

Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership Fall 2016 Steering Committee Meeting Summary

October 18-20, 2016

Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI)
350 Commercial Street
Portland, ME 04101

ACFHP Steering Committee Members Present: Russ Babb (NJ), Lou Chiarella (NMFS-NE), Julie Devers (USFWS-NE), Robert Groskin (Fly Fishers), Jimmy Johnson (NC), Wilson Laney (USFWS-SE), Dawn McReynolds (NY), January Murray (GA), Cheri Patterson (NH), Chris Powell (RI), Mark Rousseau (MA), Kent Smith (FL), Jessie Thomas-Blate (American Rivers), and Marek Topolski (MD).

ASMFC Staff Present: Pat Campfield, Lisa Havel

Guests: Jeff Barnum (Conservation Law Foundation), Graham Sherwood (Gulf of Maine Research Institute), Will Duncan (USFWS), Ginny Fay (NMFS-SE)

Via Phone and Webinar: Ben Lorson (PA), Pace Wilber (NMFS-SE)

Introduction to the Local Environment

Graham Sherwood, a fisheries ecology research scientist at GMRI, provided the ACFHP steering committee with an overview of select coastal ecosystem monitoring projects at GMRI (*Presentation 01*). GMRI's role is to catalyze solutions to the complex challenges of ocean stewardship and economic growth in the Gulf of Maine bioregion through a dynamic fusion of science, education, and community. They conduct an inshore acoustic herring survey that has been running for five years and complimented the discontinued offshore NMFS survey. They are also monitoring freshwater/marine linkages before and after dam removals in the Penobscot River Watershed using stable isotopes, and conducting a 10 year survey in Casco Bay (Casco Bay Aquatic Systems Survey – CBASS) to monitor changes within the system (including temperature changes, arrival of southern species, pending changes in fish passage, etc.). Finally, GMRI runs the 'Snap-a-Striper' program to collect biological data from recreational fishers in order to determine relative proportions in migratory vs. resident populations, as well as their respective spatial footprints.

Jeff Barnum, Great Bay-Piscataqua Waterkeeper with the Conservation Law Foundation, presented on the status of the Great Bay Estuary, as well as the Exeter Dam Removal that ACFHP endorsed (*Presentation 02*). Eelgrass is the foundation of the bay, but macroalgae and sea lettuce are currently dominating the benthos. Both seagrass and oyster reefs are a fraction of historic expanse, due in part to point and non-point source nitrogen loading. They are working to increase their diadromous run counts by promoting fish passage through dam removals on the watershed as well.

NFHP, Coastal FHP, and Whitewater to Bluewater Update

Lisa provided the committee with an update on NFHP, Coastal FHPs, and Whitewater to Bluewater. The annual FHP workshop and in-person fall NFHP Board Meeting will be held next week, and Kent Smith will be attending on behalf of ACFHP. At the last NFHP Board Meeting (June), the Pacific Lamprey FHP was added, bringing the FHP count to 20. The National Fish Habitat Conservation Through Partnerships Act

(NFHP Act) was included in the Sportsman's Act in the Senate but not the House. If the two bills get conferenced it will be passed to the President for signature. This Act allows for better coordination of watershed restoration activities. Since the last meeting ACFHP created a subcommittee to address our issues regarding USFWS evaluations: Kent, Marek, and Cheri. Lisa brought our issues to the other FHP Coordinators that wrote the original letter to USFWS in 2015, and they are in support of writing another letter, but want to wait until early 2017 since the methodology for evaluating will not change for 2016, and the NFHP might address some of our concerns.

Lisa also gave an update on the Multi-State Conservation Grant. NFHP was seeking \$375,000 for 2017 funding, but was awarded \$143,711.87. \$23,057.75 will go towards Whitewater to Bluewater activities.

The Black Sea Bass project contract was signed by the National Fish Habitat Fund and Dr. Stevens, and Lisa is hoping for a progress report at the end of the year. ACFHP also used the Fund to apply for NOAA Coastal Resiliency funding (for living shorelines projects in South Carolina and Florida); we are still the only FHP to take advantage of the Fund.

Science and Data Committee Update

Since the spring meeting Lisa has been working with current and prospective participants to garner more support for this committee, through both targeted communication and a letter from Kent sent out in June. We currently have approximately 10 active and willing participants. Recruitment was put on hold when the chair, Caroly Shumway, left her position at the Merrimack River Watershed Council (Marek Topolski stepped up as interim chair). This also set back the NOAA-funded Southeast Mapping Project to prioritize restoration and protection areas based on threats, presence-absence data, and habitat distributions. To finish the project, the Merrimack River Watershed Council is working with ACFHP and ASMFC to complete the project, with the help of Maureen Sakakeeny and Dr. Jon Lyon from Merrimack College. Lisa will bring Ginny and Lou into the discussions to see if they can provide support as well.

FY2017 USFWS-NFHAP Project Recommendations *(Presentation 03)*

Julie Devers provided the committee an update on our success to date and the evaluations subcommittee's recommendations for FY2017 funding. From 2010 to 2016 the USFWS has funded 15 on-the-ground projects and awarded \$481,954 to partners. This funding supported 7 fish passage projects, 3 marsh/mangrove projects, 2 SAV projects, 2 oyster reef restoration projects, and 1 sturgeon spawning habitat restoration project. Since 2014 the USFWS has also provided funding for ACFHP operations - \$30,000 in 2014 and 2015, and \$50,000 in 2016 (with \$20,000 still in reserve).

For FY2017 the steering committee agreed to recommend (1) Sheepscot River Barrier Removal, ME; (2) Oyster Reef and Estuarine Shoreline Restoration, Bogue Sound, NC; and (3) Sawyer Mill Dam Removal, Bellamy River, Dover, NH for funding. We received nine proposals and would consider recommending eight for funding if we receive more funds than expected. The Sheepscot River Barrier Removal is requesting \$50,000, providing \$700,000 in match. It will open 71 river miles through a full removal of Coopers Mill Dam and partial removal of Head Tide dam. It is the southernmost Atlantic salmon river designated as critical habitat. The Oyster Reef project in Bogue Sound is requesting \$38,110 and is matching \$39,126. They will use recycled oyster shells to promote salt marsh accretion along 300 feet of shoreline. It is a nursery habitat for black sea bass and red drum, and feeding ground for summer

flounder. The Sawyer Mill Dam Removal is requesting \$50,000 and is providing \$1,322,900 in match. This will assist with the removal of upper and lower Sawyer Mill Dams and hopefully delist Sawyer Mill Pond from the 303(d) list. The proposal says that it will open 1 mile for alewife, sea lamprey, and American eel, but Cheri said it will actually open more miles than that. *Powerpoint available.*

Conservation Strategic Planning (Presentation 04)

One full day of the steering committee meeting was spent in providing updates on the progress of the 2017-2021 Conservation Strategic Plan, and agreeing on the objectives and strategies for the On the Ground Conservation section of the plan, which will inform many other sections, including Outreach and Communication, Science and Data, and Finance. *Recommended edits to each subsection available.*

Other Business

Pat Campfield gave an update on ACFHP Operations (*Presentation 05*), and the \$20,000 on reserve for Northeast Mapping will go towards the partially-funded Bradford Dam Removal.

Marek Topolski presented on communicating science to the public and an outreach opportunity to take advantage of the Maryland Institute College of Art for free publicity on fish habitat issues (*Presentation 06*). The Outreach and Communication subgroup will discuss this further, and work to incorporate it into the Conservation Strategic Plan.

The committee discussed options for the spring meeting, and include coastal Georgia (Jekyll or St. Simons Islands), Manteo Alligator River Wildlife Rescue in North Carolina (pending legislative changes to allow all states to participate), Providence/Newport Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. Lisa is working with Pat and Toni on locations.

Action Items (from full meeting notes – contact Lisa Havel for a copy)

Page 9

Action Item: Lisa will share the list of current Science and Data Committee members with the Steering Committee for more suggestions. *Completed.*

Page 12

Action Item: Lisa will add the Conservation Moorings project to the ACFHP website. *Completed.*