

Appendix D

Lehigh River Fisheries Management Plan

Meeting Minutes

Prepared April 16, 2007

Meeting Time and Location

Meeting was held on Thursday evening (7:00-9:00 pm) April 12, 2007 at the Lehigh Area High School, Lehigh, PA.

Goal/Purpose

The purpose of the meeting was to present the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (PFBC) Fisheries Management Plan for the Lehigh River to the general public. The plan is a statement of the PFBC's direction for the management of fisheries issues and future survey work to be accomplished in the Lehigh River (headwaters to confluence with the Delaware River). Additionally, public comment was received by the PFBC on any issues regarding the Lehigh River following the presentation.

Avenues for general public input

Both written and oral comments were encouraged by PFBC at the meeting. Before the start of the meeting, at the entrance, sign up sheets were made available for any person wishing to make oral comments (see below). Meeting attendants were also given a sheet for any written question along with a summary copy of the Lehigh River Fisheries Management Plan proposed actions and PFBC contact information.

Public comment received by PFBC on or before April 27th, 2007 via the PFBC website or postal mail (PFBC P.O. Box 155, Bushkill, PA 18324) will be taken into consideration for the Plan.

Attendance

An attendance sheet was kept of meeting attendants (see below). A total of 58 people attended representing PFBC, ACOE, Muskies Inc., PA Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, Western Pocono Trout Unlimited, Hokendauqua Creek Trout Unlimited, Carbon County EMA, Lehigh Coldwater Fishery Alliance (LCFA), Lehigh River Stocking Association, Rivers Guide Service, Delaware River Shad Fish Association, Carbon County Conservation District, Paradise Fishing and Hunting, Fisherman's Quality Products, Wildlands Conservancy, Morning Call, and Channel 13 as well as some individuals not affiliated with any organization or agency.

Minutes

I. The meeting was called to order at 7:00PM and opened by PFBC Commissioner Fred Osifat.

He had a few brief opening remarks including stating what the PFBC was presenting and immediately introduced Leroy Young and Dave Arnold.

II. Leroy Young (PFBC Chief of Division of Fisheries Management)

Leroy had brief statements about what the meeting entailed. He stressed that Dave Arnold will be presenting an overview of the Lehigh River Fisheries Management Plan. After the presentation those that signed up for oral comments would be heard followed by any received written comments. Answers and a discussion period followed each presenter and written question. Leroy also made the meeting attendees aware of the oral comment signup sheet and asked them to fill out any written questions they wanted to provide and return them to Daryl Pierce after the presentation so that they could also be addressed at the meeting. Leroy also stated that questions would be addressed as they came up during any discussion period.

III. Dave Arnold (Area Fisheries Manager – Area 5) presentation of the Plan (7:15 – 7:58PM)

Dave A. presented the highlights to the LRFMP via PowerPoint presentation.

Among the issues Dave highlighted were the following:

- Water temperatures relative to the Chapter 93 designations of various sections of the river
- 2006 Angler Use and Harvest Survey
- 2006 Angler log book survey (PFBC & LCFA)
- Overview of current PFBC management practices and stocking by river section
- Overview of proposed actions per river section
- Accessibility
- Public input

After Dave's presentation Leroy Y. called for all written questions and provided opportunity for the oral commentary.

IV. Oral Comments (7:58PM)

A. Michael Gontar – PA Federation Sportsmen's Club

Michael made brief comments on the boating accessibility to the Lehigh River. He would like to see more access from SR 145 to Northampton along with the associated maintenance. He liked the fact that PFBC was not stocking musky in section 8 anymore and was against any special regulations in section 6.

A brief discussion arose about the online report regarding Jeans Run. The concern was about the decrease of trout that PFBC noted in the report on the PFBC website. Dave Arnold (PFBC) responded stating that Jeans Run is a poorly buffered stream that will cause the trout populations to fluctuate – when acid input is low, have higher trout populations; higher acid inputs results in lower trout populations. Acidification of Jeans Run is mostly from springtime runoff as decaying leaf matter (particular oaks) that has tannins is washed into the stream and from acid rain events. The acidifying of the water has the greatest impact on young of the year and egg survival.

A discussion also arose concerning the TV interview with PFBC Executive Director Dr. Austen. Comments were made by several meeting attendees that adult anglers crowd out kids on Opening Day of trout. One individual recommended that kids under the age of 12

years be allowed to start fishing an hour earlier than the rest of the anglers on Opening Day. A number of attendees applauded this idea.

B. George Magaro - Delaware River Shad Association

George would like to have more studies to evaluate and improve the efficiency of the fishways in the Lehigh River, specifically for improving American Shad passage. The PFBC needs to work with other agencies and private organizations to get modifications on the fishways in the near future rather than 20 years from now. He feels that the fishways at the Easton and Chain Dams do not work and need modifications. George mentioned that typical salmon fish ladders on the West Coast are very efficient for shad passage and would like to see this kind of ladder investigated for the Lehigh River rather than the existing slot ladder.

George stated that Lehigh University wants to do studies on the Lehigh River related to fisheries and water quality topics and that we should be funneling monies to them. He is also supportive of the proposed radio-telemetry study and wishes that the PFBC could offer funding. He noted that PPL pledged \$20,000 dollars toward the study but the total cost of the study is over \$100,000 dollars and that more monies are need.

C. The remaining meeting attendees that had requested oral commentary withdrew their requests.

V. Written Questions (8:30 PM)

A. A written question was submitted by Tony Pittman regarding the water release schedules and amounts on Fridays after 5pm pertaining to the Francis E. Walter 2006 plan. Tony stated that he pulled three people from the river that were in trouble due to rapid flow increases. Specifically, as written on the comment sheet “water levels on Friday after 5 PM I pulled 3 people out of River because raising water”.

George Sauls (ACOE) responded that the 2007 plan is available on the US Army Corps of Engineers website and that high flows for whitewater are released every other weekend with water being withdrawn early in the mornings (1:00 am) to early afternoon 1:00pm) on both Saturday and Sunday beginning in mid May. George S. also stressed that they (ACOE Dam tenders) rigidly follow a rate of change procedure for avoiding rapid increase/decrease of riverine flow below the Dam, specifically to give anglers and aquatic organisms to adjust.

An attendee made the statement that he has been measuring water flow at White Haven for a long time and that flows are typically 200-300 cfs and 7.3 °F higher than what is reported on the ACOE website. Additionally, he stated that the ACOE should adjust flows to “keep fish and keep the river fishable” for trout. In response, a shad angler stated that they would rather have warm water releases to benefit returning shad.

George Sauls stated that ACOE can only release bottom waters, the FEW is not equipped with selective withdrawal gates. Dave A. reviewed the 2007 FEW experimental release plan and stated that the FEW only affects the Lehigh River mainstem water temperatures downstream to the Tannery Bridge and would not impact returning American shad. Dave

A. also reviewed the initiative to seek Federal Section 22 funding for modeling riverine flows, water quality and releases from FEW and Beltzville Dams to better manage the Lehigh Rivers water quality.

- B. Written Question from Matt Lysek: A question was submitted regarding the stocking of musky – how can they help? Specifically, as written on the comment sheet “At the last meeting you talked about stocking more and larger muskellunge into the river. What are your plans and how can we help?”

Leroy Y. reviewed the PFBC musky stocking reduction based on a series of workshops with stakeholders. In general the PFBC is reducing the number of waters stocked with musky fingerlings and will focus stocking only those waters that have the greatest potential for supporting a high quality musky fishery. Thus, the PFBC stopped stocking musky fingerlings in Section 8 (Palmerton to Northampton Dam) of the Lehigh River, but will continue stocking fingerlings in Section 9 (below Northampton Dam).

Additionally, Leroy Y. stated that Musky Inc. also stocks muskies in the Lehigh and that the PFBC will work with them to promote the musky fishery. Leroy Y. believed that Musky Inc. was currently seeking to purchase larger fingerlings to stock into the Lehigh R., and issue to which the PFBC had no objections.

- C. Question from John Lazar: Who requested the special regulations? Specifically, as written on the comment sheet “Who requested the special reg’s – fly fish only artificials only on section 6?”

Leroy Y. addressed the issue. A petition was submitted by Evening Hatch Fly Shop supported by the Lehigh Coldwater Fishery Alliance, North Pocono C.A.R.E., Tobyhanna Creek Watershed Association, Brodhead Chapter Trout Unlimited, and individual anglers requesting “that a section of the upper Lehigh River be designated as special regulated waters, such as Catch & Release Fly Fishing Only, or Catch and Release Artificial Lures Only” within section 6 of the Lehigh River. The PFBC has reviewed the petition and in light of the 2006 creel survey, any gear limitation in Section 6 would alienate a major portion of the angling community. According to the 2006 creel survey over 40% or 51% (WH and FEW) of the interviewed anglers were bait anglers and the majority of anglers regardless of tackle type practiced catch and release.

Dave A. responded that, no special gear limitations would be pursued for Section 6; however, the PFBC is currently thinking about opening Section 6 to year round fishing.

- D. Ron Marks submitted a statement that the fish ladders need to be more efficient. Specifically, as written on the comment sheet “Fish ladders need to be made more efficient. Shad are essential to the food chain in the River.”

Leroy Y. – we agree.

Dave A. – we are working with DCNR for the optimal operation and maintenance of the Easton and Chain Dams fishways. We are trying to redirect the fish ladder outflow away from the shoreline at the Hamilton Street Dam fishway, and the PFBC would like to get a fish passage device installed at the Northampton Dam. Dave A. stated that the best way

to improve fish passage would be the elimination of all dams on the Lehigh such that the river is returned back to a free flowing state.

A discussion arose about the species utilizing the fish ladders. Dave A. stated that we have seen many species using the ladders including trout, walleye, musky, fallfish, white suckers, etc.

An attendee stated that PFBC stocking efforts of American shad above the Northampton Dam was not enough to overcome the predation within the Lehigh River – PFBC needs to stock 1.5 million or more. The attendee stated that they were willing to help but wanted more than a token show of effort from PFBC. Dave A. – agreed that stocking more fry would be helpful but the PFBC is limited to the number of American shad collected at Smithfield Beach in the Delaware River and hatchery production capacity. Dave A. also noted that according to the proposed Fisheries Management Plan, the PFBC would be examining the populations of forage fishes and predators within the Lehigh River so that the agency will have a much better understanding of these populations in the future.

- E. A written question from an unknown was submitted “Why not stock more catchable trout in Lehigh sections 6-8”?

Dave A. reviewed the PFBC catchable trout socking allocation program and one of the limitations of stocking the Lehigh River is its being classified as a 1L river; it takes too many trout to stock the Lehigh River at similar levels as smaller streams. Water temperature is also a concern for the PFBC, especially since water temperatures typically exceed Chapter 93 levels in all sections of the Lehigh River. The higher water temperatures physically stress trout and congregate in cooler water refuges (e.g., tributary mouths, seeps, etc.). PFBC hatchery production capacity is another limitation of the number of trout stocked in PA waters. State hatcheries are limited to a specific biomass of fish and not the number of fish produced due to restrictions on effluent discharge by PADEP. The PFBC can stock more trout but the trade-off would be that their sizes would have to be reduced to stay within the hatchery production limits.

Dave A. also noted that there are several private stocking associations that stock catchable trout in these sections of the Lehigh River but the PFBC does not have any information regarding the numbers of trout or stocking locations. An attendee affiliated with the Lehigh River Stocking Association stated that they put 6,000 catchable trout in the Lehigh River during the Spring.

An attendee asked if that the PFBC could match private organizations’ stocking numbers. In response, Dave A. stated that the PFBC couldn’t match private stockings efforts due to hatchery production limitations.

As a longer-term solution, depending on the fingerling and fry evaluations, the PFBC may be willing to pursue stocking bigger fingerlings in Spring, but stocking would be limited by hatchery production due to growing time, and effluent discharge.

Leroy Y. stated that PFBC Fisheries Management is revising the current statewide trout management program.

- F. A written comment was submitted by Jake Markizin after the meeting. Questions/Comments were “What is procedure for boat electro-survey? What is breakdown of anglers in audience? Expand on the settlement of Palmerton Ramp Access”.

VI. Open forum

- A. A recommendation was made by an attendee to not stock the Lehigh Canal but move those fish into the mainstem and that access is limited to the Lehigh River below Jim Thorpe.

Dave A. responded that the PFBC would not reallocate the trout from the canal. The canal is stocked to promote a short-term fishery that is highly utilized by families who are more comfortable fishing in slow moving waters. This water is an excellent opportunity for promoting youth angling. Additionally, the canal is easily accessible to all types of anglers. The PFBC is aware of the water quality limitations and takes this into account in its stocking program.

Dave A. stressed to attendees that the PFBC must serve all types of anglers and the Lehigh Canal offers exceptional short-term angling opportunities to a different angling community than those who traditionally fish the mainstem waters.

Dave A. commented that a fisheries management plan will be developed for the Lehigh Canal in the near-future.

Leroy Y. commented that the PFBC is working with other agencies regarding the mitigation of the Palmerton superfund site. One of the proposals being pursued by the PFBC is the development and improvement of access points on the Lehigh River mainstem. Leroy Y. also noted that the PFBC has its own program for development of access areas but did not know of current PFBC projects on the Lehigh River. One concern of attendees regarding having more access points was keeping out the jet skiers. Leroy Y. responded that the PFBC was only in the initial stages of promoting increased access points but these issues would be addressed in the future.

- B. A question arose about promoting warm water species – bluegills, bass, and perch?

Dave A. responded that the PFBC is addressing this but not in the near future. During the next five years the PFBC will be evaluating the populations of forage and gamefishes (cold, cool, and warm waters). Adjustments for promoting specific fisheries through stocking and/or regulations will be considered after the initial five-year population assessments.

- C. A comment was made by an attendee that he was not a trout angler and why was there a need for stocking so many trout in the Lehigh River when there are ample trout present already?

Dave A. responded that from the PFBC's pilot study in the fall of 2006, trout are present but not in quantities that would suggest large populations. Dave A., however did note that electrofishing in 2006 was a small survey that did not cover large reaches of the river. Electrofishing is a good tool for quickly assessing fish populations with minimal effort but many of the reaches in the Lehigh are inaccessible to the PFBC because of the weight of the electrofishing gear. Dave A. stated that, if necessary, the PFBC will employ other methods for estimating fish populations if electrofishing is inefficient.

- D. A question arose concerning the returning of docks at the RT 33 launch

WCO Lee Creyer responded that the PFBC is waiting on the City of Easton to issue the necessary permits for anchoring the docks to the launch. The PFBC does not own the land but it is leased from the City of Easton.

- E. A statement was made that the dumping of water from FEW was bad for the river particularly during the fall months after the rafting season when anglers are trying to fish.

George Sauls (ACOE) responded that the ACOE has a set of regulations regarding the rate of change of water releases from the FEW that limits the amount of change aquatic life are exposed to and gives anglers adequate time to respond to the flow changes. Additionally, FEW is a flood control facility and due to the large quantities of water during 2006, they (ACOE) were consistently releasing higher flows to stay within operating pool levels. During the fall months, it is imperative to the ACOE that the reservoir be kept at the base pool level (1,300 ft) due to the onset of peak hurricane season and the potential need for large flood storage capacity.

- F. Question: when will accesses be put in?

Leroy Y. – we don't know since the mitigation for the Palmerton superfund site is still in the settlement phase. Superfund sites are notorious for taking a long time to reach settlement.

Dave A. - the sites have been identified.

- G. Question: what are the effects of lamprey on fish populations? Are they potentially bad?

Dave A. – no, lamprey are native to the Lehigh River, and are beginning to return to the system in large numbers due to the improvements to the Easton and Chain Dam fishways. Lampreys are returning to the Lehigh River to spawn and are not parasitic on fish until they return to estuarine waters.

- H. Question: why not manage walleye, shad and bass together?

Dave A. – these fish use different habitats within the Lehigh River that preclude effective management as a group.

VII. Leroy Y. made a last call for questions.

In closing, Leroy Y. stated that all comments regarding the Lehigh River fisheries Management Plan would be taken into consideration. Please have comments to the PFBC by April 27th, 2007. Comments can be submitted via the PFBC website (www.fishandboat.com) or postal mail at: PFBC, Attn: Dave Arnold Area Fisheries Manager, P.O. Box 155, Bushkill, PA 18324

VIII. Meeting Adjourned (9:00PM)

Commissioner Osifat thanked all attendees for coming and closed the meeting.