

# Lake Champlain Federal Partners Meeting Minutes August 30, 2005

Edited by: Erik H. Beck, US EPA      Written by: Dave Tilton, USFWS

July 12, 2006

## **Abstract**

This regularly scheduled (quarterly) meeting was held on August 30, 2005 at the offices of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 356 Mountain View Drive, Colchester, Vermont, and by Conference Call bridge provided by EPA New England.

## **Attendees:**

- Erik Beck, Chair, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Dave Tilton, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Brian Mrazik, U.S. Geological Survey, VT/NH District
- Bill Howland, Lake Champlain Basin Program (by phone)
- Dave Hoyt, U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Beckett Grealish, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (by phone)
- Jenifer Thalhauser, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (by phone)
- Jason Shea, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (by phone)
- Jurij Homziak, Lake Champlain Sea Grant Program
- Keith Robinson, U.S. Geological Survey
- Tom Berry, Office of Senator James Jeffords
- Bob Paquin, Office of Senator Patrick Leahy
- Rob Hoelscher, U.S. Forest Service

## Discussion Summary

### May 17 Minutes

With discussion and corrections, the workgroup members approved the May 17, 2005 minutes.

### Membership:

Members welcomed Rob Hoelscher as the U.S. Forest Services representative. Jurij Homziak indicated he plans to contact the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrations Air Resources Lab to see if there is an interest in participating, given the importance of airborne pollutants, especially mercury, in the Lake Champlain Basin Federal Partners Workgroup.

### Current issues:

Erik Beck announced that, after a great deal of discussion and investigation, the Lake Champlain Basin Program grant is now considered exempt from EPA's competition policy, which ordinarily requires an evaluation of competing bids for such programs. Language in the Senate Appropriations Conference Report calls for a continuation of prior practice with regard to the Lake Champlain grant. Discussions over the last several weeks illustrated the complexity and impracticality of compliance with the competition policy for programs such as the Basin Program.

Bill Howland reported on a successful roll-out of the Basin Programs State-of-the-Lake report, and the upcoming schedule of Executive Committee and Steering Committee meetings. The Chairmanship of the Executive Committee will switch from Stewart Buchanan, NYDEC, to Canute Dalmasse, VTANR, at the Committees next meeting.

Bob Paquin indicated that the developing relationship between the International Joint Commission and the Basin Program, and an earmark on the I.J.C. budget for phosphorus work in Lake Champlain, offer new opportunities to advance the Basin Programs phosphorus reduction goals. Administrators and policy makers in Quebec and Vermont will need to provide a "Letter of Reference" to meet I.J.C.s administrative requirements for funding.

Jenifer Thalhauser described a new initiative in the Army Corps North Atlantic Division to enhance communication and sharing of ideas and goals with The Nature Conservancy. The Corps has invited The Nature Conservancy to serve as a reviewer of plans and projects, such as those under the Lake Champlain General Management Plan. Work Group participants discussed the need to ensure any new review requirements avoid causing significant delays or new complications in implementing the Corps Lake Champlain watershed initiative. Otherwise TNC is a welcome source of funding and expertise to help accomplish Basin Program goals.

## **Agency updates:**

### **SeaGrant**

Jurij Homziak announced that Lake Champlain Sea Grant has issued a Request for Proposals for applied research that supports the improved understanding, use, and management of Lake Champlain, Lake George, the Basins inland waters, and the Great Lakes in general. The research must answer clearly identified needs, and the results must directly contribute to the resolution of important lake and watershed management issues. The research must support improved management, better understanding and sustainable use of coastal and aquatic resources in the basin.

Jurij also announced that Lake Champlain Sea Grant has hired Emma-Lynn Melvin, a Water Quality Educator to be based at UVM. Ms. Melvin will provide training and support to municipal officials. She will be conducting a session at the upcoming, annual Municipal Officers Management Seminars for Vermont municipal officials.

### **USDA NRCS**

Dave Hoyt said public hearings will be scheduled in Vermont in the next few weeks to provide information on USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Conservation Security Program. The 2006 selected CSP Watershed is the Hudson Hoosic subwatersheds in south western Vermont. NRCS in Vermont has obligated over \$13,000,000 in financial and technical assistance funds in 2005 for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Grasslands Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Conservation Security Program, Agriculture Management Assistance Program and Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, which supports conservation easements in cooperation with Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and various local land trusts. NRCS has worked with the VT Agency of Agriculture to leverage over \$4,000,000 in State funding for the EQIP, AMA and FRPP financial assistance and easement matching funds.

### **USFWS**

Dave Tilton summarized alewife findings from surveys conducted in 2005 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. One adult and three young of the year alewives were collected in dispersed areas in Lake Champlain, suggesting that an invasion of the Lake by this species cannot be avoided. Dave said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also discovered a previously unknown population of sea lampreys in the Lamoille River. This population could potentially be an important producer of parasitic lampreys affecting fisheries in Lake Champlain. Since the Lamoille River was not known as a lamprey producer, management options were not included in the 2000 environmental impact statement. Therefore, any significant Federal involvement in controlling this population may require preparation of

an environmental assessment under the National Environmental Quality Act. Dave also noted that the Services report on sea lamprey barrier options for Morpion Stream in Quebec is under review by the Basin Programs Technical Advisory Committee.

### **USGS**

Brian Mrazik announced a new study by U.S. Geological Survey, which will include data on conductivity and water chemistry in Alder Brook, Mill Brook and Allen Brook in the Lake Champlain watershed to identify the impacts of road salt on tributary water quality. U.S.G.S. work in 2005 includes the operation of gaging stations in the Lake Champlain watershed, a study of the effectiveness of best management practices in an urban setting on Englesby Brook, and a study of mercury cycling in several tributaries.

### **USDA FS**

Rob Hoelscher indicated the U.S. Forest Service recently released its current Green Mountain National Forest Plan Revision for public comment, and approximately 10,000 comment letters were received. Provisions for off-road vehicles, Wilderness designation, and timber management were the subjects addressed most commonly in the comment letters. Rob also indicated the Forest Service has had an active program over the summer of fish passage improvement, including correcting impediments caused by culverts, stream restoration using large woody debris and other tools, forest assessments and wetland delineations.

### **ACOE**

Jenifer Thalhauser stated planning is underway on six U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects under the Corps watershed restoration initiative. The projects in New York include urban runoff control in the village of Lake George, investigation of phosphorus removal options at the water treatment plant in Plattsburgh, and river restoration at the Rivermeade project in Keene. The projects in Vermont include river restoration on Tyler Branch near Montgomery, improvement of stormwater outflows on Stevens Brook in Saint Albans, and restoration and stabilization of Potash Brook in South Burlington. A new RFP will likely be issued once the Army Corps' 2006 funding is finalized.

### **Legislative Branch**

Bob Paquin of Senator Leahy's Office noted that Congressional appropriations supported by Vermonts Senate delegation helped secure the Environmental Protection Agency 2006 budget for the Lake Champlain Basin Program at a relatively early date, which provides a better opportunity for early planning than

has been available in recent years. Bob also described fiscal year 2006 appropriations that have either been signed into law or are still pending for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Lake Champlain Research Consortium, aquatic nuisance species control, the Lake Champlain watershed initiative, and work on Waterbury Dam by the Corps of Engineers, cormorant control and research by U.S.D.A. Wildlife Services, sea lamprey control through the Great Lakes Fishery Commission/Lake Champlain Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative, construction of the Missisquoi Bay Bridge, and support of phosphorus goals by the International Joint Commission.

Tom Berry of Senator Jeffords' Office announced that appropriations supported by Vermonts Senate delegation will fund endangered species habitat restoration through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Tom also noted that a pending appropriation for refurbishment of Route 78 through Swanton, Vermont, includes additional funding for wildlife passage. Additional pending appropriations will support a new Transportation Institute at the University of Vermont, and significant transportation improvements and a local roads stormwater initiative through the Federal Highway Administration.

Tom also announced that the Lake Champlain Heritage Partnership Act has passed in the U.S. Senate. If enacted into law, this bill would provide authorization for the National Park Service to bring its cultural heritage expertise and funding to the Lake Champlain Basin.

### **Ideas for collaborative projects:**

Brian Mrazik and Keith Robinson introduced four concept proposals for potential collaboration among the agencies on the Work Group. *Reconnaissance of emerging contaminants in the Lake Champlain Basin* would involve monitoring a selected number of stream and Lake sites for a large number of emerging contaminants. *Phosphorus trend analysis and interpretation in the Lake Champlain Basin* would assimilate data that help explain phosphorus trends, and provide an updated phosphorus trend analysis for tributaries and in-Lake stations. *Mercury and methylmercury in Lake Champlain and the near-shore environment* would sample at 15 in-Lake sites to characterize the spatial and seasonal variability of Hg and MeHg, and collect and incubate sediments from wetland and near-shore areas to evaluate methylation. *Enhanced sampling in the Englesby Brook watershed to evaluate BMP effects* would sample mercury, methylmercury, nitrogen, phosphorus and suspended sediment concentrations associated with a planned wet extended detention facility in the Shelburne Road corridor.

Dave Tilton suggested a *Lake Champlain tributary barrier assessment*. This project would produce a comprehensive inventory and prioritization of major impediments to fish passage, collecting data describing dams and other man-made barriers on one or more Lake Champlain tributaries. Data on location, ownership, hazard/public safety issues, ecological significance, cultural and economic significance, recreational value and regulatory issues would be collected to determine feasibility and priority of taking actions toward removing

or providing passage around the barrier.

**Action item:**

Project proponents will develop further details at the next meeting on how the suggested projects could be funded and/or carried out as a collaborative effort. In preparation for the meeting, each agency representative is asked to consider whether and how the representatives agency might be able to contribute toward the collaborative effort.

**Federal Work Group publication:**

The Work Group discussed and approved a draft signature page for New Yorks and Vermonts Senate delegations for “Opportunities for Federal Action: Federal activities implementing Opportunities for Action”, with minor corrections. Copies of the document for distribution are expected to be made available in the next few weeks.

**Next Meeting:**

November 30, 2005 Wednesday, 1:00-3:00 PM. Location: USDA NRCS, 356 Mountain View Drive, Colchester, VT.

An opportunity to teleconference will be arranged for those who need it.