

**Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative  
Policy Committee Meeting  
July 8, 2009**

**MINUTES**

**Kehoe Conservation Center, Lake Bomoseen Vermont**

**Attendance:** USFWS; Marvin Moriarty, Bill Archambault, Dave Tilton, Bill Ardren, Henry Bouchard Nick Staats, Wayne Bouffard, Steve Smith  
VTDFW; Wayne Laroche, Eric Palmer, Chet Mackenzie, Brian Chipman, Shawn Good, Bernie Pientka, Kevin Kelsey  
NYDEC; Patricia Riexinger, Steve Hurst, Bill Schoch, Lance Durfey, Emily Zollweg  
UVM; Ellen Marsden  
VTCFWRU; Donna Parish  
Quebec MRNF; Steve Garceau

**Clarify the term for the Policy Committee Chair**

Following a brief discussion, the policy committee agrees that the term of the Chairperson shall be 2 years duration. Pat Riexinger will continue to serve as Chairperson until next spring.

**Review and Renewal of the Cooperative Agreement**

Dave Tilton gave a brief history of the management cooperative and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)/Cooperative Agreement that officially establishes the Cooperative and how it will operate. Dave, Eric and Steve Hurst proposed a recently updated version of the MOU for approval and signature by the Policy Committee. Discussion commenced as to what role Quebec would play in the Cooperative. Steve Garceau explained that officials in Quebec have been given the MOU for review and he will let the Cooperative know of how involved Quebec will be in the Cooperative. Steve Garceau also notes that he would like to continue and improve communication between Quebec and the Cooperative.

**\*\* Policy committee agrees to sign the new MOU and then formally invite Quebec to be a signatory on the MOU. This invitation will be in the form of an official letter from the Policy Committee.**

**Lake Champlain Fisheries Strategic Plan presented to Policy Committee for adoption**

The Lake Champlain Strategic Plan for Fisheries was presented by Ellen and the Fisheries Technical Committee to the Policy Committee for adoption following a public review of the document, which was suggested at the Policy Committee meeting of 2008. The Policy Committee approved the plan with two changes: First, Patty recommended adding a short section on fish health/disease in light of the recent problems with VHS. A Northeast states and Great Lakes set of fish health guidelines could be referenced. A paragraph will be added that mentions fish health in Lake Champlain and references the Northeast States Fish Health Guidelines. Second, the review time period will be changed from 10 years to 5 years.

**\*\*The changes will be incorporated and the document will be forwarded to the Policy Committee by the Management Committee with a press release. The approved Plan will be made public accompanied by said press release.**

#### **Staffing reductions and restructuring within agencies**

Eric Palmer explained the situation facing the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, including loss of several positions within the department through attrition and one layoff. The fisheries division also has just gone through a restructuring with Chet McKenzie becoming the Western Supervisor of fisheries biologists in Rutland and Essex. Resources are thin, but they are still getting everything done. VT License sales are up which is good news going forward.

Steve Hurst explained the situation in New York. Luckily there are no lamprey control treatments in NY this fall because they might not be able to adequately staff them. The Region 5 area in NY is of considerable size with a multitude of resources and management needs. Staff levels are such that only coldwater management activities can be addressed for Lake Champlain. According to the most recent statewide angler survey, Champlain ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in regard to fishing effort (angler days) with a large component attributed towards warm and cool water fishing. Steve would like to see greater emphasis placed on Warmwater and coolwater fisheries management and is hopeful that the new Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit leader, located at Cornell University will be able to work with his counterpart in Vermont to undertake some much needed research on this very important waterbody.

Marvin Moriarty noted that the USFWS budget has been eroding slowly for the past 10 years. The future looks brighter for the Service under a new administration in Washington.

Discussion about the 2010 treatment season led to the possibility of asking the GLFC or the USFWS in Michigan to assist. The fall of 2010 is a busy one for lamprey control, including treatments of Salmon, Little Ausable, Ausable, rivers and Putnam Creek in New York and Lewis Creek in VT. How are we going to cover this??

**\*\* The Fisheries Technical Committee will need to define all of the roles and responsibilities for the 2010 treatments so that our needs can be assessed. This assessment will be sent to the management committee by the end of August 2009.**

#### **Invasive species and diseases updates**

The spiny water flea is present in Great Sacandaga Lake which is connected to the feed water source for the Champlain Canal at its highest elevation. Dave Tilton explained that Senator Leahy has obtained money for a feasibility study to determine if a filter system could be constructed to keep the spiny water flea out of the canal water system. There is an effort underway by a partnership between the Lake Champlain Basin Program, New York State Canal Corporation, TNC, NYDEC, USFWS to keep the spiny water flea out of Lake Champlain. The spiny water flea could disrupt the native plankton community which in turn could disrupt the forage base in the lake. They are also a nuisance to

anglers as they get tangled in masses on fishing lines. The feasibility study is expected to be underway this fall.

### **Forage fish assessment, alewife status**

Nick and Bernie gave a presentation of the forage fish assessment techniques and results from 2008 (see Handout). The smelt population appears to have gone through a change in Malletts bay and the Inland sea. The number of smelt per trawl is down considerably from previous years (lowest number in the past 10 years), and the 1+ age class was essentially missing. However, the total biomass calculated from the hydro-acoustic data shows an increase in fish above the thermocline, which could be alwives. Overall fish signals greater than 55 dB were higher in both the Inland Sea and Malletts Bay in 2008 than in prior years. In the main lake smelt numbers in mid-water trawls were similar to previous years. Total fish number calculated from acoustic data is down slightly from 2005.

### **Proposed baitfish (alewife) regulation changes**

New York will now allow the use of alewife as bait on waters from which it was collected. The ban of overland transport of live fish remains in effect.

Vermont will keep the current rule prohibiting the use of alewives as bait.

Quebec is considering a ban on the use of live bait. This would allow for the use of dead bait in the St. Lawrence and Champlain. This rule change is still being considered.

### **Early Mortality Syndrome update - See Summary attached.**

Early Mortality Syndrome (EMS) is now being referred to as Thiamine Deficiency Complex (TDC). Kevin gave a power point presentation on the subject and explained what TDC is and how it affected the salmon fry at the Ed Weed Hatchery in the winter of 2008-2009. We have thiamin data from adult fish showing similar levels between 2007 and 2008, but we saw no signs of TDC in the winter of 2007-2008. However, there would have been a near complete loss of hatchery production during the winter of 2008-2009 had it not been for thiamine treatments.

This issue is of great importance to our salmonid program. Dave Tilton suggested that the Cooperative think about how this issue will be addressed into the future, including additional focus on natural reproduction.

Kevin noted that the treatment for TDC in the hatchery can be costly if not purchased in bulk. We should be thinking about how to coordinate with other hatcheries in the Great Lakes to buy the treatment at a cost that is reasonable.

### **Stocking report and current plans, including adjustments to VHS**

Bill passed around a handout which can be seen in the 2008 Cooperative Annual report. We were within 2% of our target for main lake salmonid stocking in 2008. The steelhead and brown trout numbers were down due to production/disease issues, but the shortage was almost completely made up with excess landlocked salmon.

Henry passed out the cooperative agreement between The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Vermont for fish production. To provide time for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to develop procedures and infrastructure necessary to minimize risks of transmittal of Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS), the USFWS Eisenhower hatchery will raise brook trout for stocking into inland waters of Vermont. In exchange, Ed Weed Fish Culture Station will raise Vermont's portion of the landlocked salmon that Eisenhower normally would produce for Lake Champlain. Dave noted that this reflects a good partnership, and Eric noted that another example of such partnership in fish culture activities include lake trout provide by Vermont to help the Service meet production goals for Lake Ontario.

Vermont has a captive steelhead brood line which will be coming back on production so VT will stock steelhead into the lake again.

Musky stocking is also continuing in New York (Great Chazy River) and Vermont (Missisquoi River). The fish being stocked are raised in New York and are Chautauqua strain.

### **Colonial Waterbird Environmental Assessment , Organizing a joint fisheries and wildlife committees panel discussion on fish/cormorant interactions with leading experts**

Lance Durfey gave a brief update on the cormorant work on Lake Champlain. The Wildlife Technical Committee is continuing to work on the Colonial Waterbird Management Plan for Lake Champlain. Currently the 2010 budget for the cormorant management program administered by APHIS is in jeopardy in the U.S. Congress. However, if the budget comes through, then APHIS is interested in holding a meeting similar to the informational meeting that was held regarding alewives. Hopefully this could happen over the winter, but if APHIS does not get the budget we won't have the meeting.

Pat wanted to make clear that the Cooperative's stance on cormorant management not be completely about improving the fishery. Cormorant management is necessary mostly because of the habitat destruction caused by the birds, and because of impacts to other colonial nesting birds.

### **Sea Lamprey activities summary (Chipman, Schoch, Bouffard)**

There were a number of sea lamprey control treatments in the fall of 2008. Mt. Hope Brook, Mill Brook, Great Chazy River, Saranac River Delta, and Mill Brook Delta in New York and Winooski River and Missisquoi River in Vermont. Overall the treatments were largely successful at reducing lamprey populations. Treatment effectiveness was between 85% and 100% in all rivers. The delta treatments were also effective at eliminating large numbers of larvae.

There were a few glitches with the 2008 treatments. We experienced a problem with a hydro dam shutting down flow on the Winooski river. This lead to fairly high treatment

concentrations for a bit followed by low concentrations as the flow increased after the dam was opened up.

On the Missisquoi, there was an issue with the high feed rates of TFM going through a 300 foot spreader hose. The treatment was suspended for a period of time so that the spreader could be re-configured. The long spreader hose and undersized pump made it difficult to get a good chemical mix across the river. We have researched a solution for this problem in the future.

On the Great Chazy River there was a rain event that occurred during the initial phase of treatment that created a problem with the TFM block. The increasing flow made it difficult to boost the TFM block sufficiently at the first boost site. As the river level rose, it pushed the TFM block past the second boost site before personnel were available to run the boost. The TFM block was able to be boosted at the final boost location. Even with the difficulties the treatment was 98% effective.

We also had a long period of low level TFM monitoring following the Missisquoi treatment. The TFM was monitored in Quebec waters down to the detection limit. This resulted in seven weeks of low-level analysis via HPLC.

Spring 2009 sea lamprey trapping numbers were down 6 % in reference streams trapped annually by the USFWS. There was however a 57% increase in adult catch in streams adjacent to the Inland Sea section of the lake.

The Great Chazy River frog farm sea lamprey barrier dam was also improved in the spring of 2009. The cooperative contracted with Jefford's Steel of Plattsburg to fabricate and install a steel lip on the top of the dam to prevent lamprey from passing over the dam. The dam has not been functioning as a lamprey barrier and the lip will help to determine how the lampreys are passing above the dam.

The Lamoille Rive is scheduled for treatment in fall of 2009. All permit applications are submitted and there is a public hearing about the treatment on 7-16-09.

#### **Wounding rates on target fishes and salmonid population response - See Handout.**

Wounding rates on lake trout continued to decline in the fall of 2008. Rates fell to 31 wounds per 100 fish in the 533-633 mm length class. Wounding rates on landlocked salmon in the main lake also continued to decline. The wounding rate on reference length salmon (432-533 mm) was 35 wounds per 100 fish. There was also a notable increase in the number of large multi-lake-year salmon in the fall assessments of 2008. In New York waters, fish greater than 540mm made up 23 % of the total salmon catch.

#### **Changes in permitting procedures in VT**

There was significant change in the permitting process for lamprey control in Vermont under the former Commissioner of DEC Laura Pelosi. She became more engaged in the permitting process and improved the communication during the process. She worked with DFW to create a new procedure for lamprey permitting that has been signed by the commissioners of both departments. The Department of Health has also become more

engaged in the process and attended a procedural meeting, which has not happened in the past. The VTDEC has proposed a new multi-year/multi-river lamprey control permit which could reduce a large amount of staff time for both DEC and DFW.

Vermont has also adopted a slightly new approach for preparing permit applications. The Lamoille River permit was put together by a team of individuals from VT, NY, and the USFWS, in order to spread the workload and enhance communication. This approach seemed to work well and will be used in the future. Eric noted that Vermont does not expect to revisit the problems in permitting that have happened in the past.

### **Barrier construction on Morpion Stream, Quebec**

Dave and Steve Smith reported that the FWS encountered many problems in site procurement, but we seem to have that finally settled. Quebec has reviewed our legal agreements and has requested only minor changes that we can accommodate.

Kleinschmidt Associates is re-engineering our plans for the new site now. We still hope to break ground this late summer or fall to have it operational by spring. Permits are in place. The Cooperative has spent about \$76,000 on engineering and about \$15,000 on consulting fees thus far, which is not inconsistent with anticipated costs.

There is also the potential to construct barriers on the Little Ausable and LaPlatte rivers. Senator Leahy added \$300,000 to the Army Corps of Engineers budget to do sea lamprey Barrier work on Lake Champlain in the 2009 Omnibus Budget. That money requires a 25% non-federal match when spent on engineering and feasibility and a 50% non-federal match when spent on construction. New York has some bond act money available for use on the Little Ausable barrier, but the bureaucracy has made that money difficult to access.

**\*\* Patty will follow up with the New York legal team to find out exactly what hurdles exist for getting work started on the Little Ausable.**

### **Sea Lamprey Control Alternatives Workgroup report and research (Marsden)**

The Workgroup has issued a request for proposals to do alternative lamprey control research. The cooperative has allocated \$50,000 annually for alternatives research projects that could be addressed through the RFP. There are currently no proposals.

The Workgroup is an official Federal Advisory Committee Act group whose members must be appointed through FACA. Currently the appointments have expired so the Workgroup cannot make recommendations officially as a FACA committee. Hopefully the appointments will happen soon.

### **Federal Leahy Appropriation**

Dave reported that, in addition to our annual GLFC appropriation, Senator Leahy provided \$97,000 through APHIS for sea lamprey control. The plan is to use that funding to hire technicians to help ensure the Cooperative is prepared for treatments in 2010.

Through the GLFC, Lake Champlain was appropriated \$1,200,000 in fiscal year 2008. Of that, \$700k was for sea lamprey control and \$500k was assigned to the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) for water quality initiatives. Of the \$500k, \$100k will go toward the spiny water flea feasibility study, \$200k will go to USFWS wetland restoration in collaboration with U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the remainder will be used for a cleanup on Law Island in the Inland Sea and administered by the Lake Champlain Basin Program in small grants for habitat restoration, wildlife connectivity, and water quality initiatives.

Brian Chipman passed out a spreadsheet detailing the Cooperative's GLFC account balance, and expected expenses during the remainder of 2009.

### **Status of plan to move toward GLFC model**

In May, Lake Champlain International, Inc. organized a meeting of New York and Vermont Congressional staff, as well as stakeholders. The intent was to strengthen multi-state support for federal funding that would allow the USFWS to assume the lead on lamprey control. The budget is being worked on in Washington and we don't know how it will turn out for 2010.

Marvin mentioned that the USFWS made an effort to get base funding for the lamprey control program included in the Obama Administration's budget proposal for 2010. He fought hard for it, but in the end the Service could not fit it into the budget.

### **Lake Champlain Basin Program AIS Rapid Response Action Plan**

The Lake Champlain Basin Rapid Response Action Plan for Aquatic Invasive Species has been drafted by the LCBP ANS subcommittee rapid response workgroup. The plan has been approved and signed by the LCBP steering committee. Dave Tilton, Bernie Pientka, Shawn Good, and Steve Garceau worked on the plan. The next step is for the lead agencies (NYDEC, VTANR, Quebec Ministry of Environment) determine their processes for implementing the Plan and to set up an interagency Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. The task force will be made up of individuals from stakeholder agencies, government, NGO's, Universities, etc..