

**AGENDA**  
**Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative**  
**Policy Committee Meeting**

**Kehoe Green Mountain Conservation Camp**  
**634 Point of Pines Road**  
**Castleton, VT 05735**

**Date: 18 August 2011**

**9:30am - Coffee and networking**

**10:00am - Introductions, announcements, review agenda (Patrick Berry)**

**Attendees:**

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department: Pat Berry, Eric Palmer, Chet MacKenzie, Brian Chipman, Bernie Pientka, John Gobeille

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation: Patty Reixinger, Doug Stang, Phil Hulbert, Gordon Batcheller, Bill Schoch, Emily Zollweg, Joe Racette

U.S Fish and Wildlife Service: Bill Archambault, Dave Tilton, Henry Bouchard, Bill Ardren, Brad Young, Steve Smith, Nick Staats

USDS-Wildlife Services: Martin Lowney, Stacy Preusser

Vermont Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit: Donna Parrish

***- Brief agency staff and budget updates (Policy Committee)***

Pat Berry recognized the dramatic effects of recent flooding. Pat stated that we need to be prepared for the reality that these events may become more frequent and that we need to factor climate change into our management decisions. The Vermont budget has been hurt by weather, license sales have fallen, and the State is looking for ways to emerge from the deficit they face by prioritizing conservation needs. VTFWD plans to continue making the case that relatively small investments from the general fund will result in future economic and ecological benefits and avoid more costly problems that would result if problems are not addressed now.

Patty Reixinger reported that license revenue increased in New York, however they are under a hiring freeze. NYSDEC is concerned that conservation funds could be diverted to the State general fund. NYSDEC has lost over 100 staff in recent years. They have been able to restore some travel funds. There is currently a push in the State to foster economic growth especially in rural areas. The State is continuing to look for inefficiencies to cut. NYSDEC finances did not worsen, but they are simply unable to access funds.

Bill Archambault reported that USFWS is experiencing a great deal of uncertainty. USFWS had flat funding in FY11, but earmarks were an important component which enabled programmatic operations to continue. As of now, all FY12 earmarks have been eliminated. The FY12 budget is unknown but USFWS expects substantial cuts, which have been proposed by the Administration and by Congress. Substantial cuts in hatcheries and resource management dollars are proposed. Small increases in NFHAP and fish passage dollars are also proposed. A proposed cut of 30% in the Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance program significantly affects the Lake Champlain office. USFWS will be visiting states soon to discuss the FY12 budget. Marvin Moriarty retired. Wendi Weber (current Deputy Regional Director), is now acting Regional Director, and the position has been advertised. Current employment policy is to replace 1 employee for every 2 that are lost through retirement or other ways.

Martin Lowney noted that the APHIS is experiencing cuts similar to the budgets of the Policy Committee members' agencies. He reported that APHIS had a 10% reduction in FY11 and that all Lake Champlain cormorant funding was eliminated. The Congress' FY12 budget is flat for USDA Wildlife Services, but makes cuts to APHIS and will affect many programs. They have been told to brace for budget cuts and lots of uncertainty. APHIS is now working to find ways to restore cormorant control funding.

**10:30am - Fisheries**

***- Fisheries Technical Committee Annual Report (Young)***

Brad presented the Annual Report and touched on some of its highlights. It, along with previous years' reports, is available on the USFWS website (<http://www.fws.gov/lcfwro/fishtech.html>). The Policy Committee praised the FTC's work and liked the format, length, and timely delivery of the report.

**ACTION ITEM:** The Policy Committee wishes to see an executive summary in next year's report that is less technical and more accessible.

### **- Forage fish assessment, alewife status (Staats, Pientka)**

Nick and Bernie presented a 4-page summary handout, which covers up to 22 years of data. Notably, smelt age structure is shifting toward older fish in NE Arm of the lake. Alewives continue to increase, especially above the thermocline. New hydroacoustic methods are being used that yield more data. 2010 saw the largest band of YOY smelt ever recorded in South Lake.

### **- Salmonid assessment (Chipman, Smith, Ardren)**

Brian presented a 2-page summary handout. It showed that salmon and lake trout size and age structure have both improved. Population age structures for both species have shifted towards older fish. Salmon and steelhead returns at fishways and fishlifts have hit records and are believed to be the result of successful lamprey control. Angler catch rates are improving for salmon. More young lake trout are beginning to be seen.

### **- Salmonid research**

#### **- River run salmon (Ardren)**

Bill gave a PowerPoint presentation on his ongoing 3-yr project in the Winooski and Boquet rivers. Combinations of fry, fingerlings, and smolts are stocked at different locations and at different life stages. Three genetically-tagged groups for Boquet and 3 genetically-tagged groups for Winooski were produced at Bald Hill Hatchery. The genetic samples are being processed by USFWS' Lamar facility. Ultimate goal is to determine best culture regiment for producing salmon that have greatest chance of returning to natal streams. Many physiological and morphometric characteristics are being measured and evaluated. Current differences between Ed Weed and Eisenhower hatchery-raised salmon exist, yet the implications are not clear yet as to which characteristics are most deterministic. Creating a river fishery is a top priority. Natural reproduction has increased importance.

#### **- Methods to evaluate stocking rates of salmonids, Steelhead strain / landlocked salmon evaluations (MacKenzie)**

Chet presented a 4-page handout titled "An evaluation of the performance of landlocked salmon reared from 2 brood sources and of 2 steelhead strains stocked into Lake Champlain". Vermont is looking to optimize its stocking of different strains from different hatcheries which may result in savings to the department. At the 2010 Policy Committee meeting, Wayne Laroche expressed interest in proactively managing salmonid stocking strategies and rates. Vermont will be presenting a white paper to the FTC that summarizes techniques and strategies and experiences in stocking. Following discussion, Eric reported that the stocking rate had been increased in the NE Arm to 1997 recommendation levels.

#### **- Thiaminase research (Ardren)**

Bill Ardren presented a PowerPoint on Ellen Marsden's behalf. Alewife have high levels of thiaminase in their bodies, which, when eaten by salmon, lowers their normal Vitamin B12 (Thiamine) levels and negatively affects their ability to naturally reproduce. We have been monitoring alewife and smelt thiaminase levels. Since 2007, levels have been going down in alewives, but up in smelt. Lake trout and salmon thiamine levels have been going down since 2003. Lake Champlain fish have lower levels of thiamine than their Great Lakes counterparts, yet they exhibit fewer effects. Thiamine injections given to spawning fish captured at fishways and fishlifts is being contemplated.

#### **- Other ongoing research (handout)**

Brad presented a 1-page handout that summarized 5 ongoing research projects: Stonecat population assessment, Donna Parrish; Bass Tournament Impacts, Tim Mihuc; Champlain Canal Sampling, Ellen Marsden; Lamprey Statolith Microchemistry, Ellen Marsden; Larval Lamprey growth on deltas, Bradley Young.

**12:00pm - Lunch provided by Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife at Kehoe Center**

**1:00pm - International affairs**

**- *Status of Quebec participation in the Champlain Cooperative (Garceau and Bilodeau – by phone)***

Dave Tilton pointed out that participants around the table had a copy of Patty Riexinger's August 2, 2010 letter to Andre Lemay of Quebec Ministry of Natural Resources and Wildlife inviting the Quebec agency to become a signatory to the Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative's formal agreement and participate on the Cooperative's committees. Steve Garceau and Pierre Bilodeau commented that organizational and personnel changes in their agency's structure and other demands have delayed careful consideration of their participation. They hope to work with Dave and others in the next few months to determine how best to participate.

**- *Sea lamprey barrier construction on Morpion Stream (Young)***

Brad presented a 1-page handout that summarized the project budget. \$523,000 of the allocated \$720,000 have been spent thus far. The project is currently out-for-bid in Quebec. Brad has made it clear in the request for bids that construction is to be completed by winter so that the barrier can be operated in spring 2012.

**- *Missisquoi River 2012 treatment planning (Smith)***

Steve Smith reported that plans are in development for a sea lamprey treatment of the Missisquoi River in 2012. Because the lampricide plume from this treatment will probably reach Quebec waters of Missisquoi Bay, the Cooperative has enlisted the Lake Champlain Basin Program for help facilitating a meeting this fall with appropriate agencies in Quebec.

**- *Updates from Quebec (Garceau, Dumont – by phone)***

Pierre Dumont noted that Quebec has terminated the eel stocking program developed to enhance eel recruitment, because it was difficult to ensure that eel transport would not also transport parasites. The program was initiated in 2005, and the glass eels for stocking had been purchased by hydropower companies. Pierre noted the recent publication in the Journal of Great Lakes Research (Verreault, Dumont, et al.) documenting migrating silver American eels in the St. Lawrence estuary that originated from the stocking program. Based on their relatively low fat content, Pierre suggested these silver eels were probably not sufficiently mature to successfully migrate to spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea. Pierre also reported that this year's catch of migrating eels at fish ladders in the Saint Lawrence system (approximately 6,500) was the highest recorded in recent years, although still significantly lower than historic levels.

Bill Archambault reported on an ongoing review by the USFWS of a petition to list the American eel under the Endangered Species Act. Pierre noted that a similar review is also underway in Quebec.

Steve Garceau reported that an ongoing public review of baitfish rules in Quebec is targeted at preventing new introductions of round gobies and other invasive species found in the Saint Lawrence River. The proposed rules may prohibit the use of live baitfish. Steve also described the adverse effects of 2011 spring flooding in the Richelieu River and canals, including widespread migration of tench and carp in floodwaters.

Steve also announced plans by his agency to carry out a fish sampling program in Missisquoi Bay in the fall, and he invited biologists from the Cooperative to join their effort.

**1:45pm - Wildlife**

**- *Colonial Waterbird Management Update (Lowney, Racette)***

Joe gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Lake Champlain Colonial Waterbird Management Plan. The two main objectives are to restore depleted populations of bird species and to control overabundant species. An increase in most colonial waterbird populations would be welcomed, but cormorants are the exception. A public poll of attitudes towards cormorants revealed that 76% surveyed consider cormorants a nuisance, 79% want control, 80% like egg oiling, 44% believe shooting them is unethical, 52% believe they are impacting sport-fishing, 56% want agencies to control them for the benefit of sport-fishing. Cooperators are still wrestling with meshing the management plan and environmental assessment.

Martin continued with PowerPoint presentation, reporting that an Environmental Assessment is being written by Wildlife Services and is nearly complete. Environmental and habitat destruction is what started the movement to control cormorants. The Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative's Cormorant Communications Committee was organized and developed population targets based on habitat restoration goals. Next Steps are to 1) finish writing the plan, 2) let the Policy Committee review it, 3) incorporate the Policy Committee's edits, 4) submit it for Section 7 Review, 5) seek public comment, and 6) issue a decision. This process is hoped to be completed by March 2012.

Patty and Bill expressed that the management targets needed to be based on science not public opinion. Martin went into further detail explaining that lower population targets weren't simply a response to public demand, but were based on the reports and presentations from researchers who spoke at a conference sponsored by the Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative's Fishery Technical Committee and Wildlife Technical Committee in 2010.

### ***- Fishery-based cormorant control objectives (Young, Lowney)***

Brad presented a 1-page handout that was requested by the Policy Committee at the 2010 meeting. The handout explained the process by which the Fisheries Technical Committee developed a recommendation for cormorant densities based on research on other large lakes. The recommendation is not empirically based on Champlain data, but is consistent with management strategies in other systems. Brad explained that the other researchers recommended that if we wished to detect a fishery response to cormorant reduction, we would need to manage the cormorant population to a density below the expected cormorant-fishery equilibrium point. Based on available information, Brad presented a number of 2-4 cormorants/km<sup>2</sup> as a target population density, consistent with fishery goals.

Patrick reported that this issue is brought to him more than any other. Patrick supported the goal, recognizing that it was an adaptive management approach that would help us determine, based on the fishery response (or lack thereof), whether the public perception of cormorant impacts on the fishery is justified.

## **2:15pm - Sea Lamprey Control**

### ***- Overview and accomplishments (Young, Chipman)***

Brian presented a 1-page handout that showed wounding rates on lake Trout and Atlantic salmon since the beginning of the control program. For the first time in the history of the control program, salmon wounding rates dropped to 15 per 100 fish. This is our management target and a welcome achievement. The lake trout goal is 25, yet the rate is still at 40. This is far below our 2007 number of 99, but room for improvement remains.

Improvements on delta assessment were made this year which resulted in the discovery of large expanses of previously unknown populations of larvae. These will be treated this fall on the Ausable delta complex. 2010 treatments all went as planned and were considered successful, though continuing post-treatment assessments will better evaluate the true level of success. For the first time, we cancelled a treatment (Beaver Brook) because an alternative control method – seasonal trapping, effectively eliminated the population there. Brad also presented the poster that was displayed at Secretary Salazar's visit which shows the long-term plan to realign the order of treatments based on geographic clusters, rather than the current random order. The hope is to save staff and travel dollars and possibly take advantage of the lamprey's attraction to larval pheromone by clumping reproduction and then focusing treatments on that effort. The plan would eventually mean treatments would only occur in 3 years of the 4-year cycle.

### ***- Federal leadership model (Tilton)***

Dave reviewed developments in recent years, particularly Federal appropriations to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission secured by Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, which have allowed USFWS to assume leadership responsibility for the Lake Champlain sea lamprey control program in partnership with NYDEC and VTFWD. Public awareness and appreciation for these developments increased significantly when Senator Leahy and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, received substantial news coverage, including comments by Commissioner Patrick Berry, at an August 15<sup>th</sup> event in Colchester, Vermont. Significantly, when the Secretary was asked about the challenge of ensuring continued Federal funding for the USFWS leadership role, the Secretary stated "We're going to make it a priority." Dave noted that Federal budget projections are nevertheless a cause for concern, and the Cooperative needs to continue to emphasize the importance of the agencies' efforts.

Dave noted that the news coverage had too little emphasis on the State-Federal partnership, and too much emphasis on the Federal leadership. This was also noted by Patrick.

**- GLFC/Champlain: lamprey budget status (Young)**

Brad presented a 1-page handout that listed 2010 and 2011 expenditures to date. Allowances for planned expenditures such as lampricide purchases, the Morpion project, and Alternative Workgroup funds were identified. The effective balance was over \$1.2M. Given this balance, planned future expenses, and expected annual appropriations of \$700,000, Brad reported that the budget would enable the Federal Leadership Model to continue through 2015.

Eric Palmer asked about the USFWS budget and work plan per the Addendum to the Cooperative Agreement. Dave responded that the USFWS entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with GLFC for calendar year 2011 which describes use of the GLFC funding to support sea lamprey control. Brad reported that this first year, developing a precise budget was difficult. He said USFWS will be leaving over a third of the \$350,000 in the MOA in the Commission's coffers for future use on Lake Champlain. Until expenses are incurred in this year's treatments, it will be difficult to develop a specific budget, but by November, most all expenses will be known and a 2012 budget can be developed.

**ACTION ITEM:** Following a discussion amongst Pat, Eric, Dave, Bill, and Brad, it was agreed that the USFWS would submit a calendar year 2012 lamprey control program budget in November of 2011 for review by the Management Committee.

**- Alternatives Workgroup, RFP process and funding (Tilton)**

Dave filled in for Sea Lamprey Control Alternatives Workgroup (Alternatives Workgroup) Chair Ellen Marsden, who could not attend the Policy Committee meeting. Because the Alternatives Workgroup includes non-governmental members, is managed partly by a Federal agency (USFWS), and develops advice and recommendations for the Lake Champlain Cooperative, which includes the USFWS, it falls under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). FACA requires the Service to document the Workgroup's membership processes, meetings, and recommendations, with the ultimate intent of ensuring that no non-government individual or organization has an undue influence on the actions of the Federal government. Dave pointed out that this Federal requirement includes a significant administrative burden on the Service's Lake Champlain Office, including requirements for his required role as "Designated Federal Official."

The Alternatives Workgroup includes representatives of conservation organizations, the sportfishing community, scientists, and agencies. It has set milestones, including to "achieve a 20% reduction in (1) TFM use and (2) stream/delta habitat exposed to lampricides by 2018, not including new areas added to the treatment program, with no net increase in sea lamprey wounding." It's charter states: "The purpose of the Workgroup is to provide, in an advisory capacity, recommendations and advice on research and implementation of sea lamprey management techniques alternative to lampricide...." The Workgroup's Bylaws state "The purpose ... is to provide ... recommendations and advice ... on relevant research and implementation of a program of integrated pest management ... including techniques alternative to lampricide....".

Dave described a consensus of the Workgroup to request that the Policy Committee change the authorized allocation from the GLFC budget (currently \$50,000 in any given year) to allow it to accumulate for up to two years, which will allow some RFPs up to \$100,000. After thorough discussion, including expression of support from some members of the Technical Committee and opposition from others, the Policy Committee unanimously agreed to authorize a one-time increase to \$100,000 for consideration by the Fisheries Technical Committee for one budget cycle.

**3:30pm - Invasive Species**

**- Champlain Canal status (Tilton)**

Dave filled in for Meg Modley of the Lake Champlain Basin Program, who could not attend the meeting. He provided an overview of the significant risk of invasive species transport through the Champlain Canal into Lake Champlain. The U.S. Army corps of Engineers has authority under the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 to investigate the feasibility and construct a barrier to invasive species in Champlain Canal at full Federal expense. Unfortunately, annual appropriations have been insufficient to allow the Corps to proceed.

**- Lake George Asian clam control (Zolweg)**

Emily projected powerpoint slides showing the extent of an infestation of invasive Asian Clams in Lake George, and described hopeful measures to eradicate this species using benthic mats installed and monitored by dive teams. The work is ongoing.

**- Lake Champlain AIS Rapid Response Task Force (Tilton, Good, Zolweg)**

Members of the Lake Champlain Rapid Response Task Force are Larry Nashett (NYDEC) and Leslie Suprenaut (NYDEC), Dan Spada (Adirondack Park Agency), Shawn Good (VTFWD), Ann Bove (VTDEC), Isabelle Simard (Quebec MDDEP). Meg Modley (Lake Champlain Basin Program) serves as coordinator, and Dave is the facilitator. The Task Force operates to implement a Rapid Response Plan for invasive species that was approved by the Lake Champlain Basin Program Steering Committee, including policy officials from the departments of each agency in the Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative. Recent work of the task force has focused on learning from the rapid response associated with Asian carp in the Chicago Ship Canal. At its last meeting, the Task Force was joined by the EPA Rapid Response manager for the Asian Carp action.