



February 15, 2017

Sheepscot Lake Association
c/o Gary Miller
425 Lakeview Dr.
Hampstead, NC 28443

Dear Mr. Miller:

Thank you for your recent memo outlining the Sheepscot Lake Association's (SLA) concerns with opening the fishway into Sheepscot Pond. To be clear, the purpose of our call back in November was to let you know about our efforts to improve the fisheries of the Sheepscot, to explain the importance of Sheepscot Pond to diadromous fish such as alewives, and to state our sincere belief that re-opening the fishway that is currently closed from May 1-June 15 would have no harm to the hatchery or to Sheepscot Pond.

Over the next several years, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the Nature Conservancy, and the Midcoast Conservancy will be investing several million dollars in the Sheepscot to improve river habitat for migratory fisheries. This work will also benefit resident fisheries in the watershed. Since the Sheepscot River extends beyond your pond and since Sheepscot Pond is also by far the largest pond in the watershed the closing of the fishway to keep native fish out of their historic spawning habitat seems to warrant further understanding.

As I mentioned, the Atlantic Salmon Federation has a proven track record across Maine working collaboratively with local communities, select boards, lake associations, fisheries agencies, dam owners, sporting groups, and many other stakeholders working on fish passage projects. We have many references from lake associations and local communities I would urge your board to take us up on this offer to provide references.

Our approach is always to listen and address local concerns. We bring in the best scientific and engineering expertise available to look at each situation as they are all unique in some fashion. We believe that transparency (thus our call) and providing the resources people need to make informed decisions leads to the best outcomes for everyone.

As we offered on the call, we would appreciate the opportunity to attend your annual meeting this summer and we would like to ask your help in co-hosting or helping to get the word out for a meeting of home/camp owners around Sheepscot Pond to voice concerns and provide information. We would ask representatives from Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW) and the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) to attend and we could also bring in representatives from other towns/lake associations that can offer their perspectives.



In the meantime, we would like to respectively address the four points in your letter to make your board aware of information that folks around the pond might find helpful. I ask that you consider sharing this letter with members of SLA.

1) The impact on the Fish Rearing Station, including but not limited to:

a. Potential pathogens being brought into the lake by the migratory fish

b. Possible interference with the two intake pipes which supply the fish hatchery

Pathogens: Certainly the bio-security of any hatchery is a top priority. It is our understanding that after being open without incidence of disease until 1980, the fishway was closed just during the May 1 – June 15th migration season to keep out alewives (river herring). This was due to concern that alewives might bring in a pathogen from the marine environment that could then get into the hatchery and kill the trout. This fear was based on the fact that pathogens, particularly a liver disease, had been documented in landlocked alewives in the Great Lakes. That is correct but landlocked alewives in the Great Lakes are not comparable to sea-run alewives on the East coast. The US Fish and Wildlife Lamar Fish Health Facility in Pennsylvania has tested over 5,000 samples of river herring and shad from Maryland to Maine from 1997-2016 and not one has tested positive for a suite of 20 or so pathogens they test for. Maine has 12 species of native migratory fish and there is no track record of these fish somehow bringing in diseases from the ocean.

Alewives are a native fish to Maine and range from Georgia up through Quebec. They were once extremely abundant and are ecologically important to all freshwater river systems on the east coast. They are now at 1% of their historic abundance on the East Coast but still do well in Maine where they have access to their historic habitat. Through our work in New England and Canada we are aware of freshwater hatcheries in watersheds with alewives and are not aware of any problems with these hatcheries. We have also inquired about any alewife issues with representatives from the States of Connecticut, New York, New Hampshire, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Nova Scotia and we have not found one instance of any issue associated with sea-run alewives now or in the past. Historically, due to its size, Sheepscot Pond was the big producer of alewives in the watershed. The watershed still supports a small run that spawn in Long Pond below the hatchery and we are aware from IFW staff and the local alewife harvesters that alewives are present each year below the Sheepscot Pond Dam.

However, we are also aware that Inland Fisheries and Wildlife still has concerns with pathogens getting into the hatchery. It is our understanding that IFW and DMR are convening a meeting of an Aquatic Animal Health Technical Committee made up of state and federal fish health experts on the East Coast. This committee will be looking at what risks, if any, migratory fish pose to Sheepscot Pond and the hatchery. We look forward to hearing the results of their assessment.

Intake Pipes: Due to our history of working with dams in rivers and on pond/lake outlets, we have extensive construction experience with intake pipes related to hatcheries, industrial plants, wastewater treatment facilities, and even fire hydrant intakes. We employ qualified engineering firms in Maine such as Wright-Pierce, Kleinschmidt Associates, and Sewall Engineering to assist us in this



work. We have spoken to these engineers who have confirmed that screening intake pipes is common and feasible though would require a study and design. We have offered to pay for an engineering study and design for the intake opening to IF&W if that is deemed warranted. We have also offered to pay for the actual installation of a new intake opening that is screened.

(2) Reintroduction of parasitic sea lampreys into the lake with no natural predators present to create a natural check and balance with this species. Sea lampreys could potentially decimate the current self-sustaining species of togue, thousands of stocked brown trout and other sport fish.

This is another example where the biologists know a lot more today than they did 30 years ago. The poor reputation sea lampreys had is largely gone on the East Coast. Aside from their scary looks and feel, their reputation came again from the Great Lakes where there are landlocked populations of sea-lampreys that have had a detrimental impact on sportfish. It is not a good situation but it is also not comparable at all to our situation on the East Coast. Landlocked lampreys are not native to the Great Lakes but they are native to Maine and our native species have plenty of checks and balances. Sea lampreys on the east coast like most of our migratory species have a very wide range and are abundant well north into Canada. In the spring, the adults come in from the ocean, spawn, and die. The juveniles stay in freshwater for a period of time before leaving for the marine environment for the majority of their life cycle. We now have decades of experience along the east coast US and Canada that has proven this native species does no harm to sport fish. The alewife harvesters at Coopers Mills see lampreys most days when they are harvesting alewives. They have caused no problems in Long Pond despite being there for hundreds of years.

A more detailed explanation than I can provide is found in the 2004 Sheepscot River sea lamprey report written by Fred Kirchies. Fred worked the majority of his career for IFW. This report details the complex life history of the lampreys. Fred also has done research on alewives and he would be an excellent person to come talk to the Sheepscot Pond Association this summer.

(3) Historical precedent of a much lowered lake level when the Palermo fishway was open during the 1960's. An in-depth impact study to define lakefront topography changes and boating/recreation restrictions imposed by that water level change does not exist and is a requisite before any increased flows are attempted.

The biggest concern we hear in first working with home/camp owners at any pond in Maine is that they do not want their lake levels altered. We take that very seriously. We work closely with engineers and lake associations to guarantee that will not happen. Though we are obviously not proposing to construct a fishway, an example of our process might help address this issue. When we first start working with a lake association we typically spend a season recording lake elevations around the lake and talking to camp owners and the board about desired lake levels. The desired elevation is then agreed to by the association and any fishway is designed to maintain that elevation. At every fishway we construct, we have a signed operations plan between the state and the association that spell out how the fishway/water control gates will be managed and what the lake



elevation will be. We have found in every circumstance that the lake/camp associations come away with far greater certainty and comfort on what their water levels will be than before we came along. I can provide you board example operation plans that specifically address lake elevations. I do not see why ASF could not help plan/conduct a lake level study for your association in 2017.

Lastly, it appears the remnant fishway that is still there from the 1960's was far larger and let out significantly more flow than the Alaskan Steepass there now but that would need to be verified. We build a lot of Alaskan Steepass fishways and they typically pass about 6 cubic feet of water per second (CFS) during the spring migration season when ponds typically are higher to begin with. The 6cfs outflow in the spring on a 1200 acre pond is small amount water. The fishway operation plans I referred to above typically call for these fishways to be closed completely in July and August, particularly for smaller ponds so as not to affect water levels.

(4) Given the above, a seriously negative impact on lakeside property values could occur impacting both properly owners and Palermo residents as the tax base could possibly shrink.

That's a scary statement to make to property owners and the town. However, I respectfully say there is absolutely no reason why water levels would change under any management scenario that would be contemplated at Sheepscot Pond. It is also not representative of hundreds of situations here in Maine today and would not be allowed by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. One can always find a worst case scenario like Clary Lake but that is a legal dispute between a private dam owner and regulatory agencies and has nothing to do with fish passage or the situation at Sheepscot Pond.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I urge the Sheepscot Pond Association to be open to all available information and expertise. I hope we can find some dates for some informational meetings this summer where property owners can raise questions and we can provide people and resources for a productive dialog.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Goode'.

Andrew Goode
Vice President, US Programs
Atlantic Salmon Federation

CC: Palermo Select Board
Maine IFW

Atlantic Salmon Federation



Fédération du Saumon Atlantique

Maine DMR
Midcoast Conservancy

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