



Whitewater Flow Releases at the Jim Falls Hydro Project

(FERC Project No. 2491)

Where

The spillway channel at Xcel Energy's Jim Falls Hydro Project on the Chippewa River near Jim Falls, Wisconsin. The Jim Falls Hydro Project is located at the junction of County Highway Y and State Highway 178, between Chippewa Falls and Cornell, Wis.

When

Whitewater flow releases will occur six times annually on select dates announced by Xcel Energy. Gates will be opened such that peak flows of approximately 650 cubic feet per second (cfs) will occur at the old County Y bridge between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

In addition, throughout the months of April and May, Xcel Energy will release a minimum flow of 850 cfs at all times in the spillway channel. This is done to enhance spawning conditions for lake sturgeon and other river fish. During the remainder of the year, Xcel Energy maintains a minimum flow of 240 cfs, which provides marginal navigability for boaters.

River channel description

This river segment is characterized as Class II and Class III pool-drop rapids, requiring an intermediate to advanced skill level. The river reach is 0.75 miles long, drops 23 feet in elevation, and is approximately 150 feet wide. The area immediately downstream from the dam to approximately one-third to one-half the way downstream is comprised of a relatively flat boulder garden with limited navigability. Just upstream from the old bridge, the channel divides, allowing boaters to explore two different routes, each with 2-foot drops at the end. Several hundred feet downstream from the old bridge is another drop; and the last drop and play spot is several hundred feet upstream from the new County Highway Y Bridge.

Put-in and take-out location

The put-in location is Old Abe Wayside Park on State Highway 178 on the west side of the river about a half-mile upstream of the County Y bridge. An access trail leads from the parking area to the water. The take-out site is located approximately 250 yards downstream from the County Y bridge on the east side of the river. The take-out point provides for the easy removal of boats from the river, and includes a foot trail to a parking area on Xcel Energy property.

Restroom location

A restroom is located immediately upstream of the main spillway section of the dam at the boat landing along State Highway 178 about one-quarter mile north of the put-in location. Another restroom is located at a convenience store in the town of Jim Falls, about one-quarter mile from the take-out site.



Safety

River flows in excess of the posted flows may be present at times when spillway gates are opened as a result of snowmelt or rainfall runoff. River flows in the spillway channel may rapidly change as a result of spillway gate operations. Boaters should be aware that there are dangers inherent with whitewater recreation. Whitewater boaters are encouraged to take all necessary precautions and to avoid boating alone.

Aquatic interests in the spillway channel

The spillway channel is an important fish spawning area for species including walleye, flathead and channel catfish, lake sturgeon, redhorse and smallmouth bass. The lake sturgeon population in the channel, including those fish that frequent the tailrace of the minimum flow unit, is the largest known concentration of sturgeon in the Lower Chippewa River. Lake sturgeon can be observed throughout the summer months in the spillway channel and especially below the minimum flow unit. Fishing is allowed in sections of the channel during certain times of the year. The Wisconsin DNR has established a year-round refuge for the first 1,000 feet downstream from the upper dam to protect lake sturgeon from illegal harvest. Furthermore, a seasonal fish refuge has been established from the upper dam downstream to the CTH Y Bridge to prevent overharvest of lake sturgeon during the fall, sturgeon hook and line season.

Background on flow releases

During the 1990s and early-2000s, Xcel Energy underwent federal relicensing to obtain 30-year operating licenses of three hydro projects on the Lower Chippewa River: Holcombe, Wissota and Dells. As part of the relicensing, Xcel Energy cooperated with federal and state environmental resource agencies, local governments, homeowners associations, hunting and fishing groups, and an environmental group, to arrive at new operating parameters for all six of the Lower Chippewa River hydro projects owned by Xcel Energy. Primary issues of concern included recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, flow coordination, and water quality. A settlement agreement was filed in January of 2001 with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), and new operating licenses were issued on Dec. 31, 2002. The whitewater flow release plan at the Jim Falls Hydro Project was agreed to in the settlement agreement as a means of providing additional recreational opportunities. The plan was amended in 2016 to include three additional whitewater releases. The releases remain an annual operating requirement of the Jim Falls Hydro Project.

Sign-in

Please be sure to sign in at the put-in location and include any comments you might have. These sheets will be used to evaluate participation and help make informed decision regarding future flow releases. Your cooperation is appreciated.



For additional information on whitewater releases, contact Xcel Energy at **800.895.4999**.

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