



**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission
Turners Falls, Massachusetts
Meeting Minutes
June 15, 2015**

Agenda Items:

1. Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of the December 11, 2014 Meeting (Hyatt)

Chair Mr. Bill Hyatt called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. All Commissioners were present with Mr. Lou Chiarella, representing NOAA.

Mr. Hyatt opened the meeting, and introduced the new MA Division of Fisheries Wildlife Director Jack Buckley as the new Commissioner following Wayne MacCallum's retirement. Bill asked everyone to state their name and affiliations followed by the general audience.

The minutes of the last CRASC meeting on December 11, 2014 were reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes from that meeting was made, seconded, all were in favor.

2. Report of the Coordinator and TECH Shad / River Herring subcommittees (Sprankle)

Mr. Sprankle provided a handout and reviewed his Coordinator report, refer to attachment for details. A review of fishway counts to date were discussed, highlighting the relatively strong shad count at Holyoke Fish Lifts (above 80% percentile in time series) at 408K and eel passage counts at that facilities traps being relatively high for this point in time. Atlantic salmon counts are very low at all facilities to date. The sea lamprey count at Holyoke is low but within an expected range. Blueback herring counts were very low at all facilities. The shad counts at Turners Falls, passing at Gatehouse Ladder, were very high, over 52K which places it in % passed relative to Holyoke at a new high ~13%. This was noted as a good number but not close to CRASC management plan objective of 40-60%. Karl Meyer asked about daily counts at Turners Falls fishways and why those cannot be made in real time, or no lag, as updates come roughly at weekly intervals. Bob Stira answered that FLP contracts with Greenfield Community College to review SalmonSoft fishway data, they have three fishways and Gatehouse counts are the priority, Cabot and Spillway ladders are done but not reported as frequently, there are limits on what can be expected for digital review and staff and updates. Eric palmer asked about the shutdown of VY and its thermal discharge and potential affects to shad passage. Ken noted that as had been discussed in the past, data on potential effects had not been obtained through appropriate studies. Now that it is shut down we can observe how passage data occurs with observed temps. Ken has all his temp loggers out and over time we can look at passage timing during VY operations and with VY closed. However, it will not be conclusive as to potential past VY effects – temp treatment releases and controls (no release) of effluent that should have been done to test for effects, would have been the most appropriate scientific method as testable and repeatable measures. Melissa Grader noted that VY must still maintain their two temp monitoring

stations for current permit. Ken reviewed the river discharge and daily shad counts at Holyoke relationships and also river temperature profile for the spring

A review of regional fish counts was presented noting that the Susquehanna River at Conowingo Dam had its lowest shad count ever (since starting in 1997). Steve Gephard noted how all CT alewife runs were low but other shad counts were fair. Other data were reviewed – refer to report.

A review of USFWS river herring population assessment work for spring 2015 was covered. Sample effort, sample sizes, lab processed fish were all summarized. A table showing a total of 2,770 river herring captured and transferred was discussed with its details. The completion of a CRASC River Herring Restoration Status and Plans for the Connecticut River was described, this plan is posted on the Coordinator's web site. A review of river herring research was discussed including a new genetic typing effort that USFWS provided CTR samples for.

American shad research items were discussed including; 1) USGS Conte Shad Physiology, Energetic, Spawning and Temperature Study (first of three years – going well); 2) NOAA fecundity study, field sampling going very well – one year study; 3) NOAA Shad Population model, post doc is well underway has engaged many agency partners, not just CT River but much of the data from our river.

Lastly, a review of the CRASC Technical Committee's Research Forum was provided, noting 11 platform presentations given and an attendance of ~60-65 people at the new MA Division of Fish and Wildlife Headquarters.

A motion to accept the Coordinator's Report was made, seconded and all were in favor.

3. Report of the Technical Committee (Slater)

Dr. Slater provided a handout on the CRASC Technical Committee's meeting on June 10, 2014 and the various subcommittees activities with the exception of shad and river herring covered earlier. That handout is included in its entirety here:

Fish Passage Subcommittee; John Warner (USFWS)

Holyoke – Connecticut River

- HG&E's new rack and upper and lower bypasses are under construction. Preliminary staging nearing completion.
- In-water work scheduled to start June 22. This will require the fishway to be shut down. Shad passage already above the 75 percentile of historic passage, 95% of run normally passed by June 21.

Connecticut River Relicensings

- The USFWS, state agencies and NGO's requested many studies for all 5 projects undergoing relicensing by TransCanada and FirstLight Power. FERC required that almost every study requested be completed.
- The Vermont Yankee shutdown led to delays in conducting all fish and other aquatic studies till 2015 and these studies are underway now.

- Operations of the projects, due to the drought and warm conditions early, followed by higher flows and cooler temps have created havoc with the proposed study schedule for shad releases, spawning studies, etc., but we still anticipate getting good data.
- Details on a few of the studies:
 - Shad upstream and downstream passage – Radio Telemetry – all shad for First Light’s studies have now been tagged and released and TransCanada has also been releasing shad.
 - FirstLight has been releasing radio-tagged sea lamprey and monitoring movements.
 - TransCanada has released 28 radio tagged sea lamprey and have found them from below Vernon to Sumner Falls and individuals in the West, White and Black rivers.
 - FirstLight has successfully completed shad spawning site ID and have completed a number of operational change tests – adding or subtracting one or more units and observing changes in shad behavior on the spawning sites.
 - Temporary eel ramps have been designed and are being fabricated for Turners Falls and will be deployed at the Cabot entrance, canal spill gates and the spillway ladder.

Manhan River Dam – Manhan River

- Manhan River Dam fishway is complete and operating and passing sea lamprey. Still working out bugs in nighttime (IR) video of passage.

Karl Meyer asked about updates on FERC Shad Spawning studies. Bob Stira replied that they were still ongoing and that was all he could say. Caleb stated he had been told that the survey crews had found shad below Turners Falls using the same areas identified by studies conducted in the 1970s and early 1980s. Andy Fisk asked if the Manhan Ladder has SalmonSoft set up for counts. Melissa Grader replied that it was set up but working out some technical matters, hopes to be able to ensure good night-time coverage soon, so fall silver eels movements may be detected there.

Salmon Subcommittee: Steve Gephard (CTDEEP)

Spring Stocking Summary

- All salmon fry were stocked by CTDEEP in Connecticut
- Total of 391,000 fry: 269,000 Farmington River; 121,000 Salmon River
- Stocking target is 250,000 but changes made to increase eye-up were successful
- CT plans to electrofish stocked streams to determine growth and survival
- NASCO update: No quota set at meeting- Greenland set their own quota of 45 tons.
- Conte Lab Swim Flume Study: 7 salmon transported from Holyoke lift to Conte Lab, 4 salmon “swam” flume, all fish have been returned to river.

Peter Basta asked where the study salmon were being released. Steve answered below the Conte Lab in vicinity of Cabot Station, held no longer than 48 hours at lab.

Sea Lamprey Subcommittee; Melissa Grader (USFWS)

Did not meet this spring- but the Sea Lamprey management plan is nearly complete.

Melissa Grader noted that she hopes for more progress in the summer on final draft development.

American eel Subcommittee; Steve Gephard (CTDEEP)

- CTDEEP reports low numbers of glass eels this spring at mouth of CTR.
- MA, NH, and VT have come to an agreement with FirstLight and TransCanada to allow importation of adult silver phase eels to the CTR for relicensing studies.
- VT has a pending SWG proposal to extend FERC required eel surveys into tributaries and other areas not covered by the FERC relicensings.

Habitat Subcommittee

- Fall River Dam (MA) Removal complete.
- Carp Family Dam on Stony Br (CT) removal complete.
- VT still working to restore streams that were damaged by post-Irene activities
- Larger basin-wide culvert replacement grant in works for Sandy money.
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Sturgeon Subcommittee (Agenda Item 4 covered here): Micah Kieffer (USGS)

Chair Bill Hyatt noted that the Commission had tasked the subcommittee with reporting back on the matter of potential information needs for Atlantic sturgeon restoration, following is that subcommittee's report.

- Conte Labs SNS studies
 - Tagged 6 mature females, maintained receivers in Agawam and at Holyoke Dam to study wintering and spawning of SNS below Holyoke.
 - Swim Flume; 6 wild SNS currently at Conte to be run in flume and released by mid-July
 - Lots of work with SNS on Merrimack/Gulf of ME
- Atlantic Sturgeon; question of possible restoration from the Commission
 - New data from CTDEEP; captured 50 small (<50mm) individuals in 2014
 - Unlikely to have migrated to CT River
 - Samples taken for genetic analysis- CTR or Hudson origin?
 - Results will have major impact on any restoration plan
- Discussion points for an Atlantic sturgeon restoration in the Connecticut River
 - **Determine status of extant population**
 - Determine significance of young ATS captured by CTDEP in 2014
 - Existence of natural population significantly impacts re-introduction strategy
 - Additional captures of young fish can potentially identify half- or non-siblings
 - **Determine restoration goals**
 - Define necessity (why is restoration necessary)
 - ecological stability
 - commercial benefit
 - genetic diversity
 - Abundance goals
 - percent of historic abundance
 - establish reproducing population
 - support recreational fishery
 - Determine who among the sturgeon stakeholders is interested in a restoration effort
 - are goals compatible
 - **Establish permitting requirements**
 - What permits are required
 - NMFS
 - ASMFC
 - State
 - aquaculture
 - Who receives/reviews permits
 - What permit-proposal items are critical
 - ESA considerations
 - does effort require broodstock take
 - will releases result in impact with other ESA species
 - **Determine presence of adequate habitat**
 - Does sufficient habitat exist to support a reintroduced population

- **Evaluate genetics concerns**
 - Donor stock
 - Parentage selections
- **Major culturing issues**
 - Broodstock selection/availability
 - Rearing facilities
 - Culture/release effort duration
 - Release sites/schedules
 - Costs/funding
- **Literature search**
- **Success monitoring**

Karl Meyer asked about monitoring of SNS for spawning in the spring of this year and FERC studies, what is being done? Ken Sprankle answered that the FERC studies do not include SNS studies directly as NOAA (lead agency) and the other agencies, believed that the Kynard Sturgeon research publication (text), that documents 10+ years of research suffice to answer questions on conditions that influence SNS spawning in this area. Ken noted that those data reflect a range of conditions and that the published results were used to set study treatment flow levels in the bypass reach (ranging around it) as it is expected protective flows will be recommended based on that earlier research unless someone can prove otherwise. The agencies are thus focused on how other fishes and habitat are affected by the recommended minimum flow threshold during spring for SNS in this area and studies are focused on that with the SNS research providing the rationale for settings. Ken noted that while that is the case at moment, he was not suggesting such monitoring work should not be conducted in the future, work with SNS is tightly regulated so any work permits must be applied for through NOAA (currently only one CTDEEP biologist and Micah at Conte Lab are permitted to capture/handle fish in the wild). Chair Hyatt suggested discussion by the subcommittee reviewing all new information to aid in determining best recommendations for sturgeon passage, and agree on whether existing data is adequate.

There was discussion on the 50 juvenile Atlantic sturgeon collected in 2014 by CTDEEP without targeting them (gear not appropriately sized), and importance of determining whether we have a remnant population or these fish are of other origin. Bill Hyatt noted it will be important to wait for genetic test results on the discussed juveniles. Andy Fisk stated he agreed with that but noted it is important for the Commission to continue to lead and work on all other diadromous fishes, and that the public is interested. Andy asked if any new CTDEEP sturgeon work is planned. Nothing at moment, but given the pending genetic results, Bill noted he is now aware and will report back at the next meeting.

5. Technical Committee American Shad Status Report (Sprankle)

Chair Hyatt stated that this report was presented last June to the Commission and there were some requested edits. Since that time the members have worked on making necessary changes, but he stressed that this report was to bring current information forward and not a management plan, as such it does not require as strict a review. Chair Hyatt stated that these reports were to be brief but given shad required many more pages of information, he wanted the other subcommittees to work on completing these reports. Ken then reviewed the elements of the plan and discussed some of the key sections and narrative. Bill asked for a motion to approve it was made seconded and all voted in favor. Jack Buckley asked

details about the NOAA shad modeling effort noted in the report and Ken provided answers in general terms. Bill asked that any questions on that or other areas should be emailed around and shared as they arise.

6. Other Business

- A) Ken introduced Dave Perkins, new Project Leader for Cronin which is being referred to as an Aquatic Center. Dave gave an update on the work to prepare the facility for work involving research on river herring, freshwater mussel culture, tiger beetle recovery, studies in the raceway, and veterans fishing events.
- B) Bob Nasdor asked if the Commission was aware about draft proposed legislation in Congress that would greatly reduce the natural resource agencies and others role in FERC hydropower relicensing and give the FERC sweeping new authorities. Wendi Weber replied that the agencies were aware of draft discussions and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies had developed a coordinated response that had been developed by some members of Congress. [*following this CRASC meeting Chair Hyatt had the AFWA response forwarded to all members*].

Meeting adjourned at 12:33PM