Caledonia County
Natural Resources Conservation District

481 Summer Street, Suite 202 St. Johnsbury, VT | 802-424-3149 | www.caledoniadistrict.org | emily@caledoniacountynrcd.org

CCNRCD Visit to Stowe Electric
Update for Jackson Dam Steering Committee
October 29, 2026

The Stowe Electric Department purchased the Moscow Mills parcel in 2016. One of the main goals of the purchase was to establish a new office for the Stowe Electric Department. The historic mill and dam were part of the property. There is a brief summary of the history of electric generation on the site on the Stowe Electric Department website –

Originally a pull wheel and waterwheel powered the sawmill and gristmill. Gates in the mill and dam were utilized to harness water to power mechanical processes. In the 1850s turbines were installed for woodworking and much later, electricity generation. The 1980s modernization of the hydroelectric plant added a sluiceway and turbine bay to take advantage of favorable net-metering rates. Tropical Storm Irene took the hydroelectric plant off-line. Stowe Electric is now developing a plan to increase the electricity generation at the facility and install a modern hydroelectric plant external to the historic mill building.

As detailed above, the dam at the Moscow Mills parcel was originally built in 1822 to provide mechanical power for a waterwheel sawmill, with the later addition of hydropower generation (perhaps in the mid-20th century). Before Irene, the hydropower energy that was generated was primarily used on site, and excess generation was net metered to the utility. Because of this configuration, the dam was regulated by the Public Utility Commission in Vermont (not FERC - the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission - nor the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources).

In 2020, the Stowe Electric Department received a corrective order from the Vermont Dam Safety Program related to the deteriorating condition of the dam. Because of this corrective order, doing nothing was legally not an option. The three options offered to the Stowe Electric Department were to remove the dam, repair the dam without hydropower, or restore hydropower generation to the site. All three options were considered, and restoring hydropower to the site was the most economically feasible option.

Removal was not an option for a few reasons. Removal is a one-time cost, but SED officials were concerned about the effects of removal on the historic 1822 Seaver Sawmill building. The dam is closely tied to the foundation of the mill building. Removal would likely affect the foundation of the mill building, and because it is a historical structure, SED would have been required to repair that building. However, repairing the building would not be to the benefit of ratepayers, so SED would be unable to use ratepayer funds to repair the building. Removal also could not be paid for with ratepayer funds and would not have provided significant benefit from a natural resources restoration perspective. There is a dam upstream, and a dam downstream. Removing the dam was not compelling from a habitat perspective, making it likely not very competitive for dam removal funding.

Repair without adding hydropower was also considered but not determined to be a viable option. Even if SED could find funds for repairing the dam (again, just repairing the dam without a direct benefit to ratepayers

481 Summer Street, Suite 202 St. Johnsbury, VT | 802-424-3149 | www.caledoniadistrict.org | emily@caledoniacountynrcd.org

meant that SED could likely not use ratepayer funds to support the repair option), the repair option would also involve ongoing, yearly maintenance.

Restoring the hydropower generating capacity of the dam was the only economically viable option for Stowe Electric Department. Still, this option would not have been viable without wide variety of grants obtained by the Stowe Electric Department to support this effort.

While the facility will generate a modest amount of hydropower when it is online (likely enough to support 50-75 households), the project also received $1.2MM in flood mitigation related funding via a Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) package secured by Bernie Sanders. This funding was awarded prior to the 2023 flood event, and supports repair of the dam and the installation of a bladder system that can be engaged to reduce flood levels in Moscow Village. Substantial additional funding (approximately $1.5MM) to support hydropower generation at the facility was obtained through the USDA Powering Affordable Clean Energy program under the Biden Administration, a program that is no longer available.