ALLAGASH WILDERNESS WATERWAY ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
June 16, 2017, 9:00 am – 12:00 noon
Cross State Office Building, RM 214, Augusta, Maine

Council Members Present: Dave Allen, Dave Basley, Brent Hardy, Chair, and Melford Pelletier

Others Present: Tom Desjardin and Cindy Bastey (Bureau of Parks & Lands [BPL]); Matt LaRoche, (BPL/Allagash Waterway); Peter Bourque (Fisherman); Dick Barringer (AWW Foundation); Camille Denico (Vassalboro/Lock Dam Preservation); Ed Cullivan (Vassalboro/Lock Dam Preservation)

Welcome & Introductions
Chair Brent Hardy opened the meeting and asked Council members and others attending to introduce themselves.

1. Review of Minutes of the March 17, 2016 meeting
The Chair asked for any comments or questions on the minutes of the last meeting. Melford moved the minutes be approved as written, and Dave Allen seconded. Council approval was unanimous.

2. Fish Study Report – Dave Basley
Dave reported the results of recent of IF&W fish surveys and on longer term analyses of the brook trout sport fishery in Big Eagle and Churchill Lakes. Results were previously shared with AWW staff that helped with the surveys. A transcription of the information Dave presented is attached. (Scribe’s note: the handout from the meeting did not convert accurately to a pdf, so we transcribed the material as accurately as possible.) Discussion at the meeting about the information is summarized below.

IF&W fisheries biologists are considering regulation changes for Big Eagle Lake and Churchill Lake to weed out the smaller trout: an increase in the catch limit to 5 fish with a minimum length of 6”, only one may exceed 14”. They are also considering a change for the Allagash River from Churchill Dam downstream to the confluence of Chisolm Brook to allow a harvest of smaller trout: maintain the daily bag limit of 2 fish with a minimum length limit of 6”, only 1 may exceed 14”. Any rule change would be proposed for public review in the 2018 season.

Matt inquired about the process for adopting a rule change. Dave indicated that a proposal would be reviewed by the IF&W Advisory Council, circulated for public comment, and then a final recommendation would be made by the Council.

Ed asked what imbalance the new regulations would address. Dave said there are too many young fish competing for food and space, which keeps their size down. The increase in catch limit may attract more anglers. A number of people commented on the decline in groups of older open water fishermen and in the amount of ice fishing in the winter, evidenced by fewer snowmobiles and ice fishing shacks. Peter noted that it wasn’t always easy to tease out what people were fishing for. Years ago people weren’t fishing for trout; they were fishing for togue and white fish.

3. Update on Boarding House Nomination to the National Register - Tom Desjardin
Tom reported that he had forwarded all material relevant to the Boarding House to Mike Goebel-Bain at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC). Mike indicated that he needs more detailed photos to determine if the fabric of the structure is sufficiently intact to qualify the building for a National Register nomination. Tom hopes to take Mike to the Boarding House to get these photos. Tom believes there is a lot still left of the Boarding House, and it is the only extant building from the village at Churchill, other than the storehouse. Mike will document what he finds and decide whether to propose a National Register nomination to the Maine Commission. Once the Commission approves a nomination, it should clear the Park Service in about 2 months. Brent asked if the Chilcoat assessment will be included
in the material submitted to MHPC, as it both addressed the fabric of the building, and found this Boarding House to be the only one of its kind, given the modifications made to similar structures.

4. **Long Range Interpretive Plan – Dick Barringer, AWW Foundation**

Dick Barringer reported that the AWW Foundation (AWWF) had secured the funds needed to complete the Historic Resource Assessment and Interpretive Plan for the AWW. These include an MOHF grant and private donations. Bruce Jacobson, who prepared the historic assessment, will also lead the interpretive planning effort. At this point in time, the AWWF expects to see a draft document in November 2017 and a completed plan in January 2018. Bruce expects begin his work in mid-July and encourages people to submit any additional ideas to him. There will be two groups advising Bruce: a small, core group with management and operations experience and a larger group that will review draft documents and suggest changes. Participants in the larger group will likely include representatives of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Historic Preservation, State Museum, University of Maine, Wabanaki Nations and area landowners.

The purpose of the plan is to enhance the management of the Waterway by providing guidance on interpreting the historic and natural resources of the Waterway using a variety of media and programs, including resources for Maine K-12 schools.

5. **Operations & Maintenance Review – Matt LaRoche**

**Water levels:**
- The ice ran on the Allagash River on April 11th and went out of the AWW headwater lakes by May 4th.
- We had a cool rainy spring which was good for water levels but not so good for camping.
- Water levels:
  - Telos Dam – ran at or near 2000 cfs for a month this spring (that is all 4 gates open).
  - Churchill Dam – ran between 2000 – 3000 cfs for 5 weeks this spring.
  - We just started our summer routine of opening the dam at Churchill in the morning to 500 cfs and reducing the flow to 225 at noon.
  - Telos – is currently running at 400 cfs – good canoe and fishing flow.

**Fishing:**
- The spring fishing has been very good with a few 20+ inch brook trout being caught in May.
- Allagash Lake was very fast fishing this spring, but not big fish.
- There seems to be plenty of trout in the 14” – 16” range.
- Dave Basely is going to talk about the pending fishing rule changes.

**Personnel:**
- Chris Silsbee took a promotion on April 1st. He is now the Park Manager II at Bradbury Mountain State Park. Chris was an outstanding ranger that got along well with everyone – he will be missed.
- We finally filled the year-round Allagash Ranger position on June 1st. Trevor O’Leary was selected to fill that position.
  - Trevor has been the seasonal ranger at Michaud Farm for 10 years.
  - He is the epitome of what you think of when you think of a ranger on the waterway.
  - He grew up in the Town of Allagash, went to Washington County VTI after graduating from high school.
  - He has worked winters in the forest products industry. He is very well respected by landowner representatives and the rest of the waterway crew.
  - Trevor will be spending the summer season at Michaud Farm and winters at Chamberlain Bridge.
  - Jay Young who was formally at Allagash Lake in the summer and Chamberlain for most of the winter is moving to Chamberlain Bridge as the 45-week seasonal ranger.

**Public use:**
- We have not received the May public use from NM Woods yet. I will let you all know what that use was by email after I receive it.
  - Spring fishing use has increased substantially over the last two years; I expect that trend to continue.
  - Our parking lots were nearly full this spring at Churchill and Chamberlain with trucks and trailers.
Projects:
• The new campsite on the south end of Eagle Lake, called Breezy Point is finished (Eagle Scout Project).
• One of the PVC tubes that help keep water out of the gear boxes on the deep gate at Churchill was damaged last winter. Both tubes have been replaced with tubes that telescope together.
• Two bedrooms at AWW Headquarters have been spackled and painted.
• A new pine v-match ceiling has been installed in the office at Chamberlain Bridge.
• Winter damaged solar panels have been replaced at Churchill Dam and Chamberlain (five panels).
• Eight new 6 volt batteries were brought into Michaud Farm and hooked-up to the solar power system.
• Four new 12 volt batteries were brought into the Allagash Lake Ranger Station and hooked-up to the solar power system.
• AWW staff and volunteers reinstalled the original smoke stack on one of the locomotives and original front boiler door on the other locomotive. Ed Cullivan’s parts of the train were reinstalled.
• The waterway received a MOHF grant for 2/3 funding ($8,000) for one new snowmobile. (I had asked for $16,000 for two snowmobiles). I was encouraged to reapply for the other snowmobile at the next round in the fall.
• Since the ice has gone out and seasonal staff has returned to work the focus has been making campsites, access roads, water access sites, and buildings safe, clean, and repaired for the public.

Situations:
• 1 – Death by heart attack at Nugent’s camps. Jay assisted EMT’s to the scene and transported body. (Waterway loaned Nugent’s an emergency radio for the winter.)
• 2 – Attempts to locate:
  o Medical emergency at home, Jay notified the person and assisted the group out of Allagash Lake.
  o Two young ladies from Unity College failed to return from a trip to the trains in April – Jay found them and pulled them out of the ditch.
• Snowmobile thru the ice at Webster Lake, which Chris Silsbee assisted with.
• At our March meeting, I told you about a possible “test case” at Allagash Lake: a disabled vet drove his snowmobile on the lake and used a power auger. He pleaded guilty and paid a $100.00 fine.

Other:
• Have hired an engineer for the Lock Dam improvements. Steve Rule will be at the dam on July 7 to discuss water flow issues with IF&W.
• Cam Denico asked when the trail to the trains would be completed. Matt explained that Public Lands will be building the trail, but an exact path has not been finalized. Brent noted he doesn’t want a snowmobile trail to the trains.

6. Additional Items

Access:
• Peter Bourque inquired about the boat launch dates at John’s Bridge. Matt said launching at John’s Bridge is allowed in May and September. Peter noted that an additional 15 days in June might increase fishing use.
• Dave Allen suggested that if access was to be changed, it should be changed to expand access for hunting and fishing: up to June 15 in the spring and including October and November in the fall. There was debate as to whether such changes required amending the rules or the statutes. Tom Desjardin suggested amendment of the statute (12 MRSA §1882) would be required.
• Brent asked if one could land an aircraft on Webster Lake and stay there to fish. Matt noted that the purpose of landing a plane on the watercourse is to offload people and dunnage. Brent feels that landing and fishing should be allowed because Webster Lake is outside of the watercourse, even if it is in the waterway (mile zone). Tom noted that Webster Lake is below Telos, not where the majority of Allagash visitors go. Matt may have some discretion in applying the rule here.
Lock Dam Camp:
- Ed Cullivan has offered the volunteer services of the Lock Dam nonprofit group to make repairs to the camp at the dam and would like to hear from Matt. He feels the camp is worth saving. Matt noted that the camp came with the dam when it was acquired and now belongs to BPL. He has used it occasionally to house staff and volunteers and has had people ask to stay in the camp. He currently has an agreement for a party to stay and work on waterway maintenance needs. Matt finds the camp hard to maintain and doesn’t want to turn it into a rental-type camp. The building has its own history as a place for writers, which he has discussed with Bruce Jacobsen.
- Dave Basley favors keeping the camp. He thought it might be useful to IFW staff doing night work in November for white fish studies on Martin Stream. Matt encouraged IFW to make that request.
- Brent would like to keep and improve the camp. He noted the valuable offer of assistance from the Lock Dam group and feels the group is underutilized, particularly with the expertise of Charlie Cianchette and Dave Flanagan within the membership. He feels this group really wants to work with waterway staff.

Lock Dam Repairs:
Matt reported that the Bureau has decided to keep the dam where it is and permit the work to be done as a replacement, rather than a new dam. They will try to sink the control station so that it is not visible. An engineer will be needed to develop the plan.

Melford thanked Matt for making conditions workable for volunteers.
Churchill Dam Fishway Trapping-Maine Dept. Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

(Any use of the below information should be credited to "Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, unpublished data")

The Churchill Dam fishway was trapped in 2016 to examine fishes moving upstream into Churchill Lake. A large number of trout (N=440) were trapped and released upstream into Churchill Lake between May 2 - July 26. The vast majority of these trout were less than 12 inches (see figure). The trout greater than about 12 inches were judged to be fish that had spawned the previous fall, spent the winter in the River or Umsaskis Lake, and were emigrating back to Churchill Lake. The total catch compares favorably with that in 2001 (N=404) and in 2002 (N=239) over the same time period and suggests the population is very robust at this time.
Trapnetting, Big Eagle and Churchill Lakes

During 2016, Region G staff worked at Churchill Dam and Big Eagle and Churchill Lakes trapnetting which was then followed up by an intensive winter creel survey in 2017. Trapnetting surveys were carried out on both lakes with the objectives of 1) obtaining population estimates, 2) obtaining scale samples for age and growth comparisons, and 3) ascertaining general movement among all three waters over a period of approximately seven months.

The table below outlines the brook trout sampled and later recaptured during 2016. Lake specific recaptures were used to estimate population size at Big Eagle and Churchill Lakes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brook trout sampled and recaptured at Churchill Dam fishway, Big Eagle Lake trapnets, and Churchill Lake trapnets, 2016</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#Trout Caught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishway trout recaptured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Eagle trout recaptured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churchill trout recaptured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population estimate &gt;6 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population estimate &gt;12 inches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- More than 1,300 trout were sampled in 2016 among the two lakes and the Allagash River at Churchill Dam.
- Only 10 of the 440 trout marked and released at Churchill Dam were later observed in trapnets upstream at Churchill and Big Eagle Lakes; these 10 trout were evenly split between the two lakes.
- There was fall-time movement of marked trout between the two lakes. Six trout marked at Big Eagle were later recaptured in Churchill trapnets; seven trout marked at Churchill Lake were later recaptured at Big Eagle Lake. Most of the recaptured trout in trapnetting surveys originated from the lake in which they were initially marked.
- Churchill Lake supports a large population of trout that are just sublegal (<12 in); the population estimate for trout 10-12 inches was 1,025 fish just for this size range.
- Recent fishway caught trout that had been marked at the fishway in 2016 and later caught in Churchill Lake in a fall trapnet.
Figure- Comparison of Big Eagle and Churchill Lake age (x axis) and size (mm; y axis) of brook trout collected in trapnets, 2016, showing similar sizes for age 2 and 3 trout but a significant difference in age 4 fish. Data are based on scale reading of 59 fish from Churchill Lake and 43 fish from Big Eagle Lake.
Brook Trout Sport Fishery

Results from the winter 2017 creel survey at Big Eagle and Churchill Lakes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Big Eagle Lake</th>
<th>Churchill Lake</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of anglers</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>2,333</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brook trout kept &gt;12&quot;</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brook trout released &gt;12&quot;</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brook trout sublegal &lt;12&quot;</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours to catch a legal trout</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total angler use, days</td>
<td>641 (+/-140)</td>
<td>86 (+/-33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total trout harvest</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
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Big Eagle Lake is one of the large lakes at the headwaters of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway and has become well known for its robust brook trout population in recent years. Sport fishery and population data has been collected on the wild brook trout population here back to the late 1960s. This large dataset that spans 50 years documents a highly successful fishery management program for brook trout.

The brook trout sport fishery in the winter months has been extensively surveyed. Beginning in 1969 to the present 2017 season, Maine IF&W has carried out 22 intensive winter creel surveys. Based on these surveys there have been three distinct time periods with respect to brook trout regulations and the concomitant sport fishery.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Eagle Lake use levels, brook trout regulations, and fishery characteristics for the time period 1969-2017</th>
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<tr>
<td>A time when fishing use levels were moderate (700-1,200 angler days per season)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bag limits varied from 3-8 fish with a length limit of 6 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catch rates varied 15-79 hours to catch a legal (6 in) brook trout; generally, catch rates were 16-20 hours per legal trout.</td>
</tr>
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Brook Trout Harvest and Growth Compensation

We have carried out 15 estimates of brook trout harvest using clerk creel surveys over the time period 1975-2017. These estimates clearly show the increasing trout production over time that was outlined in the Sport Fishery discussion above. Special regulations implemented in the mid-1980s (2 fish bag limit, 12 inch minimum length) allowed the brook trout population to increase to a much higher level than seen in the 1970s. With protection afforded to female trout to spawn at least once, recruitment of young brook trout increased to a point where Big Eagle Lake is now supporting a much larger population of mature fish.

Based on the brook trout harvests between 1997-2007, a conservative minimum target harvest of 700 trout seems to be appropriate in balancing population level and brook trout growth. Fishing pressure after 2007 declined significantly resulting in just over 450 trout harvested in 2012. The catch rate of legal trout in that year is the highest on record. The ongoing survey of 2017 will likely be less than the 2012 harvest level. As a result, growth compensation has resulted in recent years and is most notable in the younger (age 2) and older (age 5) brook trout (see Figure). For example, average size of age 2 brook trout dropped from 12.2 to 9.0 inches from 1991 to 2016; in 2001 age 2 fish averaged 10.6 inches. For age 5 trout, average length dropped steadily from 1991 to 2016: 18.8 in (1991), 16.7 in (1996), 17.4 in (2001), and 15.4 in (2016). While catch rates have increased significantly over the years with an increasing population, number of larger trout is relatively low in years when the population is high - a downside to higher population and reduced harvests. In 2016 trapnet samples, no brook trout greater than 18 inches were sampled whereas this size group had been present in the four trapnetting events prior, 1991-2006.

Figure- Age (x axis) and size (mm; y axis) of brook trout collected in trapnets at Big Eagle Lake, 1991-2016, showing declining size of trout for each age class over a 25 year period.