

CONNECTICUT RIVER ATLANTIC SALMON COMMISSION

Minutes of Meeting

April 28, 1998

**Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center
Turners Falls, Massachusetts**

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission (CRASC) met on April 28, 1998, at the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. The meeting convened at 10:10 a.m. and adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

Subsequent to the meeting, nearly 30 meeting participants attended a celebration at Bricker's Restaurant in Greenfield, MA, honoring Mr. John O'leary for eight years of service on the Technical Committee and six years of service as the Chair.

Agenda Item:

1. Call to Order, Determination of Quorum and State Representation, Approval of Minutes from the Meeting on November 13, 1997 - *McInnes*

Chair Duncan McInnes called the meeting to order. There was a quorum and all States were represented. Mr. Duncan McInnes represented Commissioner Wayne Vetter for the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game, Mr. Ken Beal represented Commissioner Jon Rittgers, Mr. Mark Tisa represented Commissioner Wayne MacCallum, and the Public Commissioner from Massachusetts was absent.

Commissioner Charlie Thoits moved to accept the Minutes of the last meeting, Commissioner Peter Basts seconded the motion, and the Minutes were accepted.

2. Approval of Today's Agenda - *McInnes*

Today's agenda was approved with the addition of two items of business:

First, Mr. Tom Miner, Connecticut River Watershed Council, requested an opportunity to speak about American Heritage River designation on the Connecticut River.

Chair McInnes publically recognized Mr. John O'Leary (former Technical Committee Chair) for nearly a decade of work with the Commission and longer on the salmon program. The Chair

presented Mr. O'Leary with a plaque from the Commission and then praised him for doing an excellent job chairing the Public Information Meetings on the draft Strategic Plan, making the clear and concise presentations at those meetings, and serving the Commission through the Technical Committee. He wished Mr. O'Leary well in his new job.

3. American Heritage River Designation - *Miner*

Mr. Tom Miner, Connecticut River Watershed Council, provided a status update on the American Heritage River (AHR) designation process. Two weeks ago, an AHR Advisory Committee was formed to review the nominations and recommend 20 of the 126 rivers for the President to consider for designation. The review meeting will occur May 11-12 and the final selection will follow. In the mean time, the AHR Committee is accepting letters of support through May 8. Mr. Miner requested the Commission reiterate their support for the nomination. The Commissioners agreed, and charged the Coordinator with sending another letter of support.

4. Report of The Executive Assistant - *Rowan*

Executive Assistant Janice Rowan provided a report on program activities and administration (attached).

5. Report of The Technical Committee Chair - *McMenemy*

Technical Committee Chair Jay McMenemy provided a report on Technical Committee activities (attached). Mr. McMenemy reported that the largest smolt class in the program's history is emigrating this spring.

6. Update and Discussion on the draft Strategic Plan - *McMenemy*

Mr. McMenemy informed the Commissioners about the process to solicit public comment on the draft Plan. Four Public Information meetings were held, one in each of the basin states (Westfield, MA; Norwich, VT; Keene, NH; Hartford, CT). The Draft Plan was served on the Connecticut River Coordinator's Office Web site. Draft Plans were made available at many libraries and agencies offices. Over 400 copies of the draft Plan were distributed directly. About 50 people responded with a variety of comments that ranged from editorial corrections to suggestions for change in program direction. The comments were reviewed and keyed to appropriate references in the draft Plan. The subcommittee developed recommended responses that were supplied to the Commissioners prior to the meeting for their review and approval.

Commissioners Elser, Basta, and McInnes complimented Mr. McMenemy on the scope document, the table of comments and recommendations. They indicated that the material was concise, well-presented and helpful.

Commissioner Al Elser motioned to adopt the Plan with the changes outlined in the table of comments and recommendations. Acting Commissioner Mark Tisa seconded the motion. A discussion ensued.

Mr. Ed Parker questioned whether the Strategic Plan or the Action Plan would address resource needs and costs, priorities with respect to goals and objectives, and timing with respect to implementation. Commissioner Elser responded that the Plan sets broad direction whereas these specifics are more appropriate in the Action Plan.

Mr. Parker, with agreement from the other Commissioners, pointed out that the public needs to understand the costs and benefits of this program if they are to be persuaded to support this program in lieu of another competing interest. He said that it is the Commission's job, through the Strategic Plan, the Action Plan, reports, and other means to promote public awareness of the benefits and to solicit a stronger base of support among anglers and the non-traditional public constituencies.

Mr. Angelo Incerpi commented that the benefits of the program were not limited to salmon returns. The whole ecosystem has benefitted. The program has operated using an ecosystem approach since it started 30 years ago. Passage was initially constructed through Vernon for shad. Shad numbers have increased dramatically. Salmon as an indicator species were the banner for implementing the Clean Water Act. Environmental improvements have increased the value of real estate. A true cost/benefit analysis has to include all of these factors and the public needs to be reminded that this is true. Commissioner Lambertson agreed and suggested that AHR designation would really help us trumpet the landscape approach to salmon restoration.

Discussion completed, Chair McInnes asked the Commissioners to vote to adopt the Plan with changes outlined in the table of comments and recommendations. All approved. The Coordinator agreed to finalize the Plan by early summer, hopefully around July 1, 1998.

Chair McInnes suggested that the Commissioners needed to establish clear expectations and provide adequate guidance to the Technical Committee to ensure that the Action Plan would address the needs of the cooperators. It needs to identify cooperator responsibilities and overall program actions. Commissioners Basta and Tisa suggested that the Technical Committee consider an Action Plan in the short-term like an annual work plan and also a longer term Action Plan. Commissioner Lambertson encouraged the Technical Committee to add a clause in the Action Plan permitting flexibility through adaptive management. The clause should identify what changes could occur versus what changes would require an amendment to either the Strategic or Action Plan.

Mr. Parker agreed to be the Action Plan Subcommittee Chair and volunteered to draft a model format for the Action Plan based on Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Fishery Management Plan formats. The Commissioners will review that format and identify an outline of content prior to charging the Subcommittee with developing the Action Plan. Then the Subcommittee will develop a rough outline for the Action Plan which will be reviewed by the Commissioners before the Subcommittee produces a final draft document. Once that document is approved, the Subcommittee will finalize the Action Plan. The Commissioners agreed to develop the format prior to the post-spawning season/November so that the direction and guidance can be provided to the Subcommittee at that time. The Commissioners will have the opportunity to meet at the AFS meeting in August and again September 8.

Mr. Don Pugh asked if there would be a role for the public in developing the Action Plan? Chair McInnes responded that there would be but that the Commissioners needed to discuss and finalize the plan for this process.

7. Report of the Fish Passage Sub-Committee and Hydro Relicensing - *Warner*

Mr. John Warner provided an update on fish passage and hydro relicensing activities in the basin (attached).

8. Federal Aid Project Update - *Rowan*

Ms. Janice Rowan, the Connecticut River Coordinator, provided an overview of activities conducted under the Federal Aid Project (attached).

9. Report of the Shad Studies Sub-Committee - *Sprankle*

Mr. Ken Sprankle provided an update on shad issues in the basin (attached). He noted that the shad population estimate for the river last year was 660,000 shad. The projected estimate based on the juvenile index was two million shad. The difference is attributed to striped bass predation. The juvenile index for shad and blueback was high last year which bodes well for strong future returns.

10. Report of the Genetics Sub-Committee - *Gephard*

Mr. Steve Gephard reported that the spawning protocol adopted last year using paired matings, based on the DNA samples, resulted in no loss of alleles. Mr. Gephard noted that while the DNA study was initiated to address the need for a fry mark, the resulting information has proven useful in designing the broodstock management protocols to avoid inbreeding.

The question of importing specific genetic material to increase the likelihood of improving genetic variability in the Connecticut stock is still under consideration. DNA sampling is planned for the returning sea runs.

DNA marked fry are being released this spring in the Farmington River as part of a pilot marking study. A small number of additional fry will be released in Vermont in concert with the Dartmouth isotope marking study. And a few DNA marked fish have been incorporated in the smolt production program at Pittsford.

11. Pittsford NFH Smolt Advisory Committee Update - *Gephard*

Mr. Steve Gephard reported that the Committee met at the Pittsford NFH on December 17, 1997. The Committee agreed to focus on the quality not the quantity of smolts that could be produced at Pittsford. In other words, if the 100,000 smolt target is too high for the facility to adequately support, then the figure will be adjusted accordingly. Additionally, it was agreed that any research conducted should not interfere with production and should be practical in terms of a

direct contribution to improving smolt quality. The plan is to provide a specific hatchery target for smolt quality in terms of size, condition, physiology, etc. The Committee will be looking to select a marking protocol and is considering CWTs though NMFS may not be able to assist as they have in the past. Commissioner Jones suggested that it would benefit NASCO to have marked smolts out there again. Another meeting is planned for June or July.

12. Status of Strategy to Bring Funds into the Program - *Rowan*

Ms. Rowan reported that the Technical Committee took no action on this item since the last CRASC meeting.

Commissioner Lambertson suggested that the Technical Committee develop proposals for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Mr. Parker suggested that the states all consider implementing a program like Connecticut has for dealing with polluters. Instead of paying a penalty to the Connecticut General Fund, polluters have the option of entering into a settlement or consent agreement paying for environmental projects. CTDEP funds supplemental environmental projects like fishways using these funds. Plus the funds can be used as a source of revenue for matching funds.

Commissioner Jones asked if Wallop-Breaux funds could be made available to the Commission to cover administrative costs like coordination? Lambertson said now would be a good time to look into this since the allocation process is currently under review. The Coordinator was charged with exploring this alternative.

13. Selection of Next CRASC Meeting Date - *Rowan*

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for September 8, 1998, at 10:00 a.m. in Turners Falls.

14. Other Business - *Rowan*

Ms. Rowan reported that she had met with Mr. Steve Rideout, USFWS, to discuss implications of the New England Fishery Management Council's amendment to the Atlantic Salmon Fishery Management Plan to include identification of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The Council is currently looking for information to indicate presence or absence of salmon which is detailed in the draft Strategic Plan. Ultimately, the legislation empowers the Council to comment on all state and federally licensed projects with specific reference to salmon habitat.

Mr. Miner reminded the Commissioners of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Connecticut River Watershed Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection to build fishways in Connecticut. He announced that two fishways have opened and grand opening ceremonies are scheduled for the Lower Mill and Moulson Pond Fishways.

The Executive Assistant, Commission Chair and Vice Chair signed paperwork to give them signature authority over the CRASC checking account. The Chair reimbursed the Executive Assistant for the cost of the plaque for Mr. O'Leary.

Mr. Jim Carroll, CRSA, requested four basin maps for use in classroom education programs. Commissioner Basta requested 40 of the new fry stocker information cards. Mr. Miner requested copies of the comments on the draft plan submitted by CTDEP and CRJC. The Coordinator agreed to provide these.

Commissioner Ron Lambertson motioned to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Peter Basta seconded the motion, and all approved.

Respectfully Submitted By: Janice N. Rowan, Executive Assistant

ATTENDANCE

Janice N. Rowan	USFWS Executive Assistant
John O'Leary	MAFW
Deb O'Leary	
Ernie Beckwith	CTDEP Commissioner
Ed Parker	CTDEP
Robert Jones	CT Public Sector Commissioner
Ralph Pisapia	USFWS
John Warner	USFWS
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Joe McKeon	USFWS
Ken Gillette	USFWS
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Bob Stira	NUSCO
JoEllen Harris	USFWS
Kenneth L. Beal	NOAA-NMFS Acting Commissioner
Angelo Incerpi	VTFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Charles Thoits	NH Public Sector Commissioner
Duncan McInnes	NHFG Commissioner, Chair
Ron Lambertson	USFWS Commissioner
Mark Tisa	MAFW Acting Commissioner
Niccole Wandear	USFWS
Michelle Babione	USFWS
Al Elser	VTFW Commissioner
Peter Basta	VT Public Sector Commissioner
Don Pugh	USGS/BRD
Dave Sherman	Essex Hydro/Dodge Falls Hydro
Ken Sprankle	NHFG
Richard Hartley	MAFW
Curt Orvis	USFWS
Ben Rizzo	USFWS
Tom Miner	CT River Watershed Council
Steve Roy	USFS
Cori Rose	NMFS
James J. Carroll	CT River Salmon Association