



THE CONNECTICUT RIVER SALMON ASSOCIATION N·E·W·S·L·E·T·T·E·R

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An Atlantic Salmon Legacy Program

*Steve Gephard, Supervising Fisheries Biologist,
Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection*

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Program underwent many changes in 2012. The previous year, Tropical Storm Irene hammered Vermont and inflicted so much damage to the White River National Fish Hatchery (Bethel, VT) that the US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) was forced to close it, until such time as it could find money for repairs. In July of 2012, the USFWS announced that due to many factors, it was ending its hatchery support for the restoration program. Budget cuts, the cost of fixing the hatchery, and the recent poor returns of adult salmon to the river all played into the decision. The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission (CRASC) instructed its Technical Committee to inventory remaining resources and determine what kind of program might be possible in the future, without the USFWS. However, the loss of the USFWS created a huge hole—around two-thirds off all fry and 100% of all smolts stocked came from USFWS hatcheries.



Returning Atlantic salmon at Rainbow Dam Fishway, Farmington River. [Photo: CT DEEP]

The Technical Committee proposed a scaled-down “Legacy program” that sought not to restore a sustained run of salmon to the river, capable of supporting a recreational fishery, but a hatchery-maintained small population that would simply preserve the presence of this native species in the basin. Initially, the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont

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Appropriations Committee Votes to Fund Kensington for Two Years

By James Carroll, CRSA Director and Secretary

In early February, the Connecticut General Assembly’s Appropriations Committee received the governor’s biannual budget, which was submitted by the Office of Planning and Management (OPM). A line item in that OPM budget identified \$149,000 of hatchery monies to be excluded from DEEP funding. That amount was the projected non-personnel operating costs for either the Kensington or Burlington hatchery, although which hatchery was not specifically singled out in the OPM document. However, Kensington was clearly targeted for closure. It would be a loss of an important facility as well as programs supplied by that operation.

Closing the Kensington Hatchery would have shut down the new “Legacy” Atlantic salmon program, destroyed the remaining Atlantic salmon broodstock, shut down the Salmon-in-Schools Program and stopped the Trout in a Classroom Program, which needs seeforellen brown trout available from Kensington at a time appropriate to the school year thanks to the only hatchery chiller in Connecticut, located at Kensington.

The problem was highlighted during a Fishery Advisory Council meeting on March 14. At that meeting an informal working group was organized to address the hatchery funding issue. It was agreed that organized advocacy on behalf of the Kensington hatchery would be spearheaded by the CRSA, the Connecticut Fly Fishermen’s Association, The Farmington River Anglers Association, and Trout Unlimited (TU) and its six state chapters. A strategy to share information and communicate ideas was started. It was clear that the two state aquatic education programs at risk, CRSA’s Salmon-in-Schools and Trout Unlimited’s Trout in the Classroom, were in serious jeopardy.

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along with the US Forest Service were supportive of the plan. However, in the fall of 2012, Massachusetts reconsidered and decided not to continue work with salmon, including raising salmon at its Roger Reed State Fish Hatchery in Palmer, MA. Vermont does not have the space to raise salmon in its hatchery program but instead had planned on accepting eggs from Massachusetts and hatching them and stocking them into Vermont waters as fry. When Massachusetts dropped out, Vermont

THE CONNECTICUT RIVER SALMON ASSOCIATION

The Connecticut River Salmon Association (CRSA) is a nonstock, nonprofit Connecticut corporation. Our mission is to support the effort to restore Atlantic salmon in the Connecticut River basin, a joint undertaking by the states of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Connecticut, together with the US Fish and Wildlife Service of the National Marine Fisheries Service, pursuant to an act of Congress in 2003.

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had no choice but to drop out as well, along with the US Forest Service that manages the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont. That left Connecticut to implement the Legacy Program on its own.

For the past five or so years, the partners had stocked 6 million fry into the basin, with 1.4 million being released in Connecticut. The Legacy Program calls for Connecticut to release between 200,000 and 250,000 fry into targeted Connecticut waters. One can see how this is not a viable restoration plan. If 6 million fry were not producing enough adults to effectively promote restoration, certainly 250,000 fry cannot. However, Connecticut believes that this is a worthwhile effort that will have many benefits: (1) **Biodiversity** – maintain the presence of Atlantic salmon, a charismatic, native ‘heritage’ species, in the basin and retain some of its ecological functions; (2) **Genetic legacy** – serve as a living gene bank, possibly assist with Climate Change adaptation with other Atlantic salmon programs; (3) **Education** – continued education about salmon and ecosystems & support for salmon eggs in classrooms; (4) **Research** – serve an important role as a living laboratory for accessible Atlantic salmon; (5) **Sentinel species** – allow monitoring for contamination and other environmental perturbations and monitoring trends in sea survival of North Atlantic salmon; (6) **Angling** – the broodstock fishery will still provide significant angling opportunities to anglers in the Northeast.

Space does not allow elaboration of all of these benefits but let me highlight a few. **Genetic legacy**: we have worked hard for over 30 years to develop a special strain of Connecticut River Atlantic salmon, which is now the southernmost population of the species in the world. It would be a shame to let that die out. **Education**: the work that the Connecticut River Salmon Association has been doing in schools is vitally important for educating children about salmon, the mistakes that we’ve made over the past 200 years, and all aquatic resources. We need to find ways to keep our youth engaged with natural

resources (and not just by surfing the internet). The Salmon-in-Schools program is a winner and we will continue to support that program. **Research**: most Atlantic salmon in the United States are now under the protection of the US Endangered Species Act and it is very difficult for researchers to touch Atlantic salmon much less capture, tag, handle, sample, move to labs, etc., because of the stringent protections. Our salmon are not listed and therefore can help US researchers continue important research to learn more about the species and how to protect and restore it everywhere. **Angling**: there won’t be salmon fishing in the Connecticut River but the fry that we need for stocking will still require broodstock at the Kensington Hatchery to produce the eggs and those fish will continue to be stocked out into the Shetucket and Naugatuck rivers (as well as some lakes and ponds) to support recreational fisheries. That, in turn, will keep a bit of the salmon legacy alive.

This year is the last of the pre-Legacy stockings. We in Connecticut stocked around 760,000 fry this spring, Massachusetts stocked 900,600 and Vermont stocked 240,450 for a total of around 1.9 million. But in 2014, the stocking will be down to the reduced Legacy levels and only in Connecticut. The exact areas that will continue to be stocked are still being considered but it seems likely that in the Salmon River watershed, parts of the Blackledge and Jeremy rivers, Fawn Brook, and Dickinson Creek will receive some fry. In the Farmington River, the Salmon Brook watershed and Sandy Brook will be stocked with fry. Adult salmon will continue to return for several years at the same rate they have in the past few years. We expect to trap most of these adults in 2013, hold them in the Cronin National Salmon Station (Sunderland, MA) for spawning, and send the eggs to our Kensington Hatchery. After this year, the plan is less clear. It is likely that returning salmon will be released at the fishways and allowed to migrate ‘home’ and spawn naturally. They will still be off-limits to anglers.

(Legacy, page 7)

A Brief History of Atlantic Salmon Restoration in the Connecticut River

Robert A. Jones, President CRSA

The following is not intended to be all inclusive regarding the history of the Atlantic salmon restoration but includes some of the highlights of the program through time.

- 1798 A dam, sixteen feet high, was built across the Connecticut River just below the mouth of Miller's River, about 100 miles from the mouth of the Connecticut. Many tributaries were being dammed during this time of the Industrial Revolution.
- 1810 Nearly all salmon had disappeared from the river
- 1866 Connecticut Fish Commissioners were appointed by the Governor to investigate the problems of salmon and shad.
- 1867 The Connecticut Commissioners joined with their counterparts from New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts to cooperate in the restocking of the Connecticut with salmon and shad.
- 1870s Hundreds of thousands of juvenile salmon were stocked with some 800 or more adult fish returning to the river. However this effort failed due to poorly designed and unsuccessful fishways and an inability to control commercial fishing in the lower river.
- 1965 Passage by the US Congress of the Anadromous Fish Conservation Act. Interest in salmon restoration seemed to re-awaken about every quarter century since those early efforts; however, with the passage of this act serious efforts were again initiated to restore Atlantic salmon to the Connecticut River Basin.
- 1967 100 years from the date of the historic meeting of their predecessors, the fish and wildlife agency administrators from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire joined with their counterparts in the federal government and agreed to support an anadromous fisheries program for the Connecticut River Basin. The state and federal administrators agreed to participate in a Connecticut River Fisheries Management Policy Committee. As an organization established on little more than a "handshake", the Committee was able to bring together state and federal government agencies, private industry, special interest groups and average citizens in a cooperative effort with a common goal. Initially the restoration program was directed primarily at providing fish passage facilities at the lower five main-stem dams: Holyoke, Turners Falls, Vernon, Bellows Falls and Wilder.
- 1970s With no ready source of salmon eggs in the early 1970s, eyed eggs were obtained from Quebec, Iceland and Maine.
- 1974 First adult Atlantic salmon known to return under the restoration program was found dead in the main stem Connecticut River.
- 1976 Approximately 29,000 smolts, the progeny from a cross between adults from the Penobscot River in Maine and a river system in Quebec, were released in the Farmington River. Also in 1976, the first Connecticut River salmon to survive until spawning, a male, was used to fertilize 41,000 eggs from Penobscot River females.
- 1976 The Holyoke Water Power Company, completed redesign and reconstruction of a lift type fish passage facility, originally built in 1955, at Holyoke, Massachusetts.
- 1976 Rainbow Dam Fishway went into operation on the Farmington River.
- 1978 A new federal hatchery at Bethel, Vermont, dedicated to the production of salmon for the Connecticut River, went into production.
- 1980 A multi-fishway facility at Turners Falls, Massachusetts was completed.
- 1981 529: Largest number of adult salmon known to return to the river in the program.
- 1981 Fishway at Leesville Dam, on the Salmon River went into operation.
- 1981 New England Power Company completed construction of fish passage facilities at Vernon, Vermont allowing American shad access to their historical spawning grounds.
- 1983 Under the direction of the Policy Committee, legislation, drafted and enacted by all four basin states, was ratified by the U.S. Congress, which created an interstate compact known as the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission (CRASC).
- 1984 Fishway completed at Bellows Falls, Vermont.

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The CRSA "Salmon-in-Schools" Program

GREAT NEWS for TEACHERS and LIAISONS!

A two-year supply of Salmon-in-Schools eggs was assured in the Connecticut biannual budget passed in June. For you, it means that

- A Teacher Orientation will be held late this fall.
- All Salmon-in-Schools will RETURN to online registration at the CRSA web site.
- Atlantic salmon eggs will be delivered in January.

Complete information about the 2013 – 2014 program will be sent in September.

— from Richard Bell

CT General Assembly Honors CRSA

Introduced by Senator Art Linares and Representatives Melissa Ziobron, Philip Miller, Tom Vicino, Christie Carpino, Linda Orange, and Marilyn Giuliano, the Connecticut General Assembly offered congratulations to The Connecticut River Salmon Association at its 37th Annual Dinner. The citation states: "In recognition of the Salmon-in-Schools Program which has been incorporated into the academic science curriculum of over seventy schools in partnership with the Connecticut Department on Energy and Environmental Protection." The citation goes on to read: "The entire membership [of the General Assembly] extends its very best wishes on this memorable occasion and expresses the hope for continued success." The citation was signed by Donald E. Williams, Jr., President Pro Tempore, J. Brendan Sharkey, Speaker of the House and Denise Merrill, Secretary of State. The citation was accepted with thanks by CRSA President Robert A. Jones. ♦

2013 Election of Directors and Officers

The CRSA Annual Meeting was held prior to the Annual Dinner on January 19, 2013. The number of directors was fixed by vote at seventeen. Fifteen directors were elected unanimously and are listed in this newsletter on page 2. By a second unanimous vote of the membership, the directors were authorized to fill two vacancies during 2013.

Individuals who are interested in the ongoing support of the CT DEEP Atlantic Salmon Legacy Program or want to be part of the national, award-winning environmental education program, Salmon-in-Schools, may apply for appointment as a director by emailing CRSA at info@ctriversalmon.org.

At the March 12, 2013, CRSA board meeting the directors unanimously elected as officers Robert A. Jones, President; Richard G. Bell, Vice President; Gerald A. Feinberg, Treasurer and James J. Carroll Secretary. ♦

CRSA Honors Long-Time Supporters

By Jim Carroll, CRSA Director and Secretary

Vermont's Metcalfe Receives Service Award

Ed Metcalfe, museum director of the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum, was presented with the CRSA 2013 Service award at the association's annual dinner. Ed first contacted the CRSA in 2000 to see if Salmon-in-Schools would fit the museum's environmental education objectives. Located in West Marlboro, VT, the museum endeavors to foster an interest in the environment and natural sciences through exhibition, research and educational activities. It was a fit.

The CRSA provided educational materials and conducted the first Vermont teacher training at Putney High School in the fall of 2000. Ed Metcalfe has grown it from there.

Through grants and support from individuals and schools, the museum has introduced Salmon-in-Schools to some 35 schools and thousands of Vermont students. The grant program has made possible tanks and chillers as well as educational materials to schools.

Rhode Island's Sullivan Honored with CRSA Education Award

Kimberly Sullivan was given the 2013 CRSA Education Award at the annual dinner by CRSA President Robert Jones. She was cited for her very successful nine-year effort pioneering the Salmon-in-Schools Program in Rhode Island. As a state fishery biologist and the Rhode Island Fish & Wildlife Aquatic Resources Education Coordinator, she offers a special blend of skills and knowledge to her school.

Using materials from the CRSA, Kimberly organized the first Rhode Island state teacher workshop on January 10, 2004. Since then, the nine-year Rhode Island program has grown to over thirty schools. Thousands of Rhode Island students have benefited because of her leadership and enthusiasm.

15-Year Service Award Goes to Beecher Road School in Woodbridge

Beecher Road Elementary School in Woodbridge, CT, was presented with a Fifteen Year Service Award by Robert Jones at the CRSA annual dinner in January. Receiving the award were the school principal, Gina Prisco, and Science Coordinator Caron Stebinger.

Since 1998, students at the school have enthusiastically participated in the Salmon-in-Schools Program. Hundreds of students have benefited from their participation in the program in the fifteen years. ♦

Thank You to Our Donors and Contributors!

Without the support of the following organizations and individuals, our fund raising dinner and many of our activities would not be possible. Our thanks to each for their contribution and their support of Atlantic salmon restoration.

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A CRSA Winner!

At left, Jim Huber, the winner of the Thomas & Thomas DNA, 13' 7wt Spey Rod at the 2013 Dinner, has enjoyed success using it already on the Miramichi.

CRSA Spey Casting Clinic!

Check out the CRSA website at

www.ctriversalmon.org

for photos of the June 2013
spey casting clinic at
Thomas & Thomas Fine Fly Fishing
with
Northeast Spey Casting LLC.

A Surprise for the United States at 2013 NASCO Meeting

Stephen Gephard, US Commissioner to NASCO

The 30th annual meeting of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization was held June 3–7 in Drogheda, Ireland. The head of the US delegation was Daniel Morris, the assistant administrator for NOAA's Northeast Region. Other members of the ten-person delegation included staff from NOAA, Department of State, and the private sector. As typical of recent years, much of the business was housekeeping in nature. A significant item of business was the selection of a new Secretary for the organization, following last year's retirement of Dr. Malcolm Windsor who had served in that capacity since the organization's inception. The Parties selected Dr. Peter Hutchinson, who has served as the assistant Secretary for many years. Reports included updates from the International Atlantic Salmon Research Board, follow-up from the Implementation Plan Review Group, and discussion of changes to the meeting structure. The report from the ICES Advisory Committee was similar to past years: (1) all six regions in North America were below their conservation limit (CL) and suffering reduced reproductive capacity; (2) returns of two sea-winter fish in North America during 2012 continued a long decline and for the 42-year time series, the runs ranked 40th in the United States and 42nd in Scotia-Fundy; (3) for the West Greenland complex, all stocks were below their CL and suffering reduced reproductive capacity; (4) the overall status of stocks contributing to the West Greenland fishery was among the lowest recorded; (5) the total harvest of salmon at West Greenland was 33.1 tons with an estimated 10 tons of unreported catch—a 20% increase.

The surprise came when Denmark (in respect to Greenland) reported the establishment of a new fishery quota for factory

landings, at 35 tons. In the past, NASCO had endorsed an internal use only fishery (no export) of a limited season. That harvest hovered around the 20-ton level. The fish were sold fresh to local markets, restaurants and institutions. This new fishery was sold to factories that froze the fish for future sale. The other NASCO parties expressed their extreme displeasure about this unilateral decision while Denmark argued that it did not represent a violation of existing agreements nor represent an opportunity for increased landings. The other Parties, including the United States, did not agree with Denmark on either point. There was no resolution to this issue by the end of the meeting and Parties resolved to look for opportunities between now and next year's meeting to engage Denmark further on this matter.

In other matters of interest to US salmon conservation, France (in respect to St. Pierre and Miquelon) announced that it did not conduct any sampling in that small fishery in 2012. Results from sampling were expected at the meeting. Canada had conducted sampling of its Labrador fishery to use genetic data to show that it was not a multi-stock fishery. Results were expected at the meeting but were not available.

In summary, there was considerable progress improving the operation of NASCO but a lot of frustration and unfinished business when it came to meaningful conservation for Atlantic salmon. The US Delegation is intent on pursuing such conservation whether it is at next year's meeting in France or planting seeds at some other meeting between now and then. ♦

Kensington *(continued from page 1)*

Members of the Appropriations Committee were identified and contact information was supplied through web sites, emails and personal contacts. Presentations were made at various club and non-profit member meetings to generate lobbying. Letters were written to Appropriations Committee members. Visits were made to state legislators.

These two education programs were serving 12,700 students in 135 schools located in 90 Connecticut towns and cities in the 2012-2013 school year. It also was part of an undergraduate environmental course at St. Joseph University in West Hartford. Emails were sent to CRSA and TU schools outlining the funding issue and its great threat. Many, many schools responded with emails and letters and even articles in local papers. Many private individuals did as well.

The state Office of Policy and Management presented the governor's budget to the state legislature on February 7, 2013. Seven public hearings were held by the Appropriations Committee in February. On April 19, a Joint Favorable Substitute bill H.B. 6530, "An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30 2015," was filed with the Legislative Commissioners' Office. That bill contained a specific item added to the budget for funding the Burlington Hatchery in the amount of \$149,910. That meant that both Burlington and Kensington would be funded.

Important support for the funding also came from the Connecticut House Majority Leader, Joe Aresimowicz of Berlin. The Kensington hatchery is in his district. Also, three of his children have attended Catherine McGee Middle School in Berlin and participated in the Salmon-in-Schools program at the school. ♦

History *(from page 3)*

- 1984 The first Atlantic salmon to reach the White River in Vermont in nearly 200 years was observed by local residents.
- 1987 Fishway completed at Wilder, Vermont.
- 1992 490: Second largest number of adult salmon known to return to the Connecticut River.
- 1996 Salmon-in-Schools program initiated by Connecticut River Salmon Association (CRSA) in North Haven Middle School.
- 2000 Returning adult salmon were detected in the Salmon and Farmington Rivers in Connecticut, the Deerfield, Mill and Westfield Rivers in Massachusetts, and the Black and West Rivers in Vermont.
- 2002 CRASC re-authorized by US Congress.
- 2003 Connecticut DEP announces the closure of the Whittemore Salmon Station due to budget cuts and insufficient new federal funds.
- 2004 CRASC receives \$250,000 congressional appropriation of a defined \$770,000 shortfall to manage and operate its cooperative migratory fisheries management program. This was the first and only congressional appropriation to CRASC.
- 2008 Of 10 salmon radio-tagged at Holyoke, four passed through the Wilder Fishway and one was known to have moved up the Ammonoosuc River—225 miles upstream of Long Island Sound. This fish was the longest migrating sea run Connecticut River Atlantic salmon since colonial times.
- 2011 Tropical Storm Irene swept through New England on August 28 and virtually destroyed the White River National Fish Hatchery.
- 2012 Regional director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Wendi Weber announced that the Service would no longer produce any salmon for the Connecticut River restoration program.
- 2012 CRASC Chairman William Hyatt, Chief, Bureau of Natural Resources, Connecticut DEEP charged the CRASC Technical Committee with the following tasks: inventory available remaining resources; evaluate the capability of those resources; and provide the Commission with options for the future.
- 2012 The Technical Committee reported that the only Federal facility potentially available was the Richard Cronin National Salmon Station (RCNSS). The facility was available to hold sea-return adult salmon and incubate salmon eggs for 2012. After 2012, a written request must be received by February 1 addressed to the USFWS Connecticut River Coordinator annually for the transport, holding, spawning, and incubation of eggs for sea-run Atlantic salmon for that current year.
- 2013 Mr. Hyatt announced the implementation of the Legacy program in Connecticut. (See page 1 for details.)
- 2013 CRASC Connecticut River Coordinator notified Mr. Hyatt that RCNSS would be available for up to 100 returning salmon this year.
- 2013 Returning adult salmon (88 as of this writing) are being transported to the RCNSS.

A comment from the author: Clearly the number of returning adult Atlantic salmon to the Connecticut River has been disappointingly low with an average of 178 over 34 years. However there have been some high points: 529 in 1981; 490 in 1992; adult salmon reaching the Ammonoosuc River 225 miles from Long Island Sound in 2008. Low returns are not unique to the Connecticut River. If return rate was the criteria for continued effort, significant funding throughout the North Atlantic could be saved. The financial problems facing the Fish and Wildlife Service are understood and particularly the impact of the devastation to the White River hatchery. However it can be assured that the future will bring change, potentially to the better and the effort to restore Atlantic salmon to the Connecticut River will again reawaken. The Connecticut DEEP, Bureau of Natural Resources is to be congratulated for their insight with the implementation of the Legacy program. It is hoped that the USFWS would recognize the value of this program and allow the continued use of the RRNSS for this purpose. ♦

Legacy *(continued from page 2)*

A few more of the details of the Legacy program will be worked over the winter by CRASC's Technical Committee. The change is not welcome news to those who shared our dream of a restored run of Atlantic salmon to the Connecticut River but the benefits of even the scaled back Legacy Program are still worthwhile in keeping the presence of this grand species. The story of Atlantic salmon should never be forgotten by the people of Connecticut. ♦

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