

**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission
Turners Falls, Massachusetts
Draft Meeting Minutes
February 2, 2006**

Agenda Items:

1. Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of the November 18, 2005 Meeting

Chair Ed Parker called the meeting to order at 10:14 a.m. and adjourned at 12:58 p.m.

Mr. Parker opened the meeting by thanking Mr. Wayne MacCallum for Chairing the Commission in his absence. It was established that a quorum was present. Both the Vermont Public Sector Commissioner and the National Marine Fisheries Commissioner were absent. Then Mr. Parker called for those in attendance to introduce themselves.

Mr. Tom Menard motioned to approve the Minutes from the November 18, 2005 meeting. Mr. Charlie Thoits seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved. Today's meeting agenda was also accepted.

2. Report of the Executive Assistant

Ms. Janice Rowan provided the following report:

A total of 116 schools and more than a couple of thousand students in the Connecticut River basin are now involved in hatching and rearing Atlantic salmon in the classroom. Commission member agencies provide the eggs required for these environmental science-based programs, then our partners help deliver the programs.

A record of 62 schools will participate in the Connecticut River Salmon Association's school program this year including six new schools. The schools will be rearing eggs in 85 tanks in Connecticut. Training for the 19 new teachers was provided, in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection on November 14, 2005 at the Northeast Utilities Headquarters in Berlin, CT.

One January 12, 2006, 71 people attended the Atlantic Salmon Egg Rearing Program Orientation including 17 classroom liaison volunteers and 38 teachers from 34 schools in western Massachusetts. The training was hosted by Trout Unlimited, The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Greenfield Community College in Greenfield, MA. Presenters from the USGS, UMASS, and private business addressed threats and solutions to salmon sustainability in the Connecticut River basin.

Another 20 schools in Vermont and seven schools in New Hampshire have received training from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science in cooperation with the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum, Trout Unlimited, the U.S. Forest Service and several other partners. A handful of other schools in Vermont and New Hampshire are now using a similar program to rear and stock trout.

Senator Leahy hosted a New England Interjurisdictional Fisheries Forum in Washington, DC on January 20, 2006. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries staff presentation focused on conservation of Atlantic salmon, American shad and river herring in New England. The idea was to build support for anadromous fish restoration regionally and to encourage a New England legislative caucus. Hopefully, this piqued the interest of the 18 people in attendance - which included staff from offices of Senators Lieberman, Kennedy, Kerry, Jeffords, Sununu and Collins as well as staff from the offices of Representatives Bass, Reed, Tierney, Delahunt, and Lynch. This forum will be followed by individual Congressional office visits from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Project Leaders during the week of February 6, 2006 in Washington, DC.

At the last meeting, the Commission discussed the advantages of the use of fish counting software and the need for a pilot study to assess such software. The Coordinator submitted a funding request proposal and the USFWS Assistant Regional Director-Fisheries agreed to fund part of the pilot study on fish counting software. The Northeast Generation Services will fund the other half of the project to be coordinated by Mr. Alex Haro, USGS-Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center.

The Commission addressed a number of matters through administrative correspondence since the last meeting:

A letter of thanks was mailed to Mr. Jay McMenemy in gratitude for his years of service as the Technical Committee Chair.

The Commission also sent a letter to the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation commenting on the importance of salmon and the impact on salmon emigration from the Entergy Nuclear Vermont Yankee plant proposal to raise thermal output. The VTANR later requested clarification from the USFWS and NHFG. Agency staff worked together to draft a response that agrees with the Commission position and accepts the approach that VTANR has taken with the caveat that the required studies are a critical condition for approval of that approach.

The annual report on the financial transactions of the Commission was forwarded to the four State governors, as the legislation requires.

The Administrative Report, a summary of CRASC finances and correspondence was also provided.

3. Report of the Technical Committee Chair

Mr. Caleb Slater provided the following report (discussion is documented at the end of the report):

Fish Culture Subcommittee Update

The five hatcheries in the Connecticut River program produced 10.2 million green eggs this past fall including 758,000 sea-run eggs (the most in the last eight years). An accurate estimate for the number of fry that will be available for stocking this spring is not yet available, but projections are for numbers similar to last year (6.5-7M).

In Connecticut, the CTDEP is working once again to incubate 70,000 eyed Atlantic salmon eggs from the Kensington SSH at the private Tripp incubation facility. The fry that are produced will be used to stock the Eightmile River and several tributaries to the Salmon River.

100 female kelts have been transferred from the Richard Cronin NSS to the North Attleboro NFH. A total of 48 kelts remain at the Richard Cronin NSS including 46 males and two females. Eighteen of the male kelts at Cronin have been reconditioned already.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the University of Massachusetts, and the U.S. Geological Survey have entered into agreements. In 2006, the Mr. Rocco Cipriano will work with UMASS to conduct research using 400 surplus, barren, domestic Atlantic salmon brood stock held in outdoor raceways at the Richard Cronin NSS. Research will focus this year on furunculosis vaccines and later on coldwater disease. Eggs produced from these fish may be used by the program in the future.

The White River NFH has recently hired some SCA interns and the Assistant Manager position has been advertised as a GS-9/11 Fishery Biologist. But in the mean time, volunteers are still needed to help pick eggs at White River.

Mature parr, used in spawning at the Richard Cronin NSS this fall, have been released into the Westfield River below the DSI dam.

Genetics Subcommittee Update

2006 adult returns from fry origin will be genetically marked. Analysis will allow identification of origin of fish by region.

Salmon Studies Update

Atlantic salmon fry allocation meeting is scheduled for March 8, 2006 at the White River NFH. Fry production is expected to be at or just below last year's production levels (6.5-7M).

TranCanada has submitted the results of the 2005 adult radiotracking effort. 5 fish were recorded at the Deerfield No. 2 dam. This exceeds the 4 fish trigger in the settlement agreement. If the trigger is exceeded again in 2006 TransCanada will be obligated to build a salmon trap at the No. 2 dam if so directed by CRASC.

The Deerfield River radio-tag study is expected to proceed this spring as it has in the past.

The annual smolt mark and recapture study is expected to be conducted this spring by Northeast Utilities.

Fish Passage Subcommittee Update

Westfield River - Woronoco - The downstream passage study completed in 2005 must be repeated in 2006. This will require about hatchery 300 smolts.

Westfield River – West Springfield – Last year, smolts were able to escape into the power canal which is a passage concern. This year, the project received a Low Impact Hydro Certification. Improvements at the project must be made to maintain this green power certification.

Westfield River – Indian River Hydro- the FERC exemption application process continues for the rehabilitation of the old Hydro project at the Westfield Paper Dam in Russell.

Connecticut River - Holyoke – 2005 was the first season with the completely rebuilt fish lift system at the Holyoke Dam. Minor problems have been addressed for the 2006 season.

Jan Rowan has been assigned the task of scheduling shad hauling out of Holyoke. The new shad trap and truck facility worked well in 2005 and with some small modifications it should be even better in 2006.

Deerfield River - Downstream Passage - TransCanada is working on a final downstream passage plan that will provide for night time spill to facilitate passage since the bypass system is ineffective.

Deerfield River - Upstream Passage - The need for upstream fish passage at the #2 dam was partially triggered in 2005. Passage may be required if four more adult salmon reach the dam in 2006.

Connecticut River - Fifteen Mile Falls - Studies at the McIndoes dam reveal 96% survival of turbine passed smolts and 100% survival of spillgate and bypass system passed smolts.

Connecticut River – Fifteen Mile Falls - In another study at the Moore dam, TransCanada radio-tagged and released salmon smolts at the head of the impoundment. 23% of the smolts were later captured at the sampler and 71% of the smolts were documented nearby. These results indicate that there is a flow attraction problem at the bypass entrance rather than a problem with survival or movement through the reservoir. The sampler also captured 1400 wild smolts.

Connecticut River – Vernon dam – TransCanada has proposed new hydro units for the Vernon dam. Upstream passage concerns for the proposal have already been addressed but some issues with respect to downstream passage remain.

Connecticut River - Turners Falls dam - Northeast Generation Services is working on the design for a new

fishway entrance at the gatehouse despite the expected sale of the project later this year. Construction is not expected to start until 2007 with completion in 2008.

Shad Studies Subcommittee Update

The letter requested by the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission on the importance of shad restoration.

The Committee briefly discussed the model for estimating the whole river shad population and what is needed to ensure robust estimates. The model requires field ground-truthing since major changes have been made to the Holyoke fish passage system. Significant effort will have to be made in the form of either a pound net or a gill net and mark-recapture study. Recaptures might be obtained at the Holyoke fishlift, from anglers and/or commercial netters.

CTDEP is working with the University of Connecticut on a river herring/striped bass study which will continue on the Connecticut River this spring.

Massachusetts DMF has closed the herring fishery this year making the capture or possession of river herring illegal. Take of River herring has been prohibited in Connecticut for several years, and it is expected that Rhode Island will also close their fishery. There is hope that other states on the east coast will adopt similar regulation. Once harvest is reduced or eliminated, we can begin to look at other causes for the dramatic decline in the herring population.

New England Joint Ventures

The New England State Directors met at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Office in Hadley, MA on January 9, 2006. At that meeting, they decided that advocacy for Atlantic salmon restoration should proceed as a regional initiative rather than on a river-by-river basis. The Tech Committee was charged with the task of compiling a statement of needs and budget table for the Connecticut River program. These products were merged with similar products from the Merrimack and Maine programs to consolidate a New England-wide statement of need and budget table.

Other Business

Congressional Outreach

Senator Leahy hosted a New England Interjurisdictional Fisheries Forum in Washington, D.C. on January 20, 2006. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries staff presentation focused on conservation of salmon, shad and herring in New England. The idea was to build support for anadromous fish restoration regionally and to encourage a New England legislative caucus. Hopefully, this piqued the interest of the 18 people in attendance which included staff from Senators Lieberman, Kennedy, Kerry, Jeffords, Sununu and Collins offices as well as staff from Representatives Bass, Reed, Tierney, Delahunt, and Lynch's offices. This forum will be followed by individual office visits the week of February 6.

School Programs

A total of 114 schools and more than a couple of thousand students in the Connecticut River basin are now involved in hatching and rearing Atlantic salmon in the classroom. The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission member agencies provide the eggs required for these environmental science-based programs, then our partners help deliver the programs.

Sixty-two schools will participate in the Connecticut River Salmon Association's school program this year. Thirty-four schools will be participating in western Massachusetts. Another 20 schools in Vermont and seven schools in New Hampshire are involved. A handful of other schools in Vermont and New Hampshire are now using a similar program to rear and stock trout.

Fish Requests

USGS-Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center will be requesting 100-200 parr-smolt sized Atlantic

salmon for studies that will address Atlantic salmon energetics and lateral line development at smoltification.

300 smolts will be required for downstream passage studies at the Woronoco dam on the Westfield River and another 150-200 smolts are needed for the Fifteen Mile Falls study. In both cases the smolts would come from the Pittsford NFH.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working on an agreement with the Berkshire Foundation to run the Berkshire National Trout Hatchery using a volunteer workforce supervised a USFWS Project Leader (Henry Bouchard -Pittsford NFH Manager). In this capacity, the Service can maintain the hatchery for production such that it contributes to the Connecticut River basin fish restoration program while providing opportunities for outreach, education and Congressional support.

To initiate the program, the USFWS requested 15,000-20,000 eyed Atlantic salmon eggs from the White River NFH for the production of 2-year smolts at the Berkshire National Trout Hatchery.

This promoted a discussion during which the following points were addressed:

- The operation costs of the hatchery will be raised by the Berkshire Foundation through donations.
- Limited expenses may also be covered by the USFWS budget, costs not expected to exceed the amount currently budgeted for the station in caretaker status.
- This project will not divert funding from the existing Connecticut River program.
- Mr. Reed Baldwin from the Western Massachusetts Center for Sustainable Aquaculture is an experienced aquaculturist who will be the on-site, day-to-day manager working with 6-14 volunteers/day.
- The Service supervisor will make weekly or bi-weekly visits to the hatchery to ensure that operations are going smoothly.
- This added assignment will not impact that Project Leader's current duties within the Program.

The Tech Committee expressed some concern that smolt production may be problematic because of the constant water temperature at the facility. The initial request is a starting point for the hatchery, production may be increased in the future or the focus may shift to fry production or kelt reconditioning, or some other activity as needed by the program to advance the program.

The Technical Committee approved the request on the condition that the Smolt Advisory Committee has a role in guiding and evaluating the effort.

Smolt Evaluation

The 2006 smolt year class at the Pittsford NFH was evaluated on Feb 1st.

Fish Passage Funding

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is funding fish passage projects in 2006 a little bit differently than has been the routine in the past. Partners are requested to complete a more detailed proposal. Available funding is expected to be less than or equal to \$25,000/project. Proposals must be submitted before the end of February.

Eel Management Plan

A draft Connecticut River Basin Eel Management Plan is expected in March 2006.

Discussion:

Berkshire National Trout Hatchery

Mr. Parker observed that the approach of managing the Berkshire facility as an all volunteer hatchery is a unique and interesting concept. He expressed an interest in seeing how this paradigm plays out because of the potential application elsewhere in the basin.

Mr. Geiger said that the facility has great potential for an excellent water supply and since water quantity and quality availability is expected to be a critical concern in the future, it makes sense to try to retain the

facility. The hatchery has been operated by the Western Massachusetts Center for Sustainable Aquaculture with partial success since it was closed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The current agreement taps into the Foundation that formed to support the hatchery during that period. Operation of the hatchery has intrigued some influential local citizens and has the potential to generate active engagement and additional advocates for the program.

Mr. MacCallum noted that this may provide an opportunity to address concerns within the program about production of smolts (quantity and quality). He suggested that since the hatchery water supply is from wells, it would be good to mark and assess the smolts for their contribution to the program. He suggested that the Technical Committee be charged to look at this.

Mr. MacCallum expressed concern that this initiative should not take away from the existing Connecticut River program. It has been his experience that once a program like this gets going it becomes necessary to divert funds from existing efforts to keep it going. He said that the State would support the Service in the future if it had to pull back from this effort in order to keep the existing program from going backwards. Mr. Geiger acknowledged this concern and said that the partners were well aware of this concern. Nevertheless, he remains optimistic that the expected gains are worth the risk. Mr. Geiger predicted an expanded role for the facility in the next 5-10 years.

Mr. MacCallum questioned the future potential for water withdrawal at the facility because the State allocation process often limits access to water despite its apparent availability. He cautioned Mr. Geiger to look into the existing permit and ensure that the water would be there for use in the future. Mr. Geiger said that the Service would be assessing the facility. He also thought that water re-use would play an important role in the future when it comes to ensuring water quantity and quality for projected needs.

Congressional Outreach

Mr. Geiger reported on others who attended the New England Interjurisdictional Fisheries Forum in Washington, D.C. including the Executive Director of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission who was supportive of the holistic anadromous fish restoration approach and a key Senate Appropriations Committee staffer who was touring the southern portion of the Region at the moment with Regional Office staff.

Smolt Evaluation

Mr. Jay McMenemy said that the smolt fin evaluation was completed by partners at the Pittsford National Fish Hatchery on February 1. Overall, the smolts looked good. Some minor issues with pectoral fin erosion were observed on some fish.

Fish Passage Funding

Mr. Parker asked if there was a holistic approach to assessing fish passage projects in New England or if projects were selected on a case-by-case basis? Mr. Geiger said that the Service currently works with the States to identify their highest priorities but that ecological benefits and congressional accountability could be improved through a more holistic approach. Mr. MacCallum said that the process in use works by State and within the river basin. Listing priorities is complicated because of a diversity of concerns and we are otherwise in pretty good shape here with respect to salmon and anadromous fish needs. Mr. Parker expressed concern that Congress wants to see definitive on-the-ground results which is forcing States to put more funding into on-the-ground projects. He recognized that a lot of projects are selected based on opportunity but he suggested that the Technical Committee should be charged with developing a list of priorities and associated constraints on those projects to help facilitate selections.

Mr. Eric Palmer identified maintenance of existing Service fish passage/engineering expertise as another high priority. Mr. Geiger agreed but said that this is complicated because the Service is currently facing a few immediate challenges. First, as we are all aware, engineering base funding is inadequate to meet needs. Second, the Division is currently undergoing an outsourcing review to see if engineering services (all or part) should be contracted out or retained within the Service. And, finally, Budget and Administration (which administers and supervises engineering and other support functions in the Region) is undergoing a 2-year \$700,000 base reallocation which may incidentally impact engineering. Mr. Geiger

expects most of these concerns to be resolved within a few months and he remains hopeful that the Service will retain the fish passage engineering expertise. The Service Regional Director is likely to provide an update to the State Directors on this subject at the Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference.

4. Congressional Initiative 2006 Discussion

Mr. MacCallum initiated the discussion on the current Congressional initiative by providing some background. The Commission endorsed Congressional efforts for the foreseeable future at the last meeting. Mr. Perry has been Chair of the Committee with assistance from Mr. Jim Carroll, Ms. Rowan, and anyone else that Mr. Perry deemed necessary. In the past, efforts have been made to educate the Congressionals on program accomplishments, to identify needs and to establish research requirements. Similar activities have taken place elsewhere in New England sometimes resulting in competition among the programs. To resolve this apparent conflict, Mr. Perry suggested a meeting among the New England State Directors (and including NMFS, USFWS, and the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission) in order to establish a more collaborative approach to securing additional funding throughout New England. Additionally, there was some discussion about the potential for a New England-wide habitat conservation initiative or Joint Venture. And, finally, there was discussion about the potential for re-energizing the New England Atlantic Salmon Committee for this purpose. All of these things have been coming together and Mr. Perry has been coordinating the effort.

Mr. Perry said that the New England Atlantic Salmon Committee Statement of Intent had been revised and that the U.S. Forest Service had been added as a signatory. A salmon restoration and recovery needs table and narrative had been created with input from all the programs in New England in order to establish a common message and to coordinate activities. In order to move forward, Mr. Perry proposed that the Commission work with local staff throughout the year to nurture an interest in moving this initiative forward so that, if a trip to DC is later required, visits can be handled in a forum or group rather than through individual and time-consuming appointments with staffers. He has received encouragement in this pursuit from staff in the offices of Senator Sununu and Representative Bass.

Mr. Parker thought this sounded both more effective and efficient. He said that he was glad to see Maine and Rhode Island working with us. He suggested that one way to engage key staff is through field trips where they can see the resource, and connect the value. Mr. Gephard offered that a trip to Holyoke during the peak of the run around Memorial Day would provide staff with an opportunity to see the resource, to see the investment, and to see the partners in action.

Mr. Bob Jones expressed a concern that the Commission has a unique mandate and that this should not be lost in the process. He observed that the Maine Salmon Commission was listed as a signatory to the NEASC Statement but that the Commission was not. It was agreed that there was no apparent downside to adding the Commission as a signatory.

Mr. Jones also recalled that NEASC was an idea that Mr. Dick Buck originated years ago. He was a NASCO Commissioner at the time and the Committee was created to advise NASCO. Later, the NEASC had a role in addressing disease issues.

Mr. Geiger suggested that the Commission look to use the existing New England Fisheries Resources Restoration Act (NEFRRA) as the vehicle for moving this initiative forward. While a New England-wide legislative delegation will carry some weight in Congress, he pointed out that finding a Congressional champion for this initiative may be key to its success.

Mr. Perry agreed to follow-up with the National Marine Fisheries Service to make sure that there was full support from this agency. The agency has not been active on the Commission or Technical Committee for a number of years now. So, the first step is to get them re-engaged as a NEASC signatory and later to request a commitment to the restoration programs outside of Maine.

Mr. MacCallum moved that the Commission endorse the NEASC needs document as amended to include the Pawcatuck River program in the bold heading on page 1 and several minor edits to the budget table. Mr. Menard seconded the motion and the motion was approved.

Mr. Perry moved that the Commission ask the NEASC to add the Commission as a signatory to the NEASC Statement of Intent. Mr. MacCallum seconded the motion and the motion was approved.

5 Other Business

- Mr. Geiger reported that the Maine Atlantic Salmon Recovery Plan has been approved and is available to the public.
- Mr. Geiger reported that the Penobscot River Atlantic Salmon Status Review has been completed. There may be implications for the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program in this document.
- Mr. Geiger has charged the Ms. Meredith Bartron, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service geneticist, with working with Mr. Ben Letcher, USGS-CAFRC, to review the Penobscot River Atlantic Salmon Status Review and provide a report to the Technical Committee on the genetic implications of this status review here.
- Mr. Carroll noted that the New England Atlantic Salmon Committee Statement of Intent was like a prenuptial agreement among the signatories. The Statement itself can be provided to Congress so they can see our collaborative intentions but he wondered what the specific strategy was with respect to approaching Congress to ensure that additional funds would be forthcoming? Mr. Parker thought that it was important to have developed a common message about our needs. The Statement has been endorsed by the Commission and the Commission will provide both the Statement and the needs narrative to the basin's legislative delegation and ask for their support. Mr. Geiger offered that the Commission can take the opportunity to re-emphasize the ongoing and effective partnership, our long history of working together, the legal mandate, and how we delivered significant benefits in 2004 when funding was allocated to the program.
- Mr. Geiger said that reductions and redirections are expected in the FY2007 President's budget. The budget will be released on Monday. Initiatives that will receive redirected funding include things like habitat restoration/fish passage, working with partners, and programs that deliver significant benefits. The currently identified NEASC needs (\$12 million) are modest compared needs identified in the Great Lakes (several \$100 million) or the Pacific Northwest (\$1 billion).
- Mr. Slater provided the requested draft letter addressed to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission from the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission supporting the ongoing coast-wide stock review of American shad. Mr. MacCallum motioned to send the letter as written. Mr. Perry seconded the motion and the motion was approved.
- Mr. Rowan reminded the cooperators that the White River NFH was still in dire need of volunteers to assist with egg picking.

Attendance

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Ed Parker	CTDEP
Wayne MacCallum	MDFW
Jaime Geiger	USFWS
Charles F. Thoits III	NH Public Sector
Scott Decker	NHFG
Tom Menard	MA Public Sector
Dave Tilton	USFWS
Caleb Slater	MDFW
Bob Jones	CT Public Sector
Jim Carroll	CRSA
Eric Palmer	VTFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Bob Stira	Northeast Generation Services
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Robert B. Wolter	CRSA
Lee Perry	NHFG