

CONNECTICUT RIVER ATLANTIC SALMON COMMISSION

Minutes of Meeting November 13, 1997 Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center Turners Falls, Massachusetts

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission (CRASC) met on November 13, 1997, at the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. The meeting convened at 10:17 a.m. and adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Agenda Item:

1. Call to Order, Determination of Quorum and State Representation, Approval of Minutes from the Meeting on September 25, 1997 - *McInnes*

Chair Duncan McInnes called the meeting to order. All States were represented. Mr. Duncan McInnes represented Commissioner Wayne Vetter for the New Hampshire Department of Fish and Game, Mr. Angelo Incerpi represented Commissioner Al Elser of Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Public Commissioners from Vermont and Massachusetts were absent.

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

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

Today's agenda was approved with the addition of one item of other business. Mr. Jonathan Labaree was scheduled to make a presentation on the Quebec Labrador Foundation activities in the basin.

3. Report of Executive Assistant - *Rowan*

Executive Assistant Janice Rowan provided a report on program activities and administration (attached). It was noted that the current egg production estimate is about 14.4 million green eggs, with spawning nearly completed throughout the basin.

4. Report of Technical Committee Chair - *O'Leary*

Mr. John O'Leary and Mr. Don Pugh made a presentation to the Management Board of the Atlantic Salmon Federation in Hartford, CT, on November 1, 1997. They presented information of the Westfield River Broodstock Research Project and the Restoration Program.

Mr. O'Leary briefly described the success of the Research Project with over 20 redds dug this fall in the Westfield watershed as the result of the release of radio tagged sea run and domestic broodstock. The project was combined with a strong outreach effort, and a product of that effort, a fact sheet, is attached.

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

Mr. Ken Sprankle, Chair of the Shad Studies Sub-Committee provided two policy recommendations to the Commission (full report attached). The Commissioners, after some discussion, recommended that the Technical Committee pursue investigations into the passage concerns impacting upriver shad passage efficiency at Turners Falls. Two new policies were also discussed:

- 1) The Commission will ensure the annual transfer 1,500 American shad from the Holyoke Fish Lift to the Vernon Dam Impoundment to improve shad reproductive success.
- 2)
 - a) No more than 5,000 shad can be moved from the Holyoke fishlift each year due to operational constraints.
 - b) A minimum of 1,500 shad will be moved upstream of the Vernon Dam, leaving 3,500 shad available for transfer elsewhere.
 - c) CRASC member agencies (cooperators) may request adults for transfer in or out of the basin and their requests will be given a higher priority than non-cooperator requests.
 - d) Cooperators will not be required to conduct 1:1 transfers to the upper basin provided non-cooperators are able to meet the targeted 1,500 shad transfer as part of their request.
 - e) Annual requests for shad transfers, egg takes, or other related activities, must be received in writing by the Shad Studies Sub-Committee Chair on or before March 15.
 - f) An annual summary and documentation relative to the success of the transfer will be required, as requested by the Shad Studies Sub-Committee Chair, before the next request will be considered.

Commissioner Jones motioned to accept these policies, Mr. Angelo Incerpi seconded the motion, and the policies were approved.

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

Mr. John Warner provided a comprehensive summary on fish passage and hydro relicensing issues and accomplishments within the basin (attached). Mr. Incerpi recognized his efforts of the 15 Mile Falls Settlement Agreement and congratulated him on a job well done.

There was some discussion of Connecticut River Joint Commission concerns in the Northeast Kingdom. Mr. Warner indicated that he and Ms. Rowan had spoken to the Commissioners and that the Commissioners were satisfied with our response. Mr. Incerpi indicated that he was willing to meet with the Joint Commission if needed and the door was left open to that possibility.

A recent 2nd Circuit Appeals Court ruling in Vermont has strengthened State authority in 401 Water Quality Certification provisions (like fish passage requirements) that FERC might not otherwise deem appropriate in the hydro relicensing process.

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

Mr. Steve Gephard reported that tissue samples have been taken from all sea run salmon returning to the river this spring. The samples were analyzed by Dr. Tim King, USGS/BRD, Leetown, for microsatellite DNA. Results indicate that this year's fish exhibit 75% heterozygosity with 2 haplotypes present. This is indicative of moderate variability with some genetic bottleneck in the past. All in all these results are good compared to our expectations but considerably lower than the 85-90% variability exhibited by natural stocks in Ireland or Iceland.

In addition to the DNA assessment, the DNA sampling has been utilized by Dr. Ben Letcher, USGS/BRD, Conte Lab, for a fry marking study. All sampled adults were PIT tagged when sampled. With a computer aided reference system, relatedness was determined at spawning. In this way, the experimental spawning protocol prevented close matings which may have otherwise occurred 20-25% of the time using random spawning techniques. The produced eggs were batched for incubation to ensure that known families of fry can later be stocked in specific tributaries in the Farmington River watershed. The goal of the pilot study is to follow the families and determine which tributaries are most productive with respect to smolt production and adult returns.

8. Strategic Plan and Public Input Process Recommendation - *O'Leary*

Mr. O'Leary indicated that the draft Strategic Plan was adopted at the last Commission meeting with edits since made by the Coordinator. It is now complete and ready for release. Language in the mission statement was changed - recreational was substituted for sport in sport fishing. The change was made based on an article in *Fisheries* (October 1997).

Mr. O'Leary lead the discussion on the public input process. Commissioners recommended that the Draft Strategic Plan Sub-Committee meet to address public release issues:

- 1) Develop a list of libraries and addresses at which the draft Plan will be available.
- 2) Develop a list and number of cooperators to receive the draft Plan directly.
- 3) Establish dates and locations for public informational meetings. A public information style meeting was proposed. A limited presentation similar to that made at the September Commission meeting may be given by John O'Leary at each of these forums. Stations can be arranged throughout the meeting site to address public concerns face-to-face with the option of recording concerns or comments as needed. Otherwise, interested parties may forward written comments to the Coordinator directly.

- 4) Establish a web site to serve the draft Plan electronically.
- 5) Develop a list of offices and agency sites where the draft Plan will be available.
- 6) Develop a cover letter and executive summary. The letter should serve as an introduction to the summary. It should provide information on Plan availability, meetings and comment period. The summary should be short and bulletized and focus on the Plan.
- 7) Develop a news release to provide information on Plan availability, meetings and comment period. Provide the news story to the states for distribution. Release the story 30 days prior to the first scheduled public informational meeting.
- 8) Develop a press packet to explain the Plan and the program and include the Plan. Provide this packet to the states to distribute.
- 9) Establish a process for collecting and summarizing the comments for Commission review. Depending on the extent and substance of the comments, a follow-up meeting may be arranged to publicly address the comments.

Later, necessary amendments will be made to the draft Plan such that it will be ready for a Commission vote probably in April 1998.

9. Federal Aid Project to Fund Coordination - *Rowan*

Ms. Rowan provided information on the Coordination and Technical Assistance Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration Project funded by the states through D-J Funds. The project is renewed on a five year cycle. The cycle began October 1.

Commissioners reviewed the revised project description and made recommendations for changes in the narrative. They requested that the budget schedule figures be corrected to reflect funds only and not in-kind matches. The Coordinator was charged with making these changes.

The Commissioners agreed that they wanted to continue the project but at the current funding level in Fiscal Year 1998. The request for a \$3,000 annual increase per state was denied pending further review of Coordination activities and needs. The Commissioners recommended pursuing this at the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Ron Lambertson indicated that he would investigate the possibility for relief from the Denver Finance Center's 19% overhead fee.

10. Pittsford NFH Smolt Production Update - *Lambertson*

Commissioner Lambertson reviewed the smolt issue: The Commission had requested that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rear 100,000 smolts at the Pittsford NFH in addition to incubating eggs for the Connecticut Program. At the last Technical Committee meeting, the USFWS agreed to this with plans for a two-year smolt program to commence this spring. The USFWS will pick up the full cost of production estimated at \$7.2K/year.

Commissioner Lambertson indicated that distribution costs were estimated at \$1.2-2.5K and that the cooperators must find a way to cover this cost.

Additionally, raceway shelters are required to protect the salmon from sunburn at a cost of about \$20.6K to include the purchase of one prefabricated double raceway cover (\$16,600) and material for an additional 16 covers to be constructed at the hatchery. While the USFWS can

cover the cost of the tent and materials through cyclical maintenance, it does not have staff enough to construct these tents, and requested cooperator assistance to do so.

The Commissioners deferred resolution on the distribution issue to a later meeting and recommended that the Technical Committee work to resolve the raceway cover issue.

On the matter of tight budgets at the state and federal level, the Commissioners agreed that there was a need to develop and implement a strategy to bring funds into the program. Requesting funding for Fisheries, using constituents to lobby, and appealing to Senate and Congressional Appropriation Committee members were the options discussed.

Commissioners charged the Technical Committee with developing the strategy: where we are, what we are doing, and what we need. This was considered to be a high priority.

11. Broodstock and Egg Requests - *Rowan*

Ms. Rowan summarized the availability of broodstock from the White River NFH. There are about 2,100 3+('94 year class) adults to excess beginning about the second week of December, after FDA's required withdrawal from MS-222. Another 650 2+ ('95 year class) fish are also available. The 2+ and 3+ fish must be removed from the facility as soon as possible. About 3,500 1+ ('96 year class) fish are also available but can be held on station through spring.

The Commission approved of three requests:

VTFW - 300 - 3+

USGS/BRD-Leetown (Cipriano) for furunculosis research at RCNSS - 200 - 3+

MAFW - all remaining 2+ and 3+ fish pending additional requests

[Cipriano indicated a need for an additional 600 smaller fish in the spring.]

12. Selection of Next Technical Committee and CRASC Meeting Date - *Rowan*

Planning for another "Technical" Technical Committee meeting was deferred until the Plan is completed and the strategy to increase funding is in place.

The next Strategic Plan Sub-Committee meeting is scheduled for December 16 at 9:00 a.m. in the Coordinator's Office.

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for April 2, 1998, at 10:00 a.m. in Turners Falls.

13. Other Business - *Rowan*

Mr. John O'Leary introduced Mr. Jonathan Labaree from the Quebec Labrador Foundation. Mr. Labaree gave a short presentation of activities funded on the Westfield River this summer. The Foundation funded Mr. Peter Bryant to work with MAFW in conducting outreach.

Commissioner Thoits motioned to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Ernie Beckwith seconded the motion, and all approved.

ATTENDANCE

Janice N. Rowan	USFWS
John O'Leary	MAFW
Ernie Beckwith	CTDEP
Robert Jones	CT Public Sector Commissioner
Ron Howey	USFWS
John Warner	USFWS
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Joe McKeon	USFWS
Ken Gillette	USFWS
Erik C. Danielson	UMASS
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Bob Stira	NUSCO
Marsha Browning	USFWS
Harold Mears	NOAA-NMFS
Angelo Incerpi	VTFW
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Charles Thoits	NH Public Sector Commissioner
Duncan McInnes	NHFG
Ron Lambertson	USFWS
Wayne MacCallum	MAFW
Jonathan Labaree	Quebec Labrador Foundation
Ben Letcher	USGS/BRD
Gabe Gries	USGS/BRD
Michelle Babione	USFWS
Cleve Kapala	NEPCO