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Subject: CRC Comment on Montague Clean Water Facility, Montague, MA, MAC 010137

Michele Duspiva,

I am submitting comments on the draft National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits for the Montague Clean Water Facility (CWF) on behalf of the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC), formerly the Connecticut River Watershed Council. CRC is an environmental nonprofit dedicated to protecting the entire Connecticut River valley through initiatives that support clean waters, healthy habitats and thriving communities. The Montague CWF discharges into the Connecticut River and so is of interest to our organization. CRC congratulates the CWF and town on the significant reduction in CSO discharges and we are eager to support efforts to reach the goal of 96% overall reduction. Our comments on the draft permit are below.

Available Dilution

The CWF discharges to two locations of very different flows and systems and flows in this river segment and canal are highly impacted by dam operations. CSO #2 discharges into the power canal, while CSO #1 and outfall 1 discharge directly into the Connecticut River further downstream. Currently, the company operating the power canal is required to release a continuous minimum flow of 1,433 cfs or inflow, which is released through Cabot Station or Station No. 1.; the 7Q10 is not the same for CSO # 2 and the other outfalls. Additionally, for a 1-week period each year, the power canal, the receiving waters for CSO #2, is drawn down with no flow at all for maintenance purposes. How does EPA consider this drawdown for the 7Q10? Finally, within the life of this permit, EPA should note that flows will change significantly with the anticipated issuance of a new FERC license for the hydropower facility.

pH

Several wastewater treatment facilities in the Connecticut River watershed, including the Montague CWF, have an expanded pH range of 6.0 - 8.3 instead of the state-wide standard of 6.5 - 8.3 S.U. The permit allows for the CWF to undertake a study to determine if they want to continue this expanded range in the next permit. We realize that some facilities may opt to undertake the study while others may not. This will create inconsistent standards for facilities throughout the watershed and so we prefer that the pH range for this and other facilities with the same permit conditions be reduced to come into compliance with the MA WQS range of 6.5 - 8.3 S.U.

BOD and TSS

DMR data shows that there have been numerous violations of BOD and TSS limits and we understand that the facility is working in compliance with the federal administrative order schedule. The 2021 LTCP update



includes a recommendation to control solid and floatable materials in CSO using trash hoods and/or enforcing discharges from SIUs.¹ We are supportive of this recommendation, which seems like a relatively low-cost solution to reduce these violations.

Bacteria

The receiving waters, Segment MA34-04, are impaired for primary and secondary contact recreation due to elevated levels of E. coli. The facility had 11 violations of the monthly limit and 29 violations of the daily maximum limit, and we understand that the facility has been operating in order with the compliance schedule outlined in the 2020 federal administrative order. Looking at the ECHO facility report, it seems that all of these violations, in addition to the BOD and TSS violations, came from '001 - A.' Is this Outfall 001 of CSO #1? The naming of Outfall 001 and CSO #1 creates confusion and in future permits we suggest aligning the names with those used in the LTCP: "Greenfield Road CSO" and "I Street CSO."

TRC

Data from the review period includes ten violations of the TRC limits. EPA's fact sheets on wastewater technology lay out the benefits and disadvantages of chlorination and ultraviolet disinfection systems at wastewater facilities.² We recommend a feasibility assessment be conducted to understand if a UV disinfection system may be suitable for the Montague CWF, especially if these violations continue to occur. At minimum, we recommend a compliance schedule for the facility.

Nitrogen

As has been noted in recent comments on the draft Amherst and Northampton wastewater facilities, the 25% nitrogen reduction target for upstream sources does not accurately capture actual nitrogen loading, rather is based on design flow. The Montague CWF is required to meet a nitrogen limit of 153 lb/day and in the review period, discharged an annual average of 130 lb/day. If the CWF were to increase nitrogen loading to its full allowance, this would represent an increase in actual nitrogen discharge. While CRC supports the nitrogen optimization and reporting requirements, it has been demonstrated that voluntary measures have not historically incentivized wastewater facilities in the MA portion of the watershed to adopt nitrogen removal and reduction activities.¹ Providing clear, numeric goals for how optimization will reduce nitrogen loading in the permit creates an actionable pathway for the facility to work towards these goals, which we believe could result in a more substantial reduction in nitrogen loading. It would also be helpful if the fact sheet could provide information on where to find the annual report on removal and optimization activities.

Related to nitrogen, the 2008 permit fact sheet stated, "The agencies...may incorporate total nitrogen limits in future permit modifications or reissuances as may be necessary to address increases in discharge loads, a revised TMDL, or other new information that may warrant the incorporation of numeric permit limits... Although not a permit requirement, it is strongly recommended that any facilities planning that might be conducted for this facility should consider alternatives for further enhancing nitrogen reduction." Fifteen years ago, EPA prepared facilities to expect nitrogen limits in future permits to further reduce nitrogen loading to LIS. While this draft permit includes a reduction to 153 lbs/day compared to the average 172

¹ https://www.montague-ma.gov/files/20701A_Montague_MA_-_Combined_Sewer_Overflow_CSOLong_Term_Control_Plan_LTCP_Update_-_December_2021_-_Final.pdf

² https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-06/documents/disinfection_small.pdf



lbs/day in 2008, we do not believe this this approach to capping nitrogen at existing levels sufficiently works towards the goals of the CCMP to reduce out-of-basin nutrient loading. At a minimum, EPA should consider establishing measurable benchmarks for the facility to minimize nitrogen discharge over the life of the permit to further reduce nitrogen discharge below 130 lb/day.

The Montague CWF discharges in proximity to an environmental justice community. How does EPA define “equitable considerations” when referring to criteria used to inform out of basin TN allocation tiers and how does consideration of environmental justice communities factor into this decision-making?

Phosphorus

EPA notes that phosphorus monitoring data will be required with the next permit application, but the monitoring requirements are not outlined in Part I (A) of the permit. The lack of phosphorus data in the last two permits has contributed to a reliance on information collected well over a decade ago, such as the 2008 data provided in Table 4. CRC supports a requirement for phosphorus monitoring in this draft permit in line with requirements under the 2022 NPDES general permit for medium wastewater facilities.³ This includes Total Phosphorus once/week monitoring April 1 – October 31 and once/month monitoring November 1 – March 31 using composite samples. This would also include total phosphorus grab samples once per month, from May through September, every even calendar year. Though it's not included in the medium wastewater NPDES GP because of its CSOs, the Montague CWF is the appropriate size for this GP and it is reasonable that it should have the same phosphorus monitoring requirements.

WET Testing

In the fact sheet, section 5.1.8 says, “Effluent and ambient monitoring for ammonia will continue to be required in the quarterly WET tests,” yet Part I (A) of the permit only requires WET testing 2/year. We support the increase in monitoring frequency to a quarterly basis, as the contribution of two SIUs generally has the potential to increase discharge of the parameters covered under WET testing. We note that the Westfield WPCF, another facility with several SIUs, has a requirement for quarterly WET testing, so we think it reasonable to align these monitoring requirements. Finally, given the presence of federally endangered species in this area, such as shortnose sturgeon, we request that WET testing be done on a quarterly basis at the CSO discharges.

Endangered Species

In 2016, FirstLight Power conducted *Study No. 3.5.1 Baseline Inventory of Wetland, Riparian, and Littoral Habitat in the Turners Falls Impoundment, and Assessment of Operational Impacts on Special Status Species*,⁴ as a part of FERC relicensing. The study included the 13+ miles of shoreline and riparian habitat between Cabot Station and the Rte. 116 Bridge in Sunderland, which overlaps with the discharge area of the Montague CWF. The study includes 10 plant species of concern (Table 4.1-1: RTE Plant Species of Concern)⁵ and an assessment of Cobblestone tiger beetles (*Cicindela marginipennis*) and Puritan tiger beetles (*Cicindela puritana*) in the area. We

³ <https://www3.epa.gov/region1/npdes/mwwtfgp/final-medium-wwtf-gp.pdf>

⁴ https://www.northfield-relicensing.com/content/Documents/2015_USRS_3_5_1.pdf

⁵ https://www.northfield-relicensing.com/content/Documents/2017_Study_Report_3_5_1_Addendum2_PUBLIC.pdf



suggest a review of this study for the final permit to understand if/how the discharge may affect these species.

PFAS

CRC supports the efforts of EPA and DEP to characterize PFAS inputs to river systems. We support the quarterly influent, effluent, and sludge testing requirement. We understand that wastewater facilities are not yet equipped to limit or treat PFAS and support EPA's intent to use these data to ensure the future permits will continue to protect designated uses.

CSO

Notification

Both the draft permit as well as 314 CMR 16.00: Notification Requirements to Promote Public Awareness of Sewage Pollution require notification for CSO discharges. Specifically, 314 CMR 16.04 (3) indicates that, "A permittee shall establish and maintain a public website to post public advisory notifications when issued and to receive requests from the public to subscribe to and receive public advisory notifications by email or text message," and 314 CMR 16.05 (1) requires instructions on how people can subscribe to receive public advisory notifications. In January of 2023, the town submitted a notification plan⁶ acknowledging noncompliance with notification and signage requirements of this law. The notification plan indicated that the ACE Platform and signage to address noncompliance would be fully implemented by March 31, 2023. CRC requests an update on the status of this implementation.

Last year after the promulgation of the law, CRC staff made attempts to reach out to the DPW and CWF via the email provided on the town's website,⁷ but we have had difficulty with being added to the notification system and it is unclear if it is in operation. CRC has consistently advocated for CSO notification as we believe it provides critical information for the health of those who visit and recreation on or in the Connecticut River. We believe that email or text notifications, as opposed to solely website updates, are much more effective in reaching a greater number of impacted people. We are happy to work with the CWF and the town to draft appropriate language in line with the legal requirements, but we are concerned by what seems to be a lack of notification through email or text alerts. At the writing of this comment, we note that the real-time CSO event map is not working and that progress updates on notification and signage are not available on the website. We respectfully request these corrections be made and, if they are not able to be readily fixed, suggest that a compliance schedule could be helpful in meeting these requirements.

Other CSO comments

Part H2(5) does not include a definition of "dry weather overflows from CSOs". This should be added to specify what qualifies as a dry weather discharge.

During the annual power canal drawdown, discharge from CSO #1 should be specifically prohibited by the permit.

⁶ https://www.montague.net/files/Selectboard_2023-1-09_CS0_Notification_Plan_submission.pdf

⁷ <https://www.montague-ma.gov/p/1494/Public-Advisory-Notices>



Connecticut River Conservancy

Clean water. Healthy habitat. Thriving communities.

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CRC appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the draft permit. I can be reached at kwentling@ctriver.org or (413) 834-9777.

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