

**CRASC Technical Committee
Meeting Minutes/Notes
June 12, 2014**

Agenda Item

1) Call to order, approval of Minutes

Chair Caleb Slater started the meeting at 10:15 a.m., call-in by Ben Gahagan, Bill Ardren, and Bill McDavitt. Matt Carpenter was the only member unable to participate. A motion to approve the Minutes of the November 14, 2013 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. Shad passage was discussed as relatively good in spite of high river discharge for much of the early season which impacted fishway attraction. The current count of approximately 340K shad past Holyoke is close to the annual mean of 306K for the period 1976-2013. Shad counts at West Springfield were considered average and have been "relatively" high at Gatehouse (35K, Bob S. reports this meeting) at Turners Falls and in the range expected at Vernon (which has been passing targeted 40-60% counted at downstream facility in recent years). Sea lamprey counts are relatively low at Holyoke, where long-term mean is 35K, but is within the range of expected variability. Adult salmon returns are very low. We have had adults trapped, Floy tagged and released fish at Leesville- Salmon River (Steve reports this meeting), Rainbow Dam- Farmington River, West Springfield- Westfield River, and Holyoke- main stem. Salmon have been reported passed upstream at Turners Falls (Bob S. reports 7 fish this meeting), and Vernon (6 fish), Bellows Falls began operating June 6.

Two figures showing river discharge for this spring at Thompsonville CT and water temperatures at Middle Haddam Ct USGS gage station were reviewed. Fish Passage counts from other Northeast fishways or monitoring programs were discussed. This included the record low shad passage count observed on the Susquehanna River at Conowingo Dam. The Hudson River monitoring program reported strong river herring runs relative to recent years data. Steve Gephard noted that alewife runs were fair, in his many monitored coastal systems. He noted the lower CT River had relatively high abundances of bluebacks particularly in the lower Salmon River. Other rivers and species counts were discussed.

3) Fish Passage Subcommittee

John Warner was not present but provided a handout, highlighting various activities. The update was given by Brett Towler and Melissa Grader. The Holyoke Dam downstream fish passage facility design and schedule is almost complete. Brett reviewed aspects of the design and process to this date, and noted that the inclusion of changes recommended by USFWS (Brett) have been incorporated. Construction is set to begin late this year and be completed by Jan 2016. Monitoring and evaluation planning have been deferred to later date in order to get construction measures in place. Post construction evaluations will follow in 2016 – shad, sturgeon, eel.

A review of the myriad of things that have occurred with the five main stem hydroelectric relicensing process were reviewed by Melissa. Most notably – many studies were delayed to 2015 due to the planned closure of Vermont Yankee this December. The Manhan River fish ladder was operational this spring with various modifications and fixes as it began operating. Melissa has been reviewing video data and had documented 48 lamprey passed, many resident species and one adult Atlantic salmon in just a small portion of her tape review. Lastly, Brett noted his pre-season inspection of fishways at Vernon, Turners Falls, and Holyoke Dam went very well with only minor noted action items. This annual inspection work is viewed as critical by the CRASC Tech Committee.

4) Shad and River Herring subcommittees report (Sprankle)

Sprankle provided a report handout that provided a summary of river herring assessment and restoration work completed for 2014, including extensive population sampling by USFWS in April, May, and June , with over 1,800 blueback and over 200 alewife sampled on 16 sample dates throughout the basin. Otolith and scales were extracted from retained fish with over 500 bluebacks and all alewife sampled for age and spawning history examination. It was noted that relative abundance measures (fish/min) for bluebacks – derived by this assessment – were greater by factors of 5-10 for some sample areas in comparison to 2013 (preliminary). A review of the nine capture and transfer events for restoration from Wethersfield Cove was discussed with over 5,680 bluebacks moved by USFWS and CTDEEP. A review of analyses of data from 2013 surveys were provided, age structure data for the Westfield River vs. the Farmington River bluebacks in 2013 was provided to show some preliminary results.

The Draft CRASC Shad Species Status Report was discussed, it was agreed that the Draft should be sent back out to the Tech for immediate review and final comments. Mr. Gephard noted that the Draft should be provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting next week. Other items were discussed such as spring fish health testing, NOAA gonad sampling of HFL shad, planned proposals for research by Conte through USFWS – SSP, and juvenile shad grow out trails at North Attleboro NFH (for next year radio tagging needs for FERC studies). Shad transfers from HFL were discussed by CTDEEP, who had complete 9 trips; next meeting will have summary data.

Sprankle had to leave the meeting after this update. Remaining narrative are notes provided by Chair Slater.

5) Salmon Subcommittee

Steve Gephard (CT) gave a quick review of how CT tried, but failed to get the USFWS to open Cronin for sea run salmon for the 2014 returns. As a result all returning sea run salmon are being released. Prior to the passage season, the Tech committee agreed on a tag and release procedure that is being followed. Steve reported that the procedure is being followed and there have been only minor issues reported- all returning salmon have been tagged successfully and released. Salmon have been observed passing both Turners Falls and Vernon- no tags were evident- although the personnel were not really looking for them.

6) Sea Lamprey Subcommittee

Melissa Grader (USFWS) reported that the latest draft of the Sea Lamprey status report which included major additions by Boyd Kynard was shared with the subcommittee and discussed at a subcommittee meeting held on April 14. At that meeting subcommittee members were assigned sections of the report to review and edit and a new draft will be completed this summer.

The Tech committee encouraged the subcommittee to have the report finished prior to the CRASC's fall meeting.

7) American eel Subcommittee

Tim Wildman (CT) gave a very comprehensive report on the ASMFC American Eel Fishery Management Plan Draft Addendum 4 which is now out for public comment. The draft plan contains management options for all American Eel fisheries; Glass eel, Yellow eel, and Silver eel. The Tech committee discussed if and how the CRASC should express its concern for American eel conservation in this public comment process. It was decided that we should ask the Commissioners to authorize a letter from the CRASC to the ASMFC which would put the CRASC on record as 1) supporting the ASMFC's effort to conserve and manage the American Eel and 2) consistent with our call for downstream protection of migrating silver eels in the CT basin, call for prohibitions against silver eel fisheries.

8) Other Business

The Tech committee discussed the desire by the Commission for a comprehensive documentation of the most recent Atlantic Salmon Restoration activities in the basin as a historical document that may be helpful in any future restoration efforts. The question is how to get this done? Several ideas were presented- such as a grad student project or hiring a contract science writer (Andy Fisk, CRWC has been approached by one). Both of these options would require some funding- but how much is uncertain. Bill Hyatt (CT) reminded us that at the last Commission meeting he agreed to meet with the Coordinator (Ken) and Duncan McInnes to discuss options of how this project might proceed. This has not occurred yet, but Bill reaffirmed his intention to do so and explore all options including the ones discussed today.