



## St. Lawrence County Environmental Management Council

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### ***MEETING MINUTES***

**February 17, 2021**

**Via ZOOM**

*Action items in bold italics / Motions underlined.*

1. **Call to Order:** Tenbusch called the meeting to order at 6:05 pm.
  - Rudiger talked about historical salmon fishing on the Grasse River and that there were water quality regulations from the early 1800s to about 1830 to protect fishing resources.
  - It was asked if there is an inventory of fish passages/ladders on the Grasse and Oswegatchie. (***Staff will investigate.***)
2. **Roll Call, Determination of Quorum: *A quorum was present.***

Members present: Aaron Barrigar; Ryan Burkum; Donald O'Shea, Vice-Chair; Sue Rau; Lance Rudiger; Nicole Terminelli, BOL Liaison; Rod Tozzi; Brian Washburn; Pat Whalen, Secretary.

Members absent: Catherine Bennett, Chair; David Barnes; Joseph Brant; Richard Marshall; Tiernan Smith.

Guests: Kevin Acres, BOL; Herb Bullock; Tony Cooper, Town of Waddington Supervisor; David Fisher; Evan Renwick; Jana Lantry, DEC; Emily Sheridan, DEC; Alex Smith.

Staff: John Tenbusch; Dakota Casserly.
3. **Acceptance of Order of Business, Items for New Business, Items for Unfinished Business**

The order of business was accepted by consensus.
4. **Approval of the Minutes of the January 2021 EMC Meeting:**

Minutes were unanimously approved (Washburn/Rudiger).
5. **Hearings, Comments from the Public:**

There was no public comment.

The speaker for this EMC meeting was Jana Lantry, Fisheries Manager for NYS DEC Region 6. Jana discussed fisheries in general, as well as fish bypasses and other ways to manage or modify conditions for fish.

Lantry began with context around her professional background. She is DEC fisheries manager for several northern NY counties (Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, Herkimer, and St. Lawrence) and still has a roll in the Lake Ontario Fishery. She talked about how dam removal and fish passage(s) are good for river ecosystems; however, when considered, potential invasive impacts have to be considered.

**EMC: Everybody Must Care!**

Lantry talked about the Chinook salmon and how it is a non-native species. NY State and Ontario (Canadian Province) began stocking Chinook to control the invasive alewife. Chinook salmon in the Grasse River, from Lake Ontario, is unlikely; however, they could be coming from the St. Lawrence River (SLR) below the Moses-Saunders power dam.

Lantry talked about Atlantic salmon and that they are native to many SLR tributaries and Lake Ontario. They are stocked by the DEC and USGS to the tune of 120,000, in the past year. Ontario operates its own Atlantic salmon restoration program and has had limited success. In the early 2010s the DEC began using a new strain of Atlantic salmon (sebago) in its hatcheries and in 2016 they began to stock Lake Ontario. The DEC is seeing an increase in Atlantic salmon angler catch rates. The DEC is now drafting a 2020-2021 Atlantic salmon management program for Lake Ontario.

Lantry concluded with a focus on the Grasse River. The DEC records for the Grasse River show no Atlantic salmon, however there are historical accounts. The Grasse above Pyrites dam is a cold water fishery and below is a cool and warm water fishery, which contains: bass, muskellunge, walleye, and lake sturgeon, among other fish species. When considering fish passage on the Grasse, further questions need to be addressed; what are the benefits to the native species and potential impacts from invasive species. Conducting risk assessment can result in an examination of the positives and negatives of passage. Also, there are different types of fish passage that can accommodate different types of fish.

Further discussion continued with committee members:

- Tozzi asked about fish ladder or passage, which type will accommodate jumpers vs bottom swimmers. Lantry replied that ladders are for jumpers and passages for bottom swimmers
- Whalen asked when was the last survey completed near Madrid and were any invasives found. Lantry replied many Grasse River (Canton to Madrid, and Madrid to SLR) surveys exist and she can provide them if needed. Per invasives, gobi is present and tench is a potential threat.
- Washburn asked Lantry to quantify the amount of salmon (Chinook) in Grasse (SLR-Madrid) and if it could support a Chinook fishery. Lantry replied that there is one reported catch. The Grasse is not ideal for Chinook because it is a cold water fish and if Chinook were established she is unsure of the economic impact significance.
- Cooper shared his local knowledge on the Madrid dam. Years ago a NOAA representative presented to the Town of Madrid on dam removal and cost of fish ladder/passage. The Town did a cost benefit analysis and economic impact was negligible. Town residents have a strong attachment to the dam and its aesthetic character. About 6 years ago the Town, with IDA funding (~\$100K), repaired the dam bulkheads. Cooper questioned, if any action is taken on the dam, what benefit would it provide to the Town.
- Tenbusch added that the dam provides a head (of water) to support canoeing above and below it.
- Acres asked about the status of fish species in the Grasse. He hears of people coming from PA to fish for muskie, and of catching salmon in Madrid.
  - Rudiger replied that he has caught 30-50 muskies/year on both the Little and Grasse Rivers. Also, the Grasse is a well-known muskie fishery.

- Acres asked if muskie make it past the Madrid dam in normal conditions and at high water.
  - Lantry replied that she doesn't know if muskie are crossing the dam. She confirmed that lake sturgeon are not above the dam. She noted that if passage is built, the fishing regulations would change to Lake Ontario regulations.
- Smith said that if the dam is breached, there is no going back. He supports passage because it is far less impactful than dam removal
- Bullock asked if the dam is removed, what happens to the body of water behind it and what are the impacts to the land owners along the river.
  - Smith replied that the dam is only holding back 10-12 feet of water, the impoundment is relatively small. (*Staff will investigate.*)
- Rudiger said that there was a fish ladder in the former Village of Canton dam and recounted historical stories of Atlantic salmon at this site. Also, he thinks that a fish ladder at the Ampersand dam in Ogdensburg is worth consideration.
- Washburn said that if the Madrid dam is removed, salmon would go beyond Canton to tributaries from the increased river mileage. Also, he talked about the Pyrites dam being a "run-of-the-river" type and that it is currently breached. He asked Lantry if DEC is planning on stocking Atlantic salmon in the Grasse. Lantry replied, no. However, if Atlantic salmon are to be considered, it would take several years before salmon would return after initial stocking.
- O'Shea added that he remembers lake sturgeon coming up the Oswegatchie River.
- Acres said that the residents of Madrid like the dam and its aesthetic. Also, he asked, what is the value in adding a fish ladder for native species, and to be mindful of potential fishing regulation changes.
  - Lantry replied that there is value, if it is possible to pass natives. She noted that lake sturgeon can bring invasives.
  - Smith added that millions of dollars have been spent on fish passages on the Oswegatchie, and that the dam in Ogdensburg needs fish passage attention to complete the fishery.
- Washburn asked if Atlantic salmon return on a bi-annual basis.
  - Lantry replied that it depends on the river system. For example, in Lake Ontario, they are catching 1-4 year old Atlantic salmon.
- Washburn asked about the DEC's thoughts on Ogdensburg dam relicensing.
  - Lantry confirmed that relicensing is coming. The DEC is taking a bigger-picture approach in this case and working with the Fish and Wildlife service. They are concerned with invasives, such as the sea lamprey. The [Great Lakes Fishery Commission](#) is conducting a risk assessment.
- Bullock asked about which fish should be the focus for passage. Lantry replied, native fish species.

**6. Report by the Representative of the Board of Legislators (Nicole Terminelli)**

- a. At the January 21, 2021 Grasse River Blueway Marketing Plan Workshop, discussion focused on how to balance environmental and economic impacts. A digital survey was conducted and response was very low.
- b. The Highway Department has an RFP for three new maintenance buildings around the County. Nicole would like to see rooftop solar panels installed to meet power needs.

- c. Joseph Brant was reappointed to the EMC by the BOL.
- d. Recent EMC candidates have been vetted and the BOL is moving forward with their approval.
- e. There was additional discussion on the status of EMC vacancies. At the end of February, Barnes and Barrigar's terms expire, resulting to two vacancies.

**7. Report of the Committees**

- a. **Executive:** No report
- b. **Conservation of Resources Committee:** No Report
- c. **Environment and the Economy Committee:** **See attached.**
  - i. Burkum summarized. Washburn presented his [Madrid dam reports](#).
- d. **Invasive Species Committee:** No Report.
  - i. In lieu of a meeting, members attended a [CCE webinar on the Spotted Lanternfly \(SLF\)](#). The tree-of-heaven (TOH) invasive plant was also discussed during the webinar.
- e. **Watershed Management Committee:** No Report.
  - i. Washburn attended and presented at the E+EC meeting.

**8. Report of the Staff:**

- a. Tenbusch talked about the next round of CDBG funding and applications are due April 9, 2021.
- b. Casserly talked about the Hammond land use regulations revision project. *Tenbusch and Washburn reminded Casserly to share the St. Lawrence River shoreline resiliency report with the committee.*

**9. Unfinished Business:** None

**10. New Business**

- a. Annual financial disclosure statements are required for all County committee members. Staff will check with Lisa Bartalo to make sure all EMC members received the documents. They are due at the end of March. There was further discussion on whether or not this should be required of an advisory committee.
- b. Terminelli will ask the County Attorney and BOL on why EMC members (an advisory board) need to complete.
- c. 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EMC is approaching and Tenbusch would like 3 volunteers. Pat Whalen and Sue Rau volunteered.
  - i. Terminelli reminded the EMC that the YAB (Youth Advisory Board) would like to collaborate.
- d. Bullock asked about the next step(s) with fish passage(s).
  - i. Tenbusch replied that the E+EC will continue to discuss at their next sub-committee meeting and invitation will go out to the EMC.
- e. EAB Task Force meeting is scheduled for 9am, February 18, 2021.

11. **Announcements**

- a. Sheridan shared:
  - i. Great Lakes Research Consortium small grants are due March 1st:  
<https://www.esf.edu/glrc/>.
  - ii. [2018-2020 Great Lakes Program Report](#)
  - iii. DEC's Buffer in a Bag Program is offering free tree and shrub seedlings for planting along waterbodies, and applications are due by April 12th:  
<https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/115903.html>.

12. **Message to Board of Legislators:**

- a. Some members shared their displeasure with the financial disclosure statement requirement, especially for an advisory committee.

13. **Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8 pm (O'shea/Rau).

Respectfully submitted by:

*Patrick Whalen*

Patrick Whalen, Secretary

Minutes drafted by Dakota Casserly



# St. Lawrence County Environmental Management Council Environment + Economy Committee Meeting Monday, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## *Purpose of the Environment + Economy Committee.*

- To explore the relationship and interactions of the environmental resources of St. Lawrence County with the local and regional economy.
  - To reach out to individuals, business, and organizations involved in the use of natural resources in an economic capacity and to learn from these individuals and organizations about the challenges and opportunities in their endeavors.
  - To act as the interface between business, residents, and lawmakers of St. Lawrence County with regards to the role of natural resources in the economy, with an emphasis on sustainable use.
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**Meeting started** at 5:00 PM. **Present:** Ryan Burkum, Chair; Tiernan Smith; Rod Tozzi; Brian Washburn.

Staff: D. Casserly and J. Tenbusch.

**Report of Last Meeting.** The Committee briefly discussed the January meeting report. Tozzi expressed his frustration with contacting sources via email. He recently contact the USGS Tunison Laboratory of Aquatic Science (TLAS) in Cortland, NY and has not received a response. This Lab is part of the USGS Great Lakes Science Center. Burkum suggested he use other Committee members to help with this. Smith added that he will contact his sources at TLAS.

**Priority Projects for 2021.** Our current project is gathering information on fish bypass/ladders for Grasse and Oswegatchie River dams.

Brain Washburn, an EMC member, was present to discuss two reports that he authored on the Madrid dam. The detailed reports focus on a proposed fish bypass, dam removal, salmon, native fish species, and impacts to the upstream Grass River fishery. [The reports are accessible in Google Drive.](#) Highlights from the discussion:

- Washburn questioned whether or not the Grasse River Watershed can support native Atlantic salmon. He also expressed concern about non-native species.
- Smith talked about the 5 year post study on Hogansburg dam removal and it is unclear if Atlantic salmon are returning to spawn.
- The mouth of the Grasse River is downriver from two St. Lawrence Seaway locks and St. Lawrence River dams. This results in separation from the Lake Ontario fishery. Whereas, the Oswegatchie River is not.
- Burkum stated that the DEC does not believe that salmon can survive in the Oswegatchie and Grasse Rivers. In neighboring rivers, salmon are stocked for sport fishing. Also, invasive species are a concern with regards Madrid dam options.
- The Madrid dam is owned by the Town of Madrid.

**Speakers for EMC.**

- Fish Ladders: A DEC representative is speaking at the upcoming EMC meeting.
- Maple Industry: Gavin McKeller, Mack Maple Supply (Burkum will coordinate for May or June)
- Casserly will follow IDA developments and report this to the Committee.
- Tozzi is interested in what environmental topics the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe considers important.

**Public Service Announcements:** The Committee is planning on issuing one for the fish ladder/bypass project.

The meeting adjourned at 6:20PM.

Next meeting: March 8, 2021.