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Schumer: Act on rural hydro plan

New York City needs to speed project at sites of four dams, senator says

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First published: Wednesday, July 15, 2009

BLLENHEIM -- Plans to generate hydropower from four massive dams that supply New York City drinking water are being hung up deliberately by the city, U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer said Tuesday.

Schumer is stepping in on behalf of a small Delaware County electrical cooperative that has been pushing the plan for more than a year and so far has no deal with the city Department of Environmental Protection, which oversees the city's reservoirs.

The Delaware County Electric Cooperative, one of four customer-owned cooperatives created by the state in 1941 to bring low-cost power to farmers, last year sought federal approval to place hydroturbines atop four dams that hold back the city's Schoharie, Cannonsville, Neversink and Pepacton reservoirs.

Earlier this spring, however, the city bested the electrical cooperative in getting approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for such a project, only to decide that it had no interest in doing the work and would instead negotiate with the cooperative.

Plans by the cooperative call for turbines to capture enough energy from water spilling over the dams to power 20,000 homes. At a total capacity of about 65 megawatts, it would generate 10 percent of the power of a fossil fuel-fired power plant.

Schumer said the city is "dragging its feet on the negotiations to transfer the development rights ... communities that would stand to benefit from this hydroelectric project are missing out on valuable opportunities to apply for federal dollars for the project, including stimulus funding."

DEP spokesman Michael Saucier said his department has not received the senator's letter, but remains optimistic an agreement can be reached with the cooperative.

The project will create 100 construction jobs and generate up to \$800,000 a year in revenue for watershed municipalities and school districts that are members of the cooperative.

"We appreciate the senator's help," said cooperative Chief Executive Officer Gary Starheim. The Delhi-based group has about 5,100 customer/owners spread across 21 towns in Delaware, Schoharie, Otsego and Chenango counties. A rural electrical cooperative works a bit like an old-fashioned savings and loan, in which customers own shares in the enterprise and elect the board of directors.

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