

Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative
Policy Committee Meeting

August 11, 2016

Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park

Attending:

USFWS: Sherry White, Bill Archambault, Bill Ardren, Steve Smith, BJ Allaire, Madeleine Lyttle, Nick Staats, Henry Bouchard
VTDFW: Louis Porter, Eric Palmer, Chet MacKenzie, Brian Chipman, Adam Miller
NYSDEC: Doug Stang (via phone), Lance Durfey
UVM: Ellen Marsden, Donna Parrish
LCBP: Eric Howe, Meg Modley
APHIS: Fred Pogmore, Allen Gosser
Sen. Leahy's Office: Tom Berry

Meeting called to order @ 1005 hrs

Policy Committee member updates:

NYSDEC: Doug Stang mentioned several retirements: Patty Riexenger (Division Director), Phil Hulbert (Bureau of Fisheries Chief), and Shaun Keeler (Inland Fisheries Section Head). A new Division Director could be named by late fall. The filling of the Bureau Chief and Fisheries Section Head positions may not happen until after the new Division Director is chosen. There is a new Bureau Chief for Wildlife: Jim Farquhar, former Region 6 Wildlife Manager. Budget-wise, we expect a flat budget; the request for the 2017-18 Fiscal Year just arrived – we expect status quo.

VTDFW: Louis Porter mentioned that budget-wise, VTDFW is in good shape with stable or increasing license sales and a stable federal portion; increased general fund revenue has helped stabilize things; been able to hire needed personnel and purchase vehicles. An Endangered/Threatened Species habitat protection law was passed, giving VTDFW greater ability to protect habitats of state-listed species.

USFWS: Sherry White indicated the USFWS budget is flat this fiscal year and likely to be flat and based on a continuing resolution in the next FY. The last couple years the hatchery budget has been up and has allowed hiring and full production. White River National Fish Hatchery is expected back on-line soon, with fish on premises as early as this fall. A new Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Resources manager has been hired – Andrew Milliken. He is expected to start in October.

Sea Lamprey Control:

Steve Smith gave a summary of the sea lamprey control treatments completed in 2015-16, their effectiveness, adult trapping, sea lamprey wounding rates on salmonids, the status of the geographical alignment, funding, outreach and permitting. Funding-wise, it was noted that if Great Lakes Fishery Commission funding were eliminated, the program could only proceed for 1 full year with the current balance.

Permitting issues were discussed at some length:

- Three treatments were scheduled in VT this fall: Missisquoi River, Stonebridge Brook, and LaPlatte River
- VT Department of Health (VTDOH) is recommending a 3 ppb TFM water-use advisory threshold, down substantially from the previously used 35 ppb
- VTDOH is also recommending that a study be commissioned to determine a definitive drinking water standard for TFM. That study can be overseen by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC), but would take a minimum of one year to complete
- VTDOH may not take that standard “as-is”, and may reduce it in their risk assessment model
- Meantime, the lower 3 ppb threshold is problematic for this fall’s treatments, especially on the Missisquoi River
- Based on previous treatments, a Missisquoi Bay water-use advisory with a 3 ppb threshold could last into January with a substantially larger advisory zone
- It may still be practical to treat the LaPlatte and Stonebridge this fall even with the 3 ppb advisory threshold, depending on what if any prophylactic measures are needed at the Champlain Water District (CWD) intake
- The status of the water plant needs should be known within a few weeks at most
- Treatment of Stonebridge alone does not make sense logistically, as its larval sea lamprey population is small relative to the Missisquoi and LaPlatte
- One option also being explored is the CWD plant does have potassium permanganate ($KMNO_4$) injection. It is possible that $KMNO_4$ will oxidize TFM, should any reach the intake, into an innocuous byproduct, eliminating any concerns about the finished water
- If all VT treatments are postponed until completion of the drinking water standard study, it is possible that NY could conduct its treatments, originally scheduled for 2018, a year earlier in 2017
- This would allow the Missisquoi, LaPlatte and Stonebridge to be treated in 2018 instead, anticipating the study to determine a drinking water standard for TFM would be completed by then
- NY and USFWS will compile a list of the required steps and timelines so that the change in treatment schedule can be fully vetted and we can shift the needed resources

Cormorant Management:

Allen Gosser and Fred Pogmore (NY and VT USDA APHIS, respectively) provided an update on cormorant management on Lake Champlain and the status of the colonial waterbird management plan. Because of a lawsuit brought against the USFWS, cormorant management in the northeast has been suspended until the USFWS addresses the NEPA shortcomings identified

by the court. Prior to the lawsuit, however, egg-oiling had been conducted on Four Brothers Islands. So at least some cormorant management has occurred on Lake Champlain this field season. Successful cormorant nesting has been observed on two of four private islands previously managed by USDA-APHIS.

Dave Capen and Mark Labarr continue to work on the Lake Champlain colonial waterbird management plan, however there has not been a draft of the plan circulated in about a year.

Tom Berry indicated the Cooperative should let Senator Leahy's office know when cormorant management resumes, as there is funding that can be made available. Eric Howe also indicated that the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) has \$18k identified in their budget for cormorant work.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS):

Meg Modley gave a summary of the AIS spread prevention work being conducted by the LCBP and its partners, including:

- the boat launch steward program
- a pilot hot water high pressure unit program
- education and outreach
- the Rapid Response Task Force
- LCBP membership in ANS task force, which is working with boat manufacturers on designs to minimize passive transport of AIS
- Long-term plankton and water quality monitoring
- Recent AIS workshops in both NY and VT focused on emerging species of concern including hydrilla, starry stonewort, quagga and zebra mussels, and spiny waterflea impacts in Lake Champlain
- Update on the hydraulic barrier study for the Champlain Canal (to separate the Champlain and Hudson watersheds)

Lake Champlain Basin Program

Eric Howe discussed the LCBP and the fisheries work they have collaborated on, and stressed the desire for additional opportunities for collaboration going forward:

- Long-term monitoring program (both biological and chemical)
- Installation of acoustic receivers on the research vessels in NY and VT (to assist with fish movement studies)
- Darrin Fresh Water Institute study on mercury and cyanobacteria toxin levels in fish
- Bass tournament impact study
- Cormorant work funds
- Good working relationship between Senator Leahy's office, the LCBP and the GLFC
- Future collaboration could include outreach efforts; Eric also suggested the Cooperative think about retaining some form of forage fish monitoring, which LCBP may be able to help fund for the short term

Habitat Restoration

Madeleine Lyttle provided a summary of the Willsboro dam removal project and some of the research going on to help restore landlocked salmon to the river, which include several researchers from Concordia University.

Fisheries Management & Research Updates:

- Bill Ardren provided a summary of the annual report, and mentioned any feedback from the Policy Committee in terms of style or content is welcome
- Brian Chipman provided a summary of the pen-water creel survey conducted by VTDFW and salmonid assessment work conducted around the lake and tributaries
- Chet MacKenzie discussed the sturgeon research and management conducted in support of Vermont's recently adopted Lake Champlain Lake Sturgeon Recovery Plan (http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/learn_more/fish_and_wildlife_library/?portalId=73163&pageId=109813&objectId.11292=111334&contextId.11292=109819&parentId.11292=111301).
- Henry Bouchard gave an update on the status of the reopening of the White River National Fish Hatchery (WRNFH)
- Bill Ardren discussed NY's request that USFWS assess the ability of WRNFH to raise sauger for a five-year stocking program into southern Lake Champlain as part of NY's statewide sauger conservation management plan (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/92788.html>)
- Dr. Ellen Marsden provided an update on the research she has been involved with via the UVM Rubenstein Lab including:
 - o role of early feeding in restoring thiamine levels in wild lake trout fry
 - o impacts of habitat fragmentation from causeways on genetics of fish
 - o cisco food webs and feeding in Lake Superior
 - o impacts of cyanobacteria blooms on fish and food webs
 - o acoustic telemetry studies on lake trout and walleye
 - o Recruitment of wild lake trout in Lake Champlain
 - o Food web model for Lake Champlain
- Dr. Donna Parrish provided an update on research she has been involved with via the VT Cooperative Fishery Research Unit:
 - o Change in distribution of forage fish and predation with the advent of alewife in Lake Champlain
 - o Assessment of stonecat populations in the Missisquoi and LaPlatte rivers
 - o Lake sturgeon population estimation using remote sensing

Policy Committee Discussion

- Policy Committee members discussed how they want to provide edits and approval of the annual report and minutes, and decided by e-mail would be easiest
- NY is serving as Management Committee Chair for 2 years, and as Policy Committee Chair for 2 years; with the retirements of Phil Hulbert and Patty Riexinger, alternates should be identified

- Doug asked that NY and USFWS be kept apprised of the treatment schedule going forward as the VT treatment/permitting situation unfolds
- Doug asked for a list of needed steps and associated timelines so that the necessary resources can be deployed to adjust for the treatment schedule change in NY if needed
- Louis indicated that within 3 weeks their permitting/treatment plans should be clear

Meeting was adjourned at 1605 hours.

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