

**CRASC Technical Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 18, 2013**

Agenda Item

1) Call to order, approval of Minutes

Chair Caleb Slater started the meeting at 10:15 a.m., all agency members were present except Bill Ardren (USFWS) who could not call in due to phone line issues at Conte Lab. Following some noted required edits and the addition of a missing page, a motion to approve the Minutes of the June 26, 2012 was made, all were in favor.

2) Coordinator's Report

Mr. Sprankle referred to his handout and reviewed upstream fish passage count totals to date for the river basin and then proceeded to review counts to date from individual passage facilities. It was noted that over 386,000 American shad had been counted as passing upstream of fishways as of 6/16/13, with Holyoke Fish Lift (HFL) and much higher than typical shad counts and passage rates (from facility to facility) were being observed this spring. Mr. Sprankle noted a table in the handout that documents the substantial increases in percentage rate passage from HFL, Turners Falls Gatehouse ladder, and Vernon Dam ladder. The numbers of shad passed through Vernon are especially impressive, with only three other years posting higher counts and expectations for this year to break into the all-time number three high count. The count data was placed in the context of river flows which were very low for much of the typical peak period of passage with cool water temperatures allowing fish to find fishway entrances and also attributed to the continued monitoring and enhancement of the fishway entrance at Turners Falls in the canal and the fish ladder at Vernon. Mr. Sprankle noted the pre-season fishway inspections by USFWS Brett Towler and other agency staff, have been making a difference in ensuring operations are as designed and going over these parameters and things to watch for with both agency and hydro-power staffs.

Mr. Sprankle referred to figure showing the relationship of shad passage at HFL, water temperature, and river discharge. High flow events were related to decreased or no passage along with the increasing water temps. Mr. Sprankle referred to figures at the end of his report which contained river discharge data from below Holyoke dam (April 1 to current) and water temperature data (from in CT), and explained the temp data is only available in CT but the discharge data are not a good representation of conditions in non-tidal river, tides affect the site where temps are available. These data show the conditions that have contributed to the high passage counts at fishways, to varying levels.

Regional fish passage count data were reviewed (data in handout) starting in the South at the Susquehanna River – extremely poor shad run and Hudson River shad fishery closed for fourth year in a row. Mr. Steve Gephard provided verbal update in addition to the statistics in the report. In general, alewife runs were variable in southern New England with some very high counts, intermediate counts and reduced counts. For blueback herring, the data are less clear, as

counts for this species are less available. It is believed the CT River run this year is still low, passage at HFL approached 1,000 which is a relatively substantial increase to recent years – but well below management target. Mr. Ben Gahagan reported generally good alewife runs in Massachusetts. He noted a lack of data on bluebacks but will be examining some available data soon. Relative to salmon returns it is still early so difficult to say much, although the numbers to date are not encouraging throughout the Gulf of Maine (NH and ME stocks).

A summary of Atlantic salmon stocking in the Spring of 2013 was provided and reviewed. Data are not final but were shown by state and lifestage. Basin-wide stock out includes 1.9M fry, 107,700 smolts, and 410 older age classes (Roger Reed depopulation).

Lastly, Mr. Sprankle reviewed in bullet form the work he has been engaged with during the winter and through the spring.

Mr. Dan McKinley asked – are there any adult salmon that will be released?

Mr. Gephard – due to the numbers of adults seen and time of year/conditions, we do not expect to reach the 100 fish cap for Cronin Station holding capacity, so all fish are being retained for spawning to support CTDEEP reduced salmon program.

3) Salmon Subcommittee

Mr. Gephard gave a verbal report on the US Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee meeting, which occurred at CTDEEP in February and provided a handout with some summary information showing all US programs data. He noted this meeting was summarizing information from 2012 season and the report and past ones are available at www.nefsc.noaa.gov/usasac/. He described the reports data and analyses components and historic compilation of a variety of data.

An update on the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) was provided with handouts. Mr. Gephard went into some detail on what was covered at the meeting including some increased concerns with Greenland's intention to increase catches, lack of all parties engagement and remaining unknowns in many important areas (relative to fishery data – quantify and quality of data, and fish population data). Bottom line – prefishery abundance indices remain very low, so increased fishing mortality is not a logical direction.

Mr. Dan Marchant provided a handout on fish culture activities, by facility and reviewed his report. Highlight of the report include the data on salmon spawning which produced 4.85 million green eggs, yielding 2.62M eyed eggs in fall of 2012. Distribution of eggs among facilities, and those provided to Vermont were noted.

Mr. Gephard asked how many adult salmon have died at Cronin this spring? We had heard there were a few.

Mr. Sprankle – I cannot say with certainty at the moment.

Mr. Gephard – responded to a question on spawning, stating that it is the plan to use sea-run parr to fertilize adult eggs as done in the past.

Mr. Sprankle – the USFWS will collect parr in July and have the fish health work done, prior to collection for spawning in the fall.

Mr. Gephard stated that it is his expectation that this will be the last spawning of sea-run fish, with fish in 2014 not being captured and retained. He noted the Salmon Subcommittee and Technical Committee will need to meet and determine the management plan for the adult returns in 2014.

4) Fish Passage

Mr. John Warner provided a handout and began with an update at Holyoke Dam and downstream fish passage plans that remain to be finalized. He described the many factors that have led to ongoing delays with this matter. He noted that the typical shad passage study in place at Turners Falls is not this year. There are some limited effort shad tagging work using PIT tags as PIT readers are in place at TF and other fishways (e.g., Vernon). Dr. Alex Haro noted that the reduced effort was not beyond their time availability and they did not want to skip a year, so PIT tags were a good option. They are getting data of value based on this effort at the various facilities and also includes PIT tagged sea lamprey (almost 100) tagged and released at HFL.

Mr. Warner went into some detail on the extensive amount of work going into the five main stem FERC relicensing process involving many USFWS employees, our state agency partners, and our partnering NGO's (such as TNC and TU). Much information is posted on the web including New England Field Office Site and Coordinator's site and TransCanada and FirstLight web sites. A total of 43 Study requests were submitted by USFWS. We have been in many meetings and review with the companies responsive plans. Details are being worked out, with some work starting this summer (FLP instream flow study). Most study work will be for 2015 and 2016.

Mr. Warner continued with a status report facility by facility (refer to handout) and noted that through an agreement with TransCanada, Bellows Falls ladder became operational once 100 sea lamprey passed at Vernon. Since no adult salmon are being passed upstream, the trigger for operation would mean no opening of that BF ladder. Several hundred lamprey have passed upstream of BF Dam as of this date.

5) Shad and River Herring

Mr. Sprankle provided a handout. He noted the shad and river herring subcommittees are now separate, but the April 5, 2013 conference call was designed to address both. He covered three many area in handout. First - assessment activities for river herring, USFWS boat e-fishing starting in early April and still continuing. Over 627 otoliths extracted (paired with scales) for alewife, blueback and shad. Goal to characterize river herring age structure, repeat spawner and compare data among sites and over time; develop data time series (this will be ongoing annual program). These data are critically lacking for herring in CT River and will feed into ASMFC monitoring and future stock assessments. Second – active restoration measures, USFWS over seven dates, captured and transplanted 2,931 river herring to the Oxbow in Easthampton, MA and the Manahan River. Third and last, a total of 2,123 adult shad have been trapped and

transferred from the HFL this spring. Data were provided. A total of 680 were transferred to the Ashuelot River by RIDFW as part of our agreement regarding out-of-basin transfers. In addition, CTDEEP has conducted restoration stocking with and outside of the basin and USGS Conte obtained fish for study purposes.

6) Other Business

Mr. Bill McDavitt asked about the topic of an MOA for the CRASC members.

Mr. Bill Hyatt – responded that this has been raised in the past among members and it will be discussed at next week’s meeting – it may help to clarify the diversity of topics the agencies have always worked on and will continue to work on.

Mr. McDavitt asked if the committee should consider examining performance measures for fish passage, as being handled in Maine with salmon. Given relicensing of main stem dams and their fishways this approach merits consideration.

Various members agreed that this is a topic that can start to be discussed at the subcommittee level and we should consider.

Mr. Gephard asked when will the Manhan Ladder be completed.

Mr. Warner stated this year.

Mr. McKinley – what are we to do regarding fall parr sampling this year?

Mr. Gephard – CRASC is not in a position to require any agency to do anything, but the data can still be useful and placed in USASAC database.

Dr. Slater – MADFW will continue sampling these sites as time series is long and data are valuable even as the presence of salmon no longer occurs. Data on trout and other species have use.

Mr. Lenny Gerardi – will the parr data still be of use?

Mr. Gephard – yes. The USASAC can still make use of these data as it is a good time series, until the data are no longer available (lack of either salmon or other priorities).

Mr. Gerardi – we will continue to sample as long as we expect to see parr in the systems.

Dr. Steve McCormick – both Alex Haro and I will have a research need for sea lamprey transformers this fall does anyone have suggestions?

Mr. Ben Gahagan – we have a site on North Shore that produced transformers this spring in trap nets.

Mr. Gephard – people have sampled in Leesville area of Salmon River for ammocetes, maybe sampling will get pre-transformers? Maybe start in the summer.

Dr. Alex Haro – we will need a lot of fish for these experiments and we have the Turners Canal drawdown in mind on that same approach.

Dr. Haro – wanted to inform the group that the National Fish Passage Symposium – next week in Oregon, has selected an award winner for best design – going to the Alden/NU weir. The weir was a large scale collaboration that included involvement of USGS via studies and has proven effective in a development and evaluation process he noted was well done.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30

ATTENDANCE

CRASC TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING – June 18, 2013

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Bill Hyatt	CTDEEP
Steve Gephard	CTDEEP
Ken Sprankle	USFWS/CTRC
Caleb Slater	MADFW
Lenny Gerardi	VTFW
Bill McDavitt	NMFS
Jason Smith	NHFG
Ben Gahagan	MADMF
Dan McKinley	USFS
Tim Wildman	CTDEEP
Steve McCormick	USGS
Ben Letcher	USGS
Alex Haro	USGS
Dan Marchant	MADFW
Bob Stira	FirstLight Power
Steve Leach	Normandeau
Brett Towler	USFWS
John Warner	USFWS/NEFO
Karl Meyer	Journalist