	Wes Byne (City of Augusta)*
Jim Miller (Dominion)*	Will Pruitt (Kleinschmidt)

\* conference call

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*These notes are a summary of the major points presented during the meeting and are not intended to be a transcript or analysis of the meeting.*

**Meeting Purpose**

To review and discuss the results of the Stevens Creek Hydroelectric Project Relicensing studies and discuss next steps moving forward in the relicensing process.

**Meeting Summary**

On June 6, 2022, Dominion held a meeting with local, state, and federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to discuss the results of the Stevens Creek Project Relicensing studies – Recreation Use and Needs (RUN), Freshwater Mussel Survey, and Water Quality. Alison Jakupca, Kleinschmidt, began the meeting with introductions and the relicensing schedule update. Alison also facilitated discussions throughout the meeting. Kelly Kirven, Kleinschmidt, presented the results from the Recreation Use and Needs Study. Caleb Gaston, Dominion, presented the results from both the Freshwater Mussel Survey and Water Quality Study.

### **Recreation Use and Needs**

The group discussed the RUN study, with a focus on the results. Kelly went briefly over the methodology of the study and noted that the focus of the user surveys and spot counts at Betty's Branch was the boat ramp area and not use of the entire Riverside Park. There may have been some carry-over from Riverside Park into the Betty's Branch area which may have slightly overinflated recreation days at the Betty's Branch site. In general, capacity at the Stevens Creek Project is not a concern. Something of note is that weekends and weekdays are consistently used at the Project. Additionally, there appears to be a shift towards kayaking/paddling use compared to previous years. No user surveys were conducted at Fury's Ferry or Chota Drive, both located on USFS land, due to the lack of users on the periodic days staff were at the site. There were questions in the user surveys administered at Stevens Creek and Betty's Branch to further assess the use of the Fury's Ferry and Chota Drive sites, and it was determined that neither site is heavily used. The USFS noted that Fury's Ferry and Chota Drive are remote, therefore safety is a concern, but they are regularly patrolled by both the USFS and SCDNR. The USFS does not maintain the road down to Chota Drive due to budget constraints, does not plan to do so in the future, and would, therefore, not be interested in further developing the site. Further discussions were concerning the desire for a canoe portage around the Stevens Creek Dam. Of the recreation users surveyed, 26 percent stated they were very unlikely to use a canoe portage around the SC side and 44 percent were very likely to utilize a portage. Tonya Bonitatibus, Savannah Riverkeeper, inquired as to the number of people who answered very likely that may have rented a boat that day; they may not be familiar with the area and/or kayaking and what portage would entail. Jenn Güt, Kleinschmidt, discussed the meeting she and Dominion had with local recreation-based business owners – neither would likely market the canoe portage as part as their business due to the liability of the terrain. Tonya also inquired as to how many people commented on Betty's Branch needing to be dredged, which was unknown at the time (it was later determined that there was at least one comment about dredging). Amy Bresnahan, Dominion, noted that low water at the dam due to maintenance activities during the recreation survey period may have influenced some of the comments regarding low water. Many comments centered around making improvements at the Betty's Branch kayak/canoe launch. Alison stated that it may make sense to focus on adding a canoe/kayak launch at the Project for recreation enhancement. However, Dominion does not own a lot of land around the reservoir, and, thus,

enhancement possibilities are limited. The possibility of enhancement measures at Betty's Branch was mentioned as a potential opportunity to meet recreation needs.

### **Mussels**

Caleb presented on the mussel survey conducted in October 2021 at the Project. The four select focus areas (Stevens Creek/Horn Creek; Dry Branch/Cheves Creek/Big Branch; Little Kiokee Creek; and Uchee Creek), determined previously with the Resource Conservation Group, were paddled, and wading/snorkeling/bathyscope methods and tactile searches were conducted. Survey depth was limited as SCUBA was not employed as part of the survey. Caleb proceeded to go over the more detailed results for each of the focus areas. No live specimens were found at the Project, and shell from one Eastern Elliptio and two Eastern Creekshell were identified. The Stevens Creek Reservoir generally has poor mussel habitat within the Project Boundary Line (PBL). Oscar Flite, City of Augusta, asked if mussel surveys were conducted below the dam. Surveys were conducted within the survey scope previously determined with resource agencies which generally consists of the FERC-designated PBL, which is upstream of the dam.

### **Water Quality**

Caleb presented the methods and results from the water quality study conducted in 2021-2022. In general, water discharged from the Stevens Creek powerhouse meets applicable dissolved oxygen (DO) criteria. Nutrient sample results indicate levels below established criteria for lakes, with the exception of phosphorous at the Stevens Creek site. Jason Bettinger, SCDNR, asked at what depths the sondes were deployed (approximately 1 meter) as he was noticing some lower DO levels at sites 4 and 5. Jordan Johnson, Kleinschmidt, will check if any of the sondes deployed at those sites measured depth (it was later determined several sondes provide depth information) and will provide that data. Jason Moak, Kleinschmidt, noted that lower DO levels could be an artifact of biofouling. Tonya and Wes Byne, City of Augusta, both requested the water quality data in Excel format.

### **Other Discussions**

Following presentation of the mussel survey results, the question was raised as to why the survey was not conducted below the Stevens Creek Dam. Questions were also raised by representatives from the City of Augusta about the effects of the Project below the dam, the FERC PBL, and whether appropriate NEPA analysis was conducted. Alison noted that crucial criteria for determining whether a study is to be conducted at a FERC project is project nexus – whether there is a connection between project operations and effects (direct, indirect, and/or cumulative). Amy Bresnahan, Dominion, explained operations at the Stevens Creek Project and its FERC-designated role to re-regulate the discharge from the USACE Thurmond Dam located upstream from the Project. Water quality below the Stevens Creek Dam is a function of the water released from the Thurmond Dam and operation of the Project; data indicate that water is improved, if anything, as it passes

through the Project. Both Eric Bauer, USFWS, and Paula Marcinek, GADNR, noted that impacts below the PBL can be assessed and the PBL can change during the relicensing. Alison stated that the PBL and project effects are considered on a case-by-case basis. Dominion performed studies based on the project nexus and worked closely with the agencies to develop the study scope prior to study implementation.

**Next Steps**

Dominion will start discussing proposed mitigation and enhancement (PM&E) at the Project and would like to further discuss these with the agencies prior to the submission of the Draft License Application. Kleinschmidt will reach out soon to schedule individual Resource Conservation Group (RCG) meetings. The relicensing schedule is included below.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Mussel Survey Completed	October 2021
Water Quality Study Concluded	February 10, 2022
Recreation Study Concluded	March 31, 2022
Study Season Review Meeting and Study Report Review	July 2022
RCG Meetings to Discuss PM&E Measures	Fall 2022
Draft License Application for Agency Review	November 2022
Continued RCG Discussion on PM&E Measures	November 2022 – October 2023
File Final License Application with FERC	October 31, 2023

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**ACTION ITEMS:**

- Kleinschmidt will send out user survey additional facility comments separated by site – this was accomplished via email on June 7, 2022
- Kleinschmidt to make water quality data available, including sonde depth data
- Dominion/Kleinschmidt to schedule individual RCG meetings