

**Minutes of CRASC Meeting
March 30, 2000
Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center
Turners Falls, Massachusetts**

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes from the Meeting on November 18, 1999 and January 12, 2000

Chair Duncan McInnes called the meeting to order at 10:17 a.m. The agenda was accepted with the addition of a presentation from Mr. Bruce Williams, USACE.

A quorum (simple majority) was present.

Mr. Charlie Thoits motioned to approve the Minutes from the November meeting, Mr. Peter Basta seconded the motion, and the Minutes were approved. Mr. Wayne MacCallum motioned to approve the Minutes from the April meeting, Mr. Charlie Thoits seconded the motion, and the Minutes were approved.

2. Report of the Executive Assistant

Ms. Janice Rowan provided a report on coordination activities and Commission administration (attached).

3. Report of the Technical Committee Chair

Mr. Jay McMenemy provided a report on Technical Committee and Subcommittee activities (attached). A lengthy discussion followed.

Mr. Wayne MacCallum asked why survival of smolts and YOY was down in the basin. The cause for poor survival is not known. Sea-run fry stocked in the Farmington River was down and the 1999 drought was worse in the lower river.

Mr. MacCallum asked what would happen if parr destined for transfer to the Cronin hatchery are positive for disease when sampled. The protocol developed for parr collection and sampling is in agreement with the New England Fish Health Management Guidelines. Only clean fish will be transferred from Vermont to the Cronin hatchery.

Mr. MacCallum asked why the shad run is declining. The cause for the decline in shad returns is not known. It may be the result of increased striped bass predation. It may be the result of a recently expanded mixed stock Atlantic coast fishery. The ASMFC is phasing this fishery out over a five-year period beginning last year. Mr. Jon Rittgers recommended that the Commission keep an eye on this fishery and be prepared to comment formally to ASMFC as needed.

Mr. Bob Jones requested an update on this fishery and the ASMFC Shad Management Plan at the next meeting. It was suggested that Mr. Ernie Beckwith might be able to provide this update.

Mr. MacCallum asked what was causing the decline in the blueback herring fishery. The returns no longer track the juvenile index suggesting that losses are occurring in the Sound or the ocean. Runs are still strong in the Hudson River. Runs in coastal Massachusetts and Connecticut have been better than the Connecticut mainstem. The cause for the decline in bluebacks is not known. Maine Department of Marine Resources has reported that bluebacks have been harvested as bycatch in a sea herring fishery.

Mr. Steve Gephard reported that Connecticut has enacted new regulations closing the mainstem to blueback fishing from Glastonbury to Hartford including all tributaries and Whethersfield Cove. The upper Connecticut from Hartford to the Massachusetts line remains open for striped bass anglers who use the herring as bait.

Mr. MacCallum asked if there was any strategy in place for CRASC to obtain funds. Since none of the agencies have adequate staff or funds to investigate and assess the herring runs, the Commissioners recommended that the Technical Committee put together a scope of work that can be used to develop funding proposals for the herring work and for reading shad scales. Additionally the Technical Committee should investigate the feasibility of automated scale readers using image analysis software.

Mr. MacCallum asked about program egg incubation capacity given the fish health and temperature concerns at the Warren SFH and personnel and facility constraints at the White River NFH. The NHFG does not currently have the funds to make the changes needed at the Warren SFH, decreasing incubation capacity by 700,000 eggs. The WRNFH incubated 11 million eggs this year. The workload of increased numbers of eggs and DNA research taxed the staff and resulted in concerns about the quality of fry. The incubators were overloaded necessitating an increase in incubator space and related costs. The preferred incubation capacity is 8 million eggs, given the projected staffing level in 2000-2001, or 10 million with a full staff and seasonals, decreasing incubation capacity by 1-3 million eggs.

Mr. Ron Lambertson explained that USFWS Fisheries funding is at an all time low. A new initiative has been launched in Washington to address the issue. The first step has been to convince the agency that there is a problem. The second step has been convincing the Department of Interior. The last remaining step is to convince the OMB, the office that controls the budget. There is apparently an individual there who believes that hatcheries are bad and has blocked administration requests for

funds. So, the USFWS is looking to educate folks from this office, taking them on field trips and demonstrating that we are using partnerships and new technology to address the old problems - that funding is the key to implementation of a new era in hatchery programming.

Mr. MacCallum asked what was required to conduct the DNA research. There is ongoing sea run marking and family releases, results in terms of family performance are currently being collected. The next step is managing families from domestic broodstock. The broodstock are marked but family management will begin either this year or next year depending on funding and staffing.

The Commissioners suggested the use of interns and offered to take action to increase the USFWS budget to help with concerns at the hatchery. The Commissioners suggested that the education process look at the whole program and all its needs rather than focusing on one hatchery. Mr. Lambertson agreed to carry this offer to Washington and report back to the Chair on what would be most helpful.

The Roxbury FCS will increase incubation capacity from 450K to 600K eggs this year. There is a potential that capacity will also be increased at the Roger Reed SFH.

Mr. Steve Rideout pointed out that the USGS-CAFRC is looking to fund a technician to assist with the research at the White River hatchery in FY2001. He is looking for clarification on how much time is required of an employee at the hatchery.

4. Knightville and Townshend Dam

Mr. Bruce Williams, USACE, updated Commissioners on the Townshend dam fish barrier construction project. The plans are in place, funding has been allocated, and construction will begin after the spring migration. Construction was scheduled prior to the migration season but funding delays precluded an award of the contract until this week. The cost estimate for the project is \$425,000. Once the construction is completed the barrier will be evaluated for effectiveness and efficiency in guiding fish to the trap.

Mr. Williams informed the Commissioners that operational changes have been made at the Knightville dam to facilitate spring downstream migration on the Westfield River. Feasibility for upstream passage also looks good. Conceptual plans include a two-year phased project with engineering and design (est. cost \$200K) and construction (est. cost \$1.2M) occurring in 2002 and 2003, respectively.

The USACE will need legislated authorization to conduct fish passage at Knightville and support for funding from the Commission.

Commissioners agreed to have the Coordinator draft a letter of support for the USACE. Mr. McMenemy will provide the Coordinator with language from the Townshend authorization. The draft will be circulated among all of the Commissioners for approval.

5. CRASC Work Plan

The draft CRASC work plan and agency work plans were directed back to the Technical Committee for additional revisions without discussion.

6. Re-authorization of Compact

The Commissioners discussed the content and strategy for re-authorizing the Compact, which expires in 2003. Re-authorization with no changes would likely be non-controversial. Re-authorization will likely require support from the Administration and the Chair of Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

The Commissioners agreed to take some more time to determine if any changes should be made to the language in the Compact. The possibility of including the USFS was mentioned. Proposed changes should be forwarded to the Chair McInnes prior to the next meeting. No action on re-authorization is planned before the next Commission meeting.

Mr. MacCallum and Mr. Incerpi both cautioned against making any changes since these would have to be addressed in the existing state legislation. Mr. MacCallum also cautioned the Coordinator against speaking to Congressional representatives on behalf of CRASC with respect to the legislation.

7. Officer Elections

It was agreed that officers would be elected to the positions of Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary/Treasurer at the next CRASC meeting. Mr. Angelo Incerpi expressed willingness to serve as the Chair and Mr. Peter Basta expressed an interest in becoming the Secretary/ Treasurer. Anyone interested in serving in either of these positions or as the Vice Chair should contact Chair McInnes prior to the fall meeting.

8. Other Business

Mr. Bob Stira announced that Northeast Utilities would conduct the smolt estimate work again this spring.

Mr. Williams, USACE and Technical Committee advisor, inquired as to whether the USACE could be a voting member of the Technical Committee. The Compact specifically designates voting members which precludes the addition of the USACE.

The USACE was recognized by the Commissioners for having much to contribute to the Technical Committee and was encouraged to continue active participation as an advisor.

9. Next CRASC Meeting Date

The next CRASC meeting date is scheduled for November 15, 2000.

Proposed items for the agenda include an update on the ASMFC Shad Management Plan, the Atlantic coast mixed stock fishery, reauthorization of the Compact and officer elections.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:12 p.m.

About 20 of the participants at the Commission meeting honored Mr. Ron Lambertson, who is retiring from the USFWS in June, with a luncheon at Bricker's Restaurant in Greenfield after the Commission meeting. Mr. Lambertson has served on the Commission since 1988. His tenure includes 5 years as Chair. The Commission presented Mr. Lambertson with a plaque recognizing his commitment to the salmon restoration program.

CRASC Meeting Attendance

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| Janice Rowan | USFWS |
| Steve Gephard | CTDEP/Fisheries |
| Jay McMenemy | VTFW |
| Duncan McInnes | NHFG |
| Steve Rideout | USGS |
| Caleb Slater | MAFW |
| Phil Herzig | USFWS |
| John Warner | USFWS |
| Sherry Morgan | USFWS |
| Ron Lambertson | USFWS |
| Robert A. Jones | CT Public Representative |
| Charles Thoits III | NH Public Representative |
| Gary Bogli | CT River Salmon Association |
| Jim Carroll | CT River Salmon Association |
| Bob Stira | Northeast Utilities Service Co. |
| John Howard | Northeast Generation Service Company |
| Don Traestar | Northeast Generation Service Company |
| Adam Goncalves | USFWS |
| Bruce Williams | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers |
| Daniel Flint | USFWS |
| Michael Parker | MA Exec. Office of Environmental Affairs |
| Warren Fisher | Fry Stocker in VT & NH |
| Rose Fisher | Fry Stocker in VT & NH |
| Lynn DeWald | Normandeau Associates Inc. |
| Ron Heun | Normandeau Associates Inc. |
| Ben Rizzo | USFWS |
| Steve Roy | USFS |
| Thomas Halavik | USFWS |
| Wayne MacCallum | MAFW |
| Jon Rittgers | NMFS |
| Cori Rose | NMFS |
| Peter Basta | VT Public Representative |
| Angelo Incerpi | VTFW |