

## Dam Safety Program (DSP) Newsletter

Spring 2024

Greetings from DSP! In this newsletter, you will find important program updates. As a reminder, the DSP is responsible for the regulation of non-power, non-federal dams in Vermont, for which there are approximately 1,000, through initiatives including rulemaking, inspection, permitting, and registration.

### *New Staff*

In early July 2023, we welcomed Environmental Analyst/Program Administrator, Sarah Moore, to our team to assist in facilitating the program's tasks and responsibilities.

### *July and December 2023 Flood Events*

During July and December 2023, Vermont experienced historic flooding events with widespread impact to our communities.

**July 10-12:** A regional storm resulted in 3 to 9 inches of rainfall across the State, causing many rivers to reach a "Major Flood Stage". This storm exceeded rainfall totals from Irene in 2011 in some areas. Widespread property, road, and infrastructure damage occurred. The event resulted in failure of five dams and damage to over 50 dams regulated by the DSP.

**December 18-19:** A rain on snow event resulted in 1.5 to 3 inches of rainfall and warm weather conditions combined to melt 1 to 2 inches of water equivalent from snowpack, causing some rivers to reach "Major Flood Stage." The dam inventory was again stressed by this flood but there were thankfully no dam failures or major damages. Many Vermont communities impacted by the July Flood experienced additional damage that setback recovery efforts.



*Wrightsville Dam storing July 2023 flood waters*

**Rapid Inspection Program:** In response to the July 2023 flood, and with direct orders from the Governor, the DSP assessed 400+ dams to determine their post-flood condition. The DSP coordinated the emergency deployment of inspection teams from the VT DEC, NY Power Authority, Massachusetts Office of Dam Safety, and NYDEC Dam Safety. The purpose was to observe, document, and take action on storm driven damages to the dam inventory.

### *Dam Safety Rules and Legislation (Bill S.213)*

Following the July and December 2023 Floods, Vermont lawmakers have been working hard to improve policy around flood resiliency, flood management, and dam safety.

**Senate Bill S.213: "Flood Safety Act"**, recently passed the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee and is bound for financial committees before reaching the House of Representatives. The bill has the following main objectives that impact dams and dam safety in VT:

**(1) Creation of a Dam Safety Revolving Loan Fund:**

This would be a low-interest fund with the possibility for subsidy to assist dam owners in funding emergency and non-emergency dam safety projects. It is proposed that the fund have a \$2M starting appropriation.

**(2) Transfer Jurisdiction of PUC dams to DSP:**

The transfer of dam safety jurisdiction of approximately 20 dams from the Public Utility Commission to the DSP. Federal dam safety guidance supports this change, which recommends that a single agency perform dam safety regulation at the State level to provide consistent oversight.

**(3) Creating a Dam Emergency Operations Committee:**

This committee will study and provide recommendations to the legislature on improving and providing greater dam emergency operations support to small communities downstream of dams.

The bill includes additional resources to the DSP, including additional positions and budget.

To learn more about this Bill, enter these URL's into your web-browser - <https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2024/S.213>  
<https://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/detail/2024/30>

**Technical Standard Rulemaking** is scheduled to restart soon with drafting, interest group meetings, and a peer review. The rules are now scheduled for adoption in July 2025 and will represent a more pro-active approach to dam safety regulation.

**Rulemaking Workshop** is planned for Fall 2024. The DSP is planning to host a workshop to review the draft Technical Rules with Dam Owners and offer dam safety education and training. Stay tuned for more information.