

CONNECTICUT RIVER ATLANTIC SALMON COMMISSION

Minutes of Meeting

June 26, 1997

Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center
Turners Falls, Massachusetts

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission (CRASC) met on June 26, 1997 at the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. The meeting convened at 10:25 a.m. and adjourned at 2:10 p.m.

Agenda Item:

1. Call to Order, Determination of Quorum and State Representation, and Approval of Minutes from October 4, 1996 - *Lambertson*

Chair Ron Lambertson presided over a full quorum. All States were represented. Mr. Duncan McInnes represented Commissioner Wayne Vetter for the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game and Mr. John O'Leary represented Commissioner Wayne MacCallum for the Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife.

The Minutes from the last meeting were accepted with one exception. The scheduled CRASC meeting, January 14, 1997, was cancelled. This is the first meeting of the Commissioners since the October 4, 1996, meeting.

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

The agenda was approved with the addition of three items of other business:

- a) Policy and Technical Issues Regarding Out-of-Basin American Shad Transfers - *Beckwith*
- b) Quarterly Reporting Requirement, NUSCO - *Stira*
- c) NASCO Update - *Jones*

3. Report of the Executive Assistant - *Rowan*

Ms. Janice Rowan reported that:

Just over eight million Atlantic salmon fry were stocked into Connecticut River watershed this spring. The fry were reported to be in excellent condition and stocking was completed with minor delays and few difficulties. Approximately, 6.7 million salmon were stocked into the

Connecticut River in 1996 with a similar number stocked in 1995. As in past years, this effort was made possible because of the assistance of hundreds of volunteers throughout the basin.

Initially, the program had 8.7 million fry to distribute at the beginning of the fry stocking season. This number was reduced in April when 400,000 fry from the Warren SFH and 150,000 fry from the White River NFH were provided to the Merrimack Program, upon request by the Merrimack/Pawcatuck Policy Committee Chair, following the April Fool's Day fry loss at the North Attleboro NFH. (Heavy snow followed by rapid melt resulted in acid pH which appears to have leached toxic levels of aluminum from the soil. This killed most of the fry remaining in incubators at that hatchery.)

One hundred-eighty four returning sea-run Atlantic salmon have been counted in the Connecticut River this year (as of June 25). The run began on May 2. The fish are silvery and look quite healthy. Preliminary data from scales (96 analyzed, to date) indicate that 99% of these fish are of fry origin, and 83% of the fish spent 2 years in freshwater and 2 years in the ocean. There is 1 repeat spawner and 1 multi-sea-winter fish. Twenty-three fish have been released upstream including 12 in the Westfield River broodstock release study. A total of 260 adult Atlantic salmon returned to the Connecticut River watershed during 1996 and 188 salmon returned in 1995. The 1996 run lasted from April 23 to August 7, with three additional salmon captured or observed in October. Just over half (55%) of the returning salmon were of hatchery origin while the remainder were wild origin. All of the smolt origin fish were aged two sea-winter. This was nearly true for the wild origin salmon except there were 5 grilse and 1 multi-sea-winter salmon. Eighteen of the returning adults were released above the Holyoke Dam on the mainstem, one above the Townsend Dam on the West River, and 10 above the DSI Dam on the Westfield River. The Richard Cronin National Salmon Station and the Whittemore Salmon Station held 193 and 33 sea-run salmon, respectively.

Approximately 15 million green eggs were produced by sea-run, kelt and domestic broodstock held at seven hatcheries in the basin this past fall. This compares to 10.6 million eggs produced in 1995. Sea runs produced 6.3% of the total while 14.8% were produced by kelts and 78.9% were produced by domestic broodstock. Sea-run salmon held at both the Richard Cronin National Salmon Station and the Whittemore Salmon Station suffered mortalities from furunculosis this year. Antibiotic resistant strains of *Aeromonas salmonicida* were detected at both facilities necessitating sacrifice of these adults.

Migratory fish returns observed so far (June 25) this year include 298,308 American shad, 64,600 blueback herring, 35,870 sea lamprey, 2,075 gizzard shad, 510 striped bass and 3 alewife. Comparative returns observed in 1996 include a total of 278,370 American shad, 56,261 blueback herring, 48,207 sea lamprey, 1,088 gizzard shad, 544 striped bass and 5 alewife. Comparative returns in 1995 amounted to 190,541 American shad, 112,639 blueback herring, 18,707 lamprey eels, 2,188 gizzard shad, and 1,310 striped bass.

The Strategic Plan Sub-Committee revised the draft *Strategic Plan for the Restoration of Atlantic Salmon to the Connecticut River*. This draft has been submitted to the Commissioners for interim approval before completion of the final draft.

Staff of the Connecticut River Coordinator's assisted the Technical Committee in hosting a research forum in January to discuss technical developments in salmon research as they relate to management needs. Presentations are summarized in the Research section of the *Annual Report of the U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee Report No. 9 - 1996 Activities*.

A report, prepared by staff in the Connecticut River Coordinator's Office (Michelle Babione, Deborah Zydlewski and Brian Rod), entitled *The Status of Migratory Fish Passage and Barriers to Passage in the Connecticut River Watershed* was released at the end of 1996. This report provides information about barriers and fish passage in relation to the range of migratory fish in the watershed. This is the first compilation of such data.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service appointed Mr. Joe McKeon, Laconia Office of Fisheries Assistance, to represent the Service on the Technical Committee. He succeeds Mr. Dan Kuzmeskus in this role.

The Silvio Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is beginning to be a force in the restoration program through grants, funding, and outreach activities throughout the basin.

The Administrative Report and listing of incoming and outgoing correspondence is attached.

4. Report of Technical Committee Chair - O'Leary

Mr. John O'Leary reported that:

The Technical Committee hosted a scientific forum on Atlantic salmon at the USFWS Regional Office on January 8, 1997. The meeting was well attended with a total of 85 participants. Eighteen speakers presented topics that ranged from the genetic status of Connecticut River broodstock to isotopic fry markers. This was the first all day session of this kind staged by the Technical Committee. It was held in a good location, the agenda was well organized, and the event was very successful. Commissioners talked about how to continue this forum in some capacity to enhance interactions between researchers and managers. One concern voiced was that there were so many presentations that it was difficult to engage in full discussions of the topics. Options for future meetings include more frequent meetings with fewer papers or similar forums every other year with focused-topic round tables in between years.

Surplus broodstock were released both inside and outside the basin in support of fisheries and research. Outreach has been increased in this process to promote the restoration program.

Mr. O'Leary reiterated that Mr. Joe McKeon, USFWS-Laconia Office of Fisheries Assistance, has been appointed to represent the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the Technical Committee.

Mr. John Prescott, Massachusetts Public Sector Commissioner has announced his intention to resign as Commissioner. Mr. Prescott has been supportive of the Commission and Technical Committee efforts, particularly with respect to the draft Strategic Plan, but is unable to continue in his role as a Commissioner.

5. Report of the Draft Strategic Plan Sub-Committee - *O'Leary*

Mr. John O'Leary reported that the draft Strategic Plan Sub-Committee had worked with the Commissioners to revise the previous draft Plan. An outline of the complete strategy document was drafted and presented to the Commissioners for approval.

The Commissioners recognized the improvements and approved of the strategy, after some discussion. The sub-committee was charged with completing the draft by incorporating revised text from the previous draft into the new framework by the September CRASC meeting.

Additionally, the Commissioners were asked to provide recommendations for milestones or benchmarks against which to measure performance accomplishments. Such benchmarks could be used to quantify goals with respect to the desired number of returns for successful restoration or the trigger number for implementing a sport fishery. They should help define program benefits and set expectations.

It was suggested that non-numerical measures are also important as there are different approaches to milestone definitions. Any benchmarks require a clear definition of restoration. Ultimately, development of benchmarks will involve the Technical Committee, Commissioners, and the public when all of the reviews and comments are completed.

Milestone recommendations from the Commissioners are due in the Coordinator's Office by July 15, 1997. They will be appended to the draft strategy for further discussion.

6. Report of the Fish passage Sub-Committee - *Warner*

Mr. John Warner provided the following update:

Connecticut River Downstream Passage

MOAs and New England Power Company Warner requested assurance that MOA terms and fish passage operations at NEPCO projects would continue after the sale of the projects. NEPCO has stated that the MOAs would be conveyed with the projects to the new owner. A letter to this effect was requested. NEPCO is developing Standard Operating Procedures to pass on to the new owner which should be ready for review this summer.

Northfield Mountain A partial barrier net has been installed and is being evaluated for deployment, durability and other operational issues. If this design can be successfully installed and operated, 1998 tests would focus on smolt guidance and entrainment. NUSCO has reported impingement of 26 smolts in the barrier net (as of May 27th). The timing of these occurrences coincided with increased smolt abundance at Cabot Station.

Turners Falls The new fish bypass weir is installed in the log sluice and is being evaluated via radio-tagging salmon smolts. Loss of White River NFH smolts prior to the start of this study necessitated use of wild smolts captured at Cabot in the study.

There was some discussion about the lack of availability of appropriately sized smolts for passage studies. Fish at the White River NFH were either too small or too big, disease status of Warren State Fish Hatchery precluded transfers, and smolts ultimately culled from the White River NFH production lot and transferred to the Richard Cronin NSS suffered losses to furunculosis. As a result, wild smolts captured at the Cabot sampler were used to test the by-pass weir as described above. A less satisfactory solution is described below where landlocks were used. Alternate sources and/or changes in hatchery protocols are needed to ensure that smolts are available.

Requests for research smolts in the coming year should be made to the Coordinator by mid-July.

Tributary Passage Activities

Cavendish - Black River-VT Re-testing of the fish bypass system is underway using landlocked smolts received from VTFW.

Fellows and Lovejoy - Black River-VT FERC Environmental Assessment has been issued as a precursor to a FERC order to install downstream passage at those sites. USFWS and VTFW are preparing comments on FERC's findings.

Great Falls and Vail - Passumpsic River-VT FERC still pursuing passage issue at these projects with reluctant operator. Vail now has an operating interim facility. No good interim facility is possible at Great Falls. Letter from Village of Lyndonville asking management and program issues conveyed to Coordinator. Tech. Comm. should discuss handling these inquiries.

The Technical Committee discussed the Village letter again. This time it was decided that the Coordinator would draft a response with assistance and review by McMenemy and Warner.

Hydro Licensing

Holyoke Draft License application from Holyoke Gas and Electric issued February 1997; Draft License application from Holyoke Water Power issued April 1997; the 2 competing proposals have very different designs and fish passage issues; USFWS-Engineering working up

comments on passage needs for the 2 proposals; USFWS and MAFW to prepare overall comments; final applications due to FERC in August 1997 - opportunity for formal Intervention by CRASC to follow.

The Commissioners approved of a CRASC intervention to be developed by Mr. Warner and the Coordinator.

15-Mile Falls Pre-application studies underway; expedited Settlement being pursued by collaborative of interested parties (USFWS, VANR, NHFG, NHDES, EPA, NPS, TU, VNRC, AMC, CT River Joint Commission, etc.); current draft settlement includes implementing downstream passage now at McIndoes and downstream passage at Moore and Comerford and upstream passage/trapping as needed. CRASC, as well as USFWS, VTFW and NHFG are identified as parties on fish passage issues; a smolt migration study on the high dams to be conducted upon request by the agencies is included in the settlement offer.

Deerfield and Gardners Falls Licenses issued April 4, 1997; licenses incorporate fish passage provisions requested by USFWS and MAFW; interim passage plans in place at Deerfield 4, 3, and 2 and Gardners Falls; interim flow release plans also being implemented; upstream tracking of adult salmon from Holyoke to begin in 1998 - needed to establish trigger to build Deerfield River trapping facility.

Woronco International Paper project on Westfield (2nd Dam); initial Consultation beginning now with 2001 license expiration; FWS has been pursuing downstream passage NOW, but IP resisting - its in FERC's hands now; IP wants to wait until relicensing in 2001 to address passage - this is unacceptable; No good and simple interim passage options exist.

Book Mill Initial license for new dam and project on Sawmill River - opposed by USFWS and MAFW; application was filed with FERC last year. Additional Information was requested by FERC; required info has not been submitted on time - action FERC will take is uncertain.

Chair Lambertson expressed his amazement over the number of projects with which Mr. Warner is involved.

7. Status of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Pittsford NFH Smolt Production request & Increased Egg Incubation Capacity - *McInnes*

Correspondence is attached.

The cooperators established that 15 million eggs and 100,000 smolts are base priorities of the restoration program. Frustration was expressed by cooperators on the difficulty of accomplishing ongoing program goals. The perception is that the USFWS is backing off on commitments/obligations to the program while expanding spending on new initiatives. The funds required to produce smolts at Pittsford NFH are seen to be insignificant in comparison to

the annual and total investment in the program to date. The actual funding realities within the USFWS were explained including the anti-hatchery political-spending climate in Washington. This fueled further discussion on the reality that hatcheries are necessitated in restoration because of irrevocable changes to the environment. The States indicated that they have always dug in and helped to overcome insufficient funding (fish health, engineering, etc.) but that the USFWS should not continue to expect this.

It was agreed that the cooperators need to convey these concerns to Congressional representatives. The Commissioners discussed options: inviting the New England delegation to a meeting to explain the program and identify its needs, establishing support associations, conducting proactive outreach, and using the new draft Strategic Plan to promote the program and increase funding. Discussion on how to implement a unified initiative of this sort was delayed until the September CRASC meeting.

Chair Lambertson charged Mr. Ralph Pisapia, Assistant Regional Director - Northern Geographic Zone, with developing a clear definition of what is needed to meet the Commission's smolt production goal, what Service funds or facilities are available, and what would be required of the cooperators to implement the production plan.

8. Update on USGS/BRD Research Funding - *Booke*

- ▶ The Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center in Turners Falls, Massachusetts, conducts important research relating to the multi-agency Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program in the Connecticut River basin.
- ▶ Approximately \$250,000 is expended annually by the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center to conduct needed research that will enable the restoration program to achieve identified objectives including work on fish passage, physiology, population dynamics, and genetics.
- ▶ U.S. Geological Survey/Biological Resource Division research funds, directed to the Connecticut River/Long Island Sound Ecosystem initiative, are about to be diverted to new initiatives outside the basin beginning in October, 1997.
- ▶ The Connecticut River Ecosystem initiative brings the Center \$50,000-\$100,000/year to conduct specific studies on the genetic structure of the Connecticut River stock of Atlantic salmon, identification of the most productive stocking sites among the many available tributaries and the best genotypes for stocking based on the genetic structure of the population and tributary specific contributions, and optimization of timing for stocking cultured salmon.
- ▶ The Connecticut River Ecosystem initiative studies have been initiated upon the request of cooperators from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries

Service, U.S. Forest Service, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Massachusetts Division of Fish and Wildlife, New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game, and Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife.

- ▶ Research needs supported by the Connecticut River Ecosystem initiative have been documented by the U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee and endorsed by the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission.
- ▶ The Connecticut River Ecosystem initiative research studies that have been initiated are long-term in nature so a change in programming at this stage in these research projects is of great concern because interruption of funding will likely curtail these research projects before they have had provided full benefits to the restoration of salmon in the Connecticut River.
- ▶ It is critical that funding in support of the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program be maintained or increased to address identified research needs.

Information in the bullets listed above may be included in a letter of support for the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center. The letter should be mailed to :

Dr. James Weaver
Acting Eastern Regional Chief Biologist
U.S. Geological Survey
Biological Resources Division
Leetown Science Center
1700 Leetown Road
Kearneysville, WV 25430

Copies of the letters should be provided to the Connecticut River Coordinator. Copies might also be sent to Congressional representatives.

9. USDA/Natural Resource Conservation Service - National Conservation Buffer Initiative - DeVergilio

Rick DeVergilio of the USDA/Natural Resource Conservation Service explained his agency's National Buffer Initiative. Through technical assistance and various funding and grant programs, the NRCS hopes to establish two million miles of conservation buffers by the year 2002. They are looking for help identifying specific riparian buffers of importance to the CRASC in the Connecticut River basin. They are also looking for ways to cooperatively develop improved incentive packages to encourage private interest in the Buffer Initiative Program.

Mr. John O'Leary offered to provide information on the areas of concern identified by cooperators.

10. Sea-Run Atlantic Salmon Fish Health Protocol - *Lambertson*

Chair Ron Lambertson explained that the Technical Committee had requested a letter of commendation from the CRASC to recognize the contributions of Dr. Rocco Cipriano in securing permission from the FDA to utilize oxolinic acid in the management of furunculosis in sea-run Atlantic salmon. The letter was prepared and posted to Dr. Cipriano with a copy sent to Director of the Leetown Science Center.

11. Nomination and Selection of Commission Chair - *Lambertson*

Mr. Bob Jones motioned to select Mr. Duncan McInnes as the new Chair of the Commission, Mr. Ernie Beckwith seconded the motion, and all approved.

Mr. Bob Jones motioned to select Mr. Ernie Beckwith as the new Vice Chair, Mr. Duncan McInnes seconded the motion, and all approved.

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

The next CRASC meeting date is scheduled for September 25, 1997, at the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. The draft Strategic Plan will be the only item on the agenda for this meeting.

The next regular CRASC meeting is scheduled for October 16, 1997, at the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center in Turners Falls, Massachusetts.

13. Other Business - *Lambertson*

a) Policy and Technical Issues Regarding Out-of-Basin American Shad Transfers - *Beckwith*

Mr. Ernie Beckwith expressed concerns about the value of hauling one shad upstream for every shad transported out-of-basin. The "cost" is high and he requested that the Shad Studies Sub-Committee review the policy again.

An additional concern about the one truck per day limit was discussed. The limit was established to minimize disruption to fish passage at the Holyoke lift.

Mr. McInnes read a statement provided by Mr. Ken Sprankle, Chair of the Shad Studies Sub-Committee (attached) reiterating the position reached by the Sub-Committee.

Mr. Incerpi recommended that the Shad Studies Sub-Committee review the requirements and limits from the stand point of the existing Strategic Plan and

whether they are helping us to achieve program objectives or if changes could be made. He further questioned whether the cooperators should set up a program to haul these fish as a standard practice verses calling it a payback from agencies hauling fish outside the basin if there is a need to have fish hauled upstream.

Chair Lambertson charged Mr. Joe McKeon with consulting with the Susquehanna River Coordinator on the matter since they have been quite successful in that basin with shad restoration.

The Commissioners charged the Shad Studies Sub-Committee with reviewing the Strategic Plan, determining how many shad are required upstream, and how many must be hauled there annually. The Sub-Committee should be prepared to make recommendations on how to achieve this goal and define the role of out-of-basin transfers in this process. The Sub-Committee should also identify any problems or concerns that could preclude accomplishing this goal including operational problems at Holyoke, etc. This work should be completed and ready for Commissioners to review at the next regular CRASC meeting.

b) Quarterly Reporting Requirement, NUSCO - *Stira*

Mr. Bob Stira, Northeast Utilities Service Company requested a reduction in reporting requirements as established under the 1990 *Connecticut River Downstream Fish Passage Memorandum of Agreement*. Mr. Stira proposed a more detailed biannual report to be released at the ends of March and November. Commissioners approved this request.

c) NASCO Update - *Jones*

The full report is attached.

d) Commission Finances - *Rowan*

Ms. Rowan reported that the Commission bank balance was up to \$5,200 including \$600 from the January Technical Committee meeting. The Commissioners agreed to leave the balance since it would be needed to implement a sport fishery in the future.

e) American Heritage Rivers - *Lambertson*

Chair Lambertson pointed out that President Clinton will establish ten American Heritage Rivers in December. The criteria for selecting the ten rivers will be finalized in August. Partnerships, existing plans, and grass roots involvement will likely be important in the selection process. Though the designation will not be

associated with new funds, it will result in redirection of policy, resources, and efforts of federal agencies including the USFWS, EPA, and Army Corps of Engineers. The Connecticut River stands a good chance for being selected so we should be prepared with task lists for sister agencies like the EPA and Corps. Mr. Henry Booke added that Northeast Watershed Round Table will be a good starting point since many potential partners will be attending. The meeting is scheduled for July 11-12 in Northfield, MA. Information can be obtained from the Coordinator or Pat Munoz at (202) 364-2550. The Coordinator volunteered to fax information to the Commissioners and Technical Committee representatives.

f) Other Meeting Dates - Rowan

The next Salmon Studies Sub-Committee meeting is scheduled for July 10, at 9 a.m. in the Connecticut River Coordinator's Office.

The next Draft Strategic Plan Sub-Committee meeting is scheduled for July 31, 1997 at 10 a.m in the Connecticut River Coordinator's Office.

Respectfully Submitted on 6/27/1997, Janice N. Rowan, Executive Secretary, CRASC

ATTENDANCE

Janice N. Rowan	USFWS
John O'Leary	MAFW
Ernie Beckwith	CTDEP
Robert Jones	CT Public Sector Commissioner
Ralph Pisapia	USFWS
John Warner	USFWS
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Ben Rizzo	USFWS
Milt Anderson	New England Power
Mike Hill	Atlantic Salmon Federation
Joe McKeon	USFWS
Rick DeVergilio	USDA-NRCS
Ken Gillette	USFWS
Bob Nixon	USFWS
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Bob Stira	NUSCO
Marsha Browning	USFWS
Jon Rittgers	NOAA-NMFS
Peter Basta	VT Public Sector Commissioner
Angelo Incerpi	VTFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Charles Thoits	NH Public Sector Commissioner
Duncan McInnes	NHFG
Ron Lambertson	USFWS
Henry Booke	USGS-BRD
James J. Carroll	CT River Salmon Association