



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

## Senator Michelle Hinchey Gathers Local Leaders and Environmental Groups to Oppose Harmful Ashokan Pumped Storage Project

MICHELLE HINCHEY April 8, 2021

| ISSUE: **ASHOKAN PUMPED STORAGE PROJECT**



**Olivebridge, NY** – Today at the Ashokan Center in Olivebridge, State Senator Michelle Hinchey (SD-46) held a press conference with environmental groups, municipal leaders, and area residents to express widespread community-led opposition to a pumped storage project being proposed for the Ashokan Reservoir and to encourage residents to submit their concerns to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) by the April 12 deadline.

Premium Energy Holdings, a power company in California, has submitted a preliminary permit application to FERC to study the feasibility of constructing a pumped storage project to generate hydroelectric power that would draw from the existing Ashokan Reservoir and create both a new dam and reservoir at one of three alternative sites near the Ashokan. The proposal lists three prospective sites for the upper reservoir: Stony Clove in Hunter, Moonhaw Road in Olive, or Woodland Valley in Shandaken.

If allowed to proceed, the project would harm drinking water quality, destroy protected lands, stream ecology, residential neighborhoods, and the Catskills tourism economy.

“The proposed pumped storage project by Premium Energy is a dangerous, half-baked proposal that will cause irreparable damage to our region and cannot be allowed to move forward,” **said Senator Michelle Hinchey.** “While we are dedicated to moving New York towards 100% renewable energy sources, we cannot do so at the detriment of our precious natural resources or at the expense of our drinking water and watershed communities. I am proud to stand with a diverse coalition of community leaders, advocates, and local municipalities in opposition to this deeply flawed proposal. I thank them for their incredible organization around this issue, and I encourage any concerned residents to make their voices heard by submitting comments to FERC by April 12th. We will continue to do everything in our power until Premium Energy withdraws this proposal.”

**Kathy Nolan, Senior Research Director for Catskill Mountainkeeper, said** "This proposal for pumped storage at the Ashokan Reservoir has almost instantaneously united an entire region in opposition to its potential harms to the drinking water supply for New York City, the forever wild lands of the Catskill Forest Preserve, and the local treasures in our mountain hollows and along the Esopus Creek and its tributaries. We are doing everything in

our power to send a clear message to prevent casual exploitation of our irreplaceable lands and waters, and we deeply appreciate New York State Senator Michelle Hinchey for her role in making the public aware of these threats and encouraging broad public participation.”

**Olive Town Supervisor Jim Sofranko said,** “The Town of Olive opposes the application for a Preliminary Permit before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for the Ashokan Pumped Storage Project centered in our town, and we appreciate Senator Hinchey for her leadership in driving increased awareness around the issue. The project proposal is filled with inaccuracies and misinformation showing a complete lack of understanding of the legal environmental protections in place protecting NYS Forever Wild forests and the New York City watershed. This application has caused great alarm and stress in our community and it would be apparent this project will never happen in the Catskills if the applicant had done the necessary due diligence in properly researching their proposal. There must be a minimum standard by which FERC holds applicants accountable for the information they provide in their applications.”

**Daniel Morgan of the Coalition to Save Catskills Preserve said,** “Within a few weeks of learning about this project, our group formed from nothing into a 200-strong, highly organized coalition. By working together with local organizations, our friends in the New York State legislature, and environmental groups both in the Catskills and beyond, we believe we have the knowledge, resources, and determination to stop the Ashokan Pumped Storage Project from happening. We hope this all ends in a few days, but if for some reason it does not, our coalition will only grow in strength in the next phase. We thank Senator Hinchey for raising awareness about the dangers of this proposal and for joining us as a partner in the fight to ensure it does not move forward.”

**Hunter Town Supervisor Daryl Legg said,**

"This proposed project is ill-conceived and will do far more harm than any good. It is a shame that many people will suffer anxiety until we can get the project killed! I am ready to take any action that is necessary to see this come to an end and grateful to Senator Hinchey for standing with us in this fight."

**Jeff Senterman, Executive Director of Catskill Center said,** "We are grateful for Senator Hinchey's leadership to protect the Catskill Park and the attention that she has brought to this critical issue. The proposed project would have significant impacts on the vitally important unfragmented forests of the Catskill Park. Those impacts will have ripple effects across the forests of the Park, altering and threatening critical habitat for many rare interior nesting birds like the Bicknell's Thrush, a New York State Species of Greatest Conservation Need. In addition, as proposed, the reservoirs themselves would replace forests that currently support populations of Ruffed Grouse, Red-shouldered Hawk, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Wood Thrush, all New York State Species of Greatest Conservation Need. While the Catskill Center supports increased renewable energy production, the project proposed by Premium Energy Holdings is ill-conceived and does not take into account the barriers to its implementation including the impacts to critical habitat, New York City water supply, Catskill Park Forest Preserve Lands, and the presence of communities within areas where upper basins are proposed. This project does not belong in the Catskill Park and should not move forward."

**Ginger Strand of the Woodland Community Association said,** "The Catskill Forest Preserve is not the right place for this kind of development. It's not because it's our backyard. The Catskills are everyone's backyard. We are not saying don't build pumped storage hydro--all energy production involves trade-offs. But we have to understand the price to be paid, and sacrificing highly preserved wilderness is too high a price. The Woodland Community Association thanks Senator Hinchey for standing in strong solidarity with us in opposition

to this harmful proposal."

**Senator Peter Oberacker (R/C-Schenevus) said,** "Well thought out environmental projects that fit the community landscape and provide renewable energy for our future are vital – this proposal fails to meet those very basic qualifications. Compromising the Catskills, running roughshod over our forests and wildlife, and placing the water supply for millions at risk are the outcomes that lie ahead should this project receive approval. I stand with area residents, municipal leaders, and environmental advocates in opposing the pumped storage project at the Ashokan Reservoir and call upon FERC to reject this ill-conceived proposal."

**Jay Ungar, President & CEO of The Ashokan Center said,** "Our beautiful region has many important historic and natural features that enrich the lives of residents and visitors alike. From what I've seen to date, PSP Pumped Storage Project will have a distinctly adverse impact on our region and provide little benefit or gain. I'm joined in this belief by many concerned citizens and organizations."

**Other groups represented at the press conference include:**

- Ashokan-Pepacton Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited
- Catskill Mountainkeeper
- Catskill 3500 Club
- Coalition to Save Catskill Preserve
- Friends of Catskill Park
- Mountaintop Arboretum
- New York-New Jersey Trail Conference
- Open Space Institute

- Woodstock Land Conservancy

To date, there are over 600 comments in the FERC filing expressing opposition to Premium Energy's proposal.

**The deadline to submit comments to FERC is April 12, 2021.** Letters of up to 6,000 characters can be submitted online at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/QuickComment.aspx> or mailed to Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, NE, Room 1A, Washington, DC 20426.

Submitted comments should include the commenter's name, contact information, and **docket number P-15056-000** on the first page.

**For more information:**

Presentation given to Town of Olive by journalist Ginger Strand at the Town of Olive informational meeting held on March 18, 2021

Quick guide to submitting your comments to FERC from Save Catskills Preserve

Additional resources from the Ashokan Watershed Stream Management Program (ASWMP)

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