

Regional water-sharing proposal hailed by local town officials

From A1

piece of the project, the plans call for new water storage facilities on Decatur Hill in Ledyard and Rogers Hill in Waterford, and a booster pumping station on Route 32 in Montville that will increase pressure throughout the system.

Several new control valves would be built in Montville and Groton, and a pipeline would be constructed under the Route 12 bridge between Preston and Ledyard to allow each town emergency access to the regional supply.

The Mohegan Tribe has been instrumental in moving the project forward, Eccard said. The tribe has agreed to make available \$9.8 million to jumpstart the project, a sum that will be repaid as towns raise funds for their individual shares of the construction. In addition, Simmons recently announced that \$7 million earmarked for the project was included in an appropriations bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Without the involvement of the Mohegan Tribe, we wouldn't be here today," Eccard said.

Mohegan Tribal Chairman Mark Brown said the tribe authorized the funding to allow the towns to proceed with necessary engineering studies and to begin securing permits without worrying that the project's funding would dry up.

"This way that (financial) issue is off the table," Brown said.

The tribe also stands to benefit from improving water access near its Uncasville reservation, Brown said, since adequate supply will be necessary to continued commercial development along Route 32. The town has operated under water-use restrictions in recent years.

"It's a huge win," Brown said.

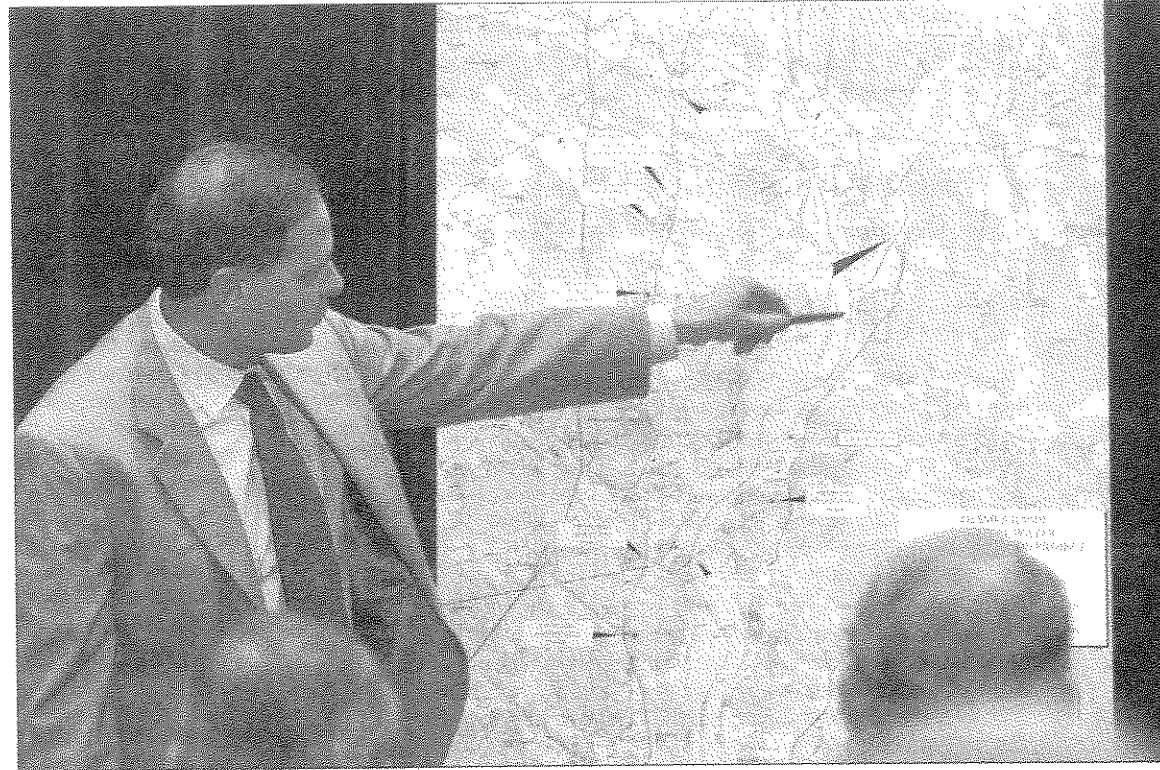
Simmons presented an oversized check for \$7 million to Eccard, representing the proposed federal share of the project cost.

"I want to point out that the check is not in the mail," Simmons said. "It's in his hand."

But while Simmons has convinced the House of the project's worth, the appropriation still must be approved by the Senate, which is not expected to take up its own appropriations bill until next year. Simmons said members of his staff are in "daily contact" with the office of Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., and that they would ask the state delegation to push for the appropriation.

"The ball is in their court," Simmons said.

Engineering studies for the project could be completed by February, said Chris Clark, the operations manager for the tribal utility authority, who is directing the project. Permit requests and construction could begin as early as spring 2004, Clark said. The project will likely require



Chris Clark, Mohegan Public Utilities operations manager, points out the areas where water lines would be placed during the announcement of the Thames Basin Regional Water Interconnection Project at the Mohegan Sun Convention Center on Tuesday.

SUZANNE OUELLETTE / The Day

approval by the various local planning and zoning commissions, the state Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, among others.

Clark said construction on the

various components of the project would begin simultaneously.

Many towns across the region will benefit, even those not directly touched by the new construction, according to the council of govern-

ments. Norwich and New London will have surplus water as demand from Montville decreases, opening the possibility that those cities could provide service to other nearby towns. Groton, meanwhile, will be

able to sell surplus water upriver for the first time.

Towns also will be better able to assist one another in the event of an emergency or attack on water supplies, Eccard said.

According to Clark, Montville will be "the only customer in the early stages," since the town has the greatest need for more water. Rather than depend on New London and Norwich, the town would be able to purchase surplus water directly from Groton. Contractual details, including how much the water would cost and how different utility organizations would be paid, have yet to be worked out, according to Clark.

Town officials now have to begin raising funds for their own shares of the construction, Eccard said, noting that Waterford already has allocated its share, \$1.8 million.

Town leaders were enthusiastic about the prospect of modernizing the region's infrastructure.

"We cannot have economic growth without water," said Montville Mayor Howard R. Beetham Jr. "Our forefathers gave away water to the south and to the north. Now we're getting it back."

But Beetham said the project was not yet a sure thing.

"Everyone here needs to get on the phone to the two U.S. senators and make sure this thing moves through the Senate," he said.

t.mann@theday.com