

# Action Items from the 2019 Policy Committee Meeting

8/21/19

## **American Eel Die-off in Lake Champlain**

What: In just the last week there have been 28 reports of American eels found dead along Lake Champlain. Not clear if this is a major die-off event yet, but staff are asked to forward any reports of dead eels onto Bernie Pientka (VTFWD). USFWS will coordinate with Northeast Fish Health Center.

Who: Staff working on Lake Champlain

When: ASAP – Ongoing

### **Action Taken:**

In the late summer of 2019 multiple reports of dead American eels, *Anguilla rostrata* were received around Lake Champlain. The large number of reports prompted VTFWD to establish a report logging system. The system logged each report and collected specific information about the observation such exact location, number of eels observed, size of eels, when they were first observed and any additional details. A total of 77 reports were received between August 11th, 2019 and September 19, 2019. Based the reports, eel mortalities appeared to start in late July and increased through August. A total of 139 dead eels were reported around Lake Champlain with a higher concentration of reports in the Inland Sea (or Northeast Arm) area of the lake.

Eighteen eels were collected and examined by VTFWD Fish Health Biologist. While both evaluations identified some minor issues, there was no conclusive evidence of a causative fish pathogen or condition (Jones, 2020). Examination of otoliths will be used to determine if these eels were stocked.

## **Indicators of Lake Champlain Salmonid Condition**

What: A *Protocol for Summarizing Indicators of Lake Champlain Salmonid Condition* has been drafted by the Salmonid Working Group and has been approved by Fisheries Technical Committee.

Who: Salmonid Working Group, Fisheries Technical Committee

When: Indicators will be reported annually in report card format. Indicators can be added or dropped if needed (e.g., forage fish).

**Action Taken:** Fisheries Technical Committee completed this protocol in June 2020 and will present to the Policy Committee as part of their report in July.

### **River Run Atlantic Salmon Restoration Plan**

What: A detailed plan for river run land-locked Atlantic salmon restoration in the Lake Champlain Basin has been drafted by USFWS and is ready for review and input by states.

Who: USFWS, VTFWD, NYSDEC, Fisheries Technical Committee

When: USFWS will share the draft with VT and NY for additional input by September 15<sup>th</sup> with the goal of a final draft for approval at the Fisheries Technical Meeting in January 2020.

**Action Taken: Initial drafts were shared with states in fall, 2019 through winter/spring 2020. Significant feedback was provided by the states indicating need for further refinement and collaboration. The plan will be updated and completed in 2020-2021 working with the states. An update on the draft plan and process will be provided at the 2020 Policy Committee meeting.**

### **Status of Petition to List Lake Sturgeon under the ESA**

What: The petition to list Lake Sturgeon under the ESA had a positive 90-day finding by USFWS, meaning that there was substantial information in the petition to consider listing the Lake Sturgeon as threatened or endangered.

Who: USFWS will begin an in-depth review to determine if Lake Sturgeon should be listed. The USFWS will request more information from states during the Species Status Assessment and 12-month finding process.

When: Next up is a Species Status Assessment and 12-month finding process during which getting information from the states will be critical. It maybe some time before this in-depth review begins. Species are placed in 1 of 5 bins in the national listing workplan based on priority and USFWS is currently planning out to 2024. USFWS will keep VTFWD and NYSDEC informed about the status.

**Action Needed: Lake Sturgeon is not yet listed on the National Listing Workplan. An update will be provided on the status at the 2020 Policy Committee meeting**

### **Lake Champlain Sauger Restoration Plan**

What: After considering a Lake Saint-Pierre strain and a Mississippi strain of sauger, it was recommended that the Mississippi strain be selected as the source for reintroduction of the species to Lake Champlain. A letter to Quebec from the Cooperative stating the desire to use the Mississippi strain and start a sauger restoration program in Lake Champlain has been drafted for the Policy Committee to review and sign.

Who: NYSDEC to finalize letter, Policy Committee (Wendi Weber – USFWS, Tony Wilkinson – NYSDEC, Louis Porter – VTFWD) to sign.

When: September 2019

**Action Taken: Letter drafted and sent to Quebec Ministry of Natural Resources. No response received. This plan is on hold for now.**

### **Long-term Funding Source for Lake Champlain Sea lamprey Control**

What: Develop a strategy for approaching the transition from annually appropriated GLFC funds to long-term, dedicated Lake Champlain Cooperative funding of the sea lamprey control program.

Who: Management and Policy Committee, in coordination with GLFC, Senator Leahy's office, and other potential partners

When: By 2020 Policy Committee Meeting

**Action Taken: Management Committee discussed this strategy and agreed a separate meeting of the Management Committee and Policy Committee to address this issue is needed once the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completes internal budget discussions. Increased funding was added to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service budget by the Appropriations Committee thanks to Senator Leahy. The amount added in 2020 is \$818,000.**

### **Strategic Plan for Lake Champlain Fisheries**

What: A charge to the Fisheries Technical Committee to create a new *Strategic Plan for Lake Champlain Fisheries* began in October 2017. While the plan remains in development, the goals and objectives for Lake Trout, Landlocked Atlantic Salmon, and Sea Lamprey are nearly complete. It was agreed that an interim plan could be finalized quickly for these three species, (possibly Lake Sturgeon as well), while continuing to work on a more comprehensive plan that included other species.

Who: Management Committee / Strategic Plan Working Group / Fisheries Technical Committee

When: Interim Plan: by the Jan 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 FTC meeting  
Comprehensive Plan: by the 2020 Policy Committee Meeting

**Action Taken: Strategic Plan Committee and Management Committee met several times and agreed on revised approach focused on salmon, lake trout and sea lamprey, then completed revision and edits. Plan will be provided for review and approval at the July 2020 Policy Committee.**

### **NYSDEC Letter for Relief from Cormorant Control Order**

What: A letter was sent from NYSDEC to USFWS Principal Deputy Director Margaret Everson asking for relief from the order that was vacated which allowed for double-crested cormorant control. The status of this request was unknown. Wendi Weber said that she would check with USFWS staff and report back to NYSDEC.

Who: USFWS

When: September 2019

**Action Taken: Wendi Weber did check and get back to DEC Division Director Tony Wilkinson acknowledging the concern and providing information. Cormorant EIS update: On June 5, 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced the publication of a [draft environmental impact](#)**

[statement \(EIS\)](#) and [draft rule](#) inviting [public comment](#) on proposed management of conflicts associated with double-crested cormorants. As part of the continued effort to address conflicts between cormorants and wild and publicly stocked fisheries, and aquaculture facilities, the draft EIS evaluates alternatives within the Service's authority to implement measures that address conflicts associated with cormorants within the contiguous 48 United States. USFWS staff will be available to answer questions about the EIS and draft rule at the July 2020 Policy Committee meeting.