

LOC EXEC MEETING MINUTES, March 21, 2006

Attending: Steve LaPan (NYSDEC), Rob MacGregor (OMNR), Leon Carl (USGS), Bob Adair (USFWS), Jim Johnson (USGS), Bob O’Gorman (USGS), Gavin Christie (GLFC), Chuck Kreuger (GLFC), John Dettmers (GLFC)

Lake trout/ANFH: The LOC expressed strong concern regarding the lack of progress toward a defined plan for renovation of the Allegheny National Fish Hatchery (ANFH). It is unclear whether any decisions have been made in light of the report provided to USFWS by The Freshwater Institute. When asked at today’s Upper Lakes Advisors’ Lunch, Kofi Finn-Aikens indicated that USFWS had not yet made any decisions. However, other sources suggest that USFWS may have come to a decision to bring the hatchery back on line. If the circulating rumors have merit, the likely outcome will be to institute about \$4M of improvements to the hatchery. These improvements likely would center on water supply and treatment, coupled with completely covering all raceways. However, there is no clear indication of when funds might be available/appropriated. USFWS is developing a five-year construction plan for 2007-2011. This plan should be finalized within the next month or two. LOC and GLFC should keep track of movement on this topic. Even in the most optimistic scenario, this process may take over 5 years to se ANFH back on line. Meanwhile, Region 3 Senecas will be available for ANFH repopulation. Not having ANFH producing also impacts Region 3, because they were relying on ANFH to help supply Senecas for the upper lakes during the next couple of years until Region 3 Seneca broodstocks are fully developed.

Having a viable hatchery up and running is a critical need for the LOC’s plans for lake trout restoration and deepwater cisco reintroduction efforts. As the LOC works to update the lake trout management plan, the LOC believes that a revised, adopted lake trout management plan should provide added impetus for USFWS to support these hatchery operations. Nevertheless, the LOC remains very concerned about the USFWS commitment to raising lake trout for restoration purposes. MacGregor noted that lake trout restoration is at a critical stage and Federal support of the process is critical for this process to proceed. Further, deep water cisco restoration is also a key component of lake trout restoration, reinforcing the need for a strong USFWS commitment to hatchery capacity for the lower lakes.

Deepwater ciscoes: LOC decided that developing a deepwater cisco restoration plan will be a priority for this spring. Meanwhile ~ 1000 bloater are being reared at Wellsboro, PA. These offspring came from Lake Superior and are being evaluated for 1) their ability to grow in a hatchery setting, 2) evidence of disease, and 3) possible introduction into Lake Ontario. The LOC believes that there would be great public relations value to put even a handful of the 1000 offspring at Wellsboro into Lake Ontario. Ontario hatcheries may be able to hold these offspring as they grow, if needed. Given the many concerns associated with collecting spawners showing signs of disease, the LOC asked whether USGS could offer help from their large vessel in Lake Superior to collect fish and transfer to Lake Ontario. Discussion around this point suggested that this may be a difficult option.

Sea Lamprey: Christie asked the LOC whether it approved of the GLFC's efforts regarding sea lamprey control, whether it agreed with GLFC's assessment of sea lamprey numbers, and ... LOC asked these questions:

1. Where are the wounds coming from? Answer: Lamprey numbers we have yet to see, and/or a decline in adult lake trout numbers, causing an increase in wounding rate associated with prey depletion.
2. Why decrease control as wounding is increasing? Answer: We are treating all known populations.
3. If LOC bumps up restoration, what assurances are there that SL control will improve? Answer: GLFC stands committed to control sea lamprey to foster lake trout restoration efforts, but GLFC can't get below current levels of control.
4. Why not buy more chemical? Answer: Instead, improve effectiveness of control. Implement improved methods (e.g, longer blocks, finer adjustment for pH, etc.)
5. LOC believes control of sea lamprey is still needed for cisco restoration even if lake trout are at low abundance.

Genetic status of sea lamprey: Recent science suggests sea lamprey are native to Lake Ontario and Lake Champlain. However, this science is not as clear as has been portrayed in recent papers. Looking at zoogeography and historical records, there is no evidence of sea lamprey from the Lake Ontario region. This suggests that sea lamprey were not abundant in the past. The LOC will revise FCOs to incorporate this latest information about sea lampreys when appropriate and adopt an interim policy statement (see attached) that reaffirms the importance of sea lamprey control, regardless of their origin.

American eel: This was well summarized in the session today. The train has left.

Cormorants: The Ontario Minister wants to do something about cormorants but is not yet ready to control on private land and shows other indications of some reluctance. Johnson asked whether control could occur on private lands in NY. Answer: If landowner gives permission, control can occur. The LOC sees a strong need for coordinated cormorant management across basin. This should be taken up by CLC.

Atlantic salmon: A major restoration effort for this species will begin in Ontario with a large partnership among OMNR, LCBO, and Banrock wines, with the announcement due April 25. The big concern about eventual success of this effort will be lake conditions, not in the streams. Ontario will develop develop 3 Atlantic salmon broodstocks as part of this partnership. Given limited hatchery capacity, choices will need to be made about priorities. Ontario is likely to seek to turn Chinook rearing over to more partners. Given the many reintroductions of native species now ongoing, the LOC needs to make hard choices about how to structure the next generation of FCOs and decide where we want to go. This is an opportunity to take a solid crack to restore a native species. Kreuger cautioned that, as broodstocks are developed, be sure to consider that characters critical

for success must go beyond genetics to what they do in the environment. For instance, it may do little good to stock a strain that survives well but whose alevins swim downstream instead of upstream to find suitable juvenile rearing habitat. LOC believes it is in good shape to start writing a management plan.

Environmental Objectives: There has been lots of activity on this front by LaMP and The Nature Conservancy. Their efforts may allow the LOC to simply modify the body of their documents, once complete.