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DEP and CAS Reach Agreement to Allow City to Re-Activate the Ashokan Reservoir Release Channel

Agreement will lead to controlled releases to reduce water levels in reservoir

Commissioner Emily Lloyd of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Campus Auxiliary Services Inc. (CAS) at SUNY New Paltz Chief Executive Officer Steven Deutsch announced today that an agreement has been reached in which CAS will grant a license to DEP to utilize the Ashokan Field Campus in order to make necessary improvements and to re-activate the release channel at the Ashokan Reservoir.

The DEP had been seeking to activate the channel for the first time since 1992 in order to provide another controlled release method to remove water from the Ashokan Reservoir. Water levels in the reservoir are high this year in part because of the need to remove water from the Schoharie Reservoir, where work is being done to stabilize the Gilboa Dam.

Water is removed from the Schoharie Reservoir through the Shandaken Tunnel, which drains into the upper Esopus Creek which then fills the Ashokan Reservoir. Levels in Ashokan were already above average because of record rainfall in October. The additional water from Schoharie has contributed to the situation and caused serious concerns about flooding in the lower Esopus below the spillway of the reservoir.

"I would like to thank CAS and Mr. Deutsch for recognizing the benefits of opening the release channel in order to relieve some of the concerns of residents downstream," said Commissioner Lloyd. "Water levels in Ashokan will likely remain above normal through the spring even with the release channel in use. But we need to do all we can so that people on the lower Esopus don't suffer because of the work going on at the Gilboa Dam."

CEO Deutsch said, "We understand the importance of working with the City as quickly as possible to facilitate the removal of water from the Ashokan reservoir. It was clear that closing the campus for the spring semester, while

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unfortunate, was necessary. We will continue to make every effort to aid the City and protect the residents of the lower Esopus."

The agreement calls for DEP to use the campus under license from CAS through mid-June, during which time all other activities on the campus will be canceled. Consideration will be given at a later date to whether the channel would continue to operate beyond June, and whether structures likely to be affected by the water will be restored. The agreement was signed on February 9 and calls for the DEP to pay CAS for lost revenues.

Water from the release channel flows through the SUNY property into the Beaver Kill and then into the Old Esopus Creek on its way to the Esopus Creek. Before the release channel can be used, significant improvement work including the construction of berms and barriers will have to be performed by DEP to restore parts of the Old Esopus Creek. Even with those improvements, it is expected that part of the campus would be flooded.

Necessary design work was started weeks ago. The DEP estimates that construction can begin within a week and will take around one month to complete. Some existing buildings and structures will have to be protected, and items will have to be removed from certain buildings in order to eliminate the chance that potentially hazardous materials could be washed from the buildings and into the lower Esopus. A fence will also be installed to protect people from entering potential flood areas.

The only other controlled method for water to exit the Ashokan Reservoir is through the Catskill Aqueduct, which conveys drinking water to users south of Ulster County. The DEP has increased its intake through the aqueduct from a normal flow of 300 - 350 million gallons per day (MGD) to the aqueduct's maximum capacity of 580 MGD. However, flow into the reservoir is exceeding that amount and the reservoir has been above capacity and spilling into the lower Esopus since October, when the region received over 12 inches of rain.

The release channel would be operated when water levels in the lower Esopus were below flood stage, with the intent of creating a void in the reservoir to capture flow from the Shandaken Tunnel as well as the anticipated annual runoff from the coming spring thaw.

Campus Auxiliary Services, Inc. is an independent not-for-profit organization that contracts with the college to provide food service, bookstore, vending, outdoor education, conference scheduling and many other services. All profits are returned to the students through capital improvements, programming and scholarships. CAS and its subcontractors also represent the largest employers of students on campus.