

Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Cooperative Policy Committee
Meeting minutes from May 21, 2008

Attendees: Bill Schoch; Ken Kogut; Lance Durfey; Doug Stang; Steve Hurst; Patty Riexinger; Wayne Laroche; Nick Staats; Jamie Geiger; Henry Bouchard; Dave Tilton; Ellen Marsden; Shawn Good; Brian Chipman; Eric Palmer; Bernie Pientka; Chet MacKenzie; John Gobeille; Steve Smith; Wayne Bouffard; Brad Young

I. Patty Riexinger graciously agreed to become chair of the Policy Committee.

II. Strategic Plan:

- A. Draft dated May 2008 was passed out
- B. Ellen gave an overview of history and contents of the draft
- C. Discussion:
 - Cormorants were not included. Group seemed okay with that.
 - Endangered, threatened, and species of greatest conservation need: certain species were discussed individually, but this committee recommended that they be given a separate section to highlight concern for them.
- D. Actions:
 - Technical Committee will have a final review and resolve any issues at the meeting of June 18, 2008.
 - Management Committee will then review and provide recommendations.
 - Then we'll seek public input:
 - Post the whole document on web and invite comments; also, direct solicitation from stakeholders that we know will have an interest.
 - Develop a cover letter explaining background to public.
 - We will review comments that we receive. But this is not a regulatory process, so we are not required to formally respond to comments.
 - By the next Policy Committee meeting, the Policy Committee will have a conference call to consider final approval.
 - Implementation plans: The Technical Committee will write a white paper on how we will develop annual implementation plans. Probably the implementation plans will be associated with the annual report. Intentions are that the implementation plans not be a substantial additional work load - essentially summarize the planning/coordinating that the Technical Committee already does.

III. Invasives:

- A. NY: baitfish regulations; disease free certification required for stocking; internal DEC hatchery procedures; protocols for Fisheries' equipment; public outreach.
- B. Champlain Canal has been a major source of invasives. Basin Program is meeting with the Canal Corp, but CC is reluctant to consider a barrier. US Army Corps is authorized to do a feasibility study for a barrier.
- C. Rapid response plan being developed by the Basin Program. Asian clams are in

- the Champlain Canal - “testing” the response plan.
- D. VT: prohibit transport of wild caught live fish; fish importation regulation; major revision to baitfish regulations; revised hatchery protocols; revised fish kill response protocol; draft protocols for equipment.
- IV. Yellow perch and smelt. Anglers have expressed great concern that yellow perch and smelt catches were extremely poor last winter.
- A. Trawl data and a draft outreach plan were passed out.
- B. NY’s proposal for 50 yellow perch per day limit was described. VT has problems with imposing a limit.
- C. Agreed that we need more information:
- Is there actually a problem - an actual trend - or is this a “random” variation?
 - If we see long-term trends, then we will evaluate what to do.
- D. Policy Committee supported the “Public Position” and “Scientific Approach” statements, as modified below:

Public Position:

The Cooperative recognizes angler concern over unusually poor ice-fishing success for yellow perch and smelt, but lake-wide data do not show signs of population decreases at this time. We will continue to regularly monitor both species’ abundance in the lake and adjust fisheries management practices if necessary.

Scientific Approach:

The Cooperative will continue their annual fish community monitoring and forage fish surveys and begin reporting on the status of the yellow perch populations to the fisheries technical committee. If the short-term trend seen in St. Albans Bay continues, or begins to be seen in other areas of the lake, responsive management strategies may need to be developed.

- V. Forage fish assessment, alewife status:
- A. Handout distributed; recent results reviewed. CPUE for smelt is highly variable, but the data show no apparent trend in y-o-y smelt abundances. There may be some decline in older smelt, possibly associated with lake trout predation. Y-o-y alewives are showing up in hydroacoustics, at shallower depths than smelt.
- B. Sampling to be modified to better evaluate alewives. Includes side looking acoustics, micro mesh gill nets, and additional shallow trawling.
- VI. Fish Stocking:
- A. Changing forage base (alewives) presents a significant unknown. Presently we are not proposing stocking changes in response.
- B. NY is not stocking steelhead due to disease concerns from the Great Lakes. VT expects to be able to increase steelhead production to compensate.
- C. Pittsford is now producing landlocked Atlantic salmon for Champlain. Partly due to Didymo in the White River system. In 2010 Pittsford will exchange some

production responsibilities with VT's Ed Weed Hatchery to help address biosecurity concerns.

- D. Hatchery production and related biosecurity issues are being very well coordinating between the three agencies and the Great Lakes.

VII. Sea Lamprey Wounding rates: (handouts: wounding rates; and a chart on lake trout rates):

- A. Lake trout wounding rates decreased in 2007 but sample size was small (Poultney River treatment overlapped normal sampling period).
- B. Salmon wounding rates remained high - may be some decline in Main lake, but continued high rates in Inland Sea brings the overall mean up.
- C. Wounding rates on larger lake trout show a decline since 2005.

VIII. Lamprey Control plans for 2008 and 2009:

- A. 2008: Great Chazy (up to Moores Dam); Mount Hope Brook; Winooski; and Missisquoi. Maybe Mill Brook (pending environmental review and permitting)
- B. 2009: Lamoille River pending environmental review and permitting. Otter Creek is undergoing environmental review in case larvae become abundant.

IX. Status of follow-through from December 2007 meeting in Waterbury on future VT permit submission and review.

- A. Several meeting have been held with VT DEC about permit applications for 2008. The information exchange has been much freer than for previous permits. VT DEC has agreed to share draft permits with Fish and Wildlife.
- B. Commissioner Pelosi has not had expected meetings with the Commissioner of the Department of Health because Health does not currently have a commissioner. Department of Health continues to impose extreme standards - that concern probably will not be resolved until there is a new commissioner for Health.
- C. Expect VT permits to be issued in August. Also, expect fewer restrictions in the permits: temperature; lake level; other similar restrictions are being discussed ahead of the permits being issued. Fire walls will be in-place when the applications are declared to be complete.
- D. Applications have been submitted, but ruled technically incomplete. That has allowed discussions such as did not occur in the past.

X. Environmental Assessment:

- A. Lamoille River, Mill Brook, Pond Brook are included in the proposed alternative in the draft Environmental Assessment.
- B. If the finding is "no significant impact," then may be able to publish the final findings on 8/15/08.

XI. Morpion stream barrier:

- A. Progressing well - expect construction to be completed by October 31, 2008.
- B. Costs are increasing due to: inflation; devaluation of the dollar; and some design modifications. Estimates have increased from \$330,000 to \$450,000.

XII. Federal/Leahy Appropriations:

- A. Balance now of about \$1,270,000 - includes \$700,000 allocated this year (FY 08). Leahy's staff seem optimistic for \$500,000 in FY 09 (but see Item "D" below).
- B. Policy Committee authorized up to, but not exceeding, \$450,000 be spent on the Morpion Barrier. If bids exceed that, the issue will be brought back to the Policy Committee. We will have about \$90,000 left in the account at the end of this FY if we spend \$450,000.
- C. Vermont pesticide storage building cost estimates are increasing. Policy Committee authorized spending up to \$25,000 above the previous estimate. If the bid/estimate is for more than that, the additional spending will be reviewed with the Policy Committee.
- D. Crystal ball projections for Federal Budget: unlikely to be a Federal budget in Oct 2008. Government is likely to proceed on continuing resolutions based on the FY 08 baseline budget. Continuing resolutions are unlikely to include earmarks/special appropriations, such as Senator Leahy has obtained.

XIII. Status of plan to move toward the GLFC model:

- A. FWS needs an additional \$350,000 annually to take on the additional responsibilities.
- B. Can not hire staff based on annual earmarks, so we need an increase to the baseline appropriation to switch to the GLFC model.
- C. FWS cannot lobby for such funding. If the states want the GLFC model, they must express that interest.
- D. Currently the appropriations go to the State Department - there may be reasons to direct baseline funding to FWS.

XIV. Sea Lamprey Control Alternatives Committee:

- A. Priorities:
 - Mark recapture studies to estimate numbers of spawning lamprey - obtain a direct evaluation of sea lamprey numbers. Not funded by GLFC.
 - Microelemental analyses - try to identify stream sources for the adult lamprey. First attempt at analyses could not identify specific source streams, so are pursuing additional refinements to the technique.
 - Evaluate what might have historically kept sea lamprey populations under control if sea lamprey were native to Lake Champlain.
- B. Will continue to seek funding. Some funding proposals may come to the Fisheries Technical Committee. The Cooperative has made \$50,000 available in recent years to implement Alternatives Committee recommendations.

XV. Public forum for the June 18 Fisheries Technical Committee:

- A. We now invite constituents to Technical Committee meetings to listen.
- B. June 18 Technical Committee meeting will be open to public comments and questions from 3:00 - 5:00 PM.

XVI. Cormorant and gull management:

- A. NY initiated control on Four Brothers Islands in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy - this is the first year for oiling eggs there. Four Brothers is the largest colony on Lake Champlain and as such is a major source of cormorants.
- B. Wildlife biologists will work on a Lake Champlain colonial waterbird plan - integrate cormorant management with the other colonial species on the lake. Primary reason to control cormorants is to help some of the other colonial birds, certain of which need trees for nesting - cormorants eliminate the trees. Cormorants and ring billed gulls are the greatest threat to common terns.
- C. VT continues control. Young Island is down to no cormorants - first time in 20 years, but ring bill gulls are still abundant. Rock, Mud, and Button Islands in Vermont are being inundated by cormorants now that NY is controlling in the Crown Pt area (about 150 cormorants have been killed on NY side in Crown Point area). VT is responding.
- D. When alewives boom, cormorant nesting success increases. Causes concern for even greater increases in cormorants on Lake Champlain.

Thanks to all for their hard work!