

# Water pipeline laid under bed of Thames River

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with mud to his hips, as he guided a connecting swivel into place.

Thursday's engineering feat began at 7 a.m., lasted until well after dusk, and resulted in the underground positioning of a pipeline that by August should be able to carry up to 1.9 million gallons of water a day from one side of the river to the other.

The project began five years ago when the Mohegan tribe realized it needed more water for its expanded casino and new hotel. If communities cooperated, water could be piped across the river from Groton Utilities with the help of pumps and holding tanks in Ledyard, Montville and Waterford.

Not only the Montville casino but nine towns to the north and west would benefit, the tribe reasoned.

"It took a long time and a lot of meetings," said Al Dion, a manager at Groton Utilities, as he watched the slow, methodical work proceed Thursday afternoon.

"It's a great regional effort," added Joseph Jaskiewicz, Montville's mayor.

Chris Clark, the Mohegan's Utility Authority operations manager, took a break near midday to describe glitches that had delayed the project by six weeks, namely 210 feet of rock in the pipeline's path and some wood pilings underwater that more than

once jammed a drill bit.

"The process is so cumbersome," he said. "Sometimes you hit the target, and sometimes you don't."

"I'm only an hour and a half off!" Shull later announced in mock triumph when the pipeline finally began moving, ever so slowly, into the riverbank opening buttressed with steel.

An unseasonably warm 70-degree day helped, Clark said.

"It's perfect," he said. "That's what the pipe wants; it wants to be warmed up so it's more flexible."

## Working together

Twenty years ago, various municipal leaders longing for a more-reliable supply of water envisioned a project like this but couldn't make it happen, Jaskiewicz said. When the Mohegans stepped forward with \$7 million in startup money, town and utility officials across the region quickly sensed that, without broad cooperation, this opportunity could vanish.

Municipal utility officials in Preston, Waterford, Ledyard, Montville, Norwich and Groton began talking up the prospects of a unified approach. In April of 2002, the Southeastern Connecticut Water Authority, which manages smaller water systems in the region, endorsed the idea of an interconnected water system but thought the pipeline should cross

at the Mohegan-Pequot bridge.

That idea was soon jettisoned in favor of the riverbed crossing between Ledyard and Bartlett Cove in Uncasville. Disagreements over fees nearly cut Ledyard out of the system, but ultimately towns agreed to new water-storage facilities on Decatur Hill in Ledyard and Rogers Hill in Waterford, and a booster pumping station on Route 32 in Montville to bump up water pressure.

Construction of the water tanks has just begun.

With parochialism giving way to collaboration, the tribe and towns of Ledyard and Waterford forged ahead with their plans. The tribe and Intercon mathematically plotted the path of the pipeline, which would soon be part of a \$12 million, interconnected system. Towns would pay back the tribe once the pipeline was in use.

On Wednesday, Dion presented a new and evolving water quality plan to members of the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments that he said will protect the region's water sources.

"The COG has come a long way," Dion said. "There's a great working relationship with the communities, and they're realizing how symbolic this effort is. It will translate into transportation, housing and other improvements, because now municipalities are thinking regionally."

## Pipeline journey

Fused together in sections over the past few months, the pipeline snaked its way behind the NRG Energy Inc. power plant, propped on trapezoid-shaped stools outfitted with rubber rollers that would guide it beneath the riverbed.

Drill rigs on both sides of the river were used to coordinate the pipeline's trip through the river bed. Though contractors had started at 7 a.m., it wasn't until 12:50 p.m. that the pipeline's journey toward an opening on the east shore really began, and it would be seven or eight hours more before it was finished.

"It's going really well," said Project Manager Dave Ilvento of AZ Corp. at 7 p.m. "We probably have 1,100 feet in now and we have another 400 feet to go. I'm guessing we have another couple hours here before we get it all buttoned up."

Ron Weeks of AZ Corp., a crane operator stationed next to one segment of pipe behind NRG, said his role was just to keep the pipeline on track and prevent it from dragging as it was pulled beneath the river, while drilling fluids soaked up soil and solids in its way.

"I'm just glad to be here and to see it done," said the Lisbon resident. "I've never seen anything like this before."

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