

New York Citizens Advisory Committee (NYCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future

**Monday, February 28th, 2022
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm**

DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Committee Members Present: Vic Putman (Chair), Jackie Bowen, James C. Dawson, Steve Kramer, Ricky Laurin, Walt Lender, Tom Metz, Hannah Neilly, Fred Woodward

Committee Members Absent: Jane Gregware, Charlotte Staats, Bill Wellman

LCBP Staff: Jim Brangan, Katie Darr, Lauren Jenness, Colleen Hickey, Eric Howe, Meg Modley, Erin Vennie-Vollrath (NYS DEC), Matthew Vaughan

Presenters: Meg Modley, William Cooke (The Nature Conservancy), Eric Howe, Matthew Vaughan, Jim Brangan, Colleen Hickey

Public Guests: None

Meeting summary by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

1:00 – 1:15 pm

1. Welcome and Introductions – Vic Putman

2. Public Comments

No public comments.

1:15 – 1:45 pm

3. Round Goby Response Update– Meg Modley, William Cooke

Meg Modley, LCBP Aquatic Invasive Species Management Coordinator, discussed the aquatic invasive species currently present in Lake Champlain, the imminent threat of round goby, and provided an update on the status of the Champlain Canal Aquatic Invasive Species Barrier Feasibility Study. Her presentation is posted with the meeting materials.

Round Goby: The round goby is native to the Caspian and Black seas and is suspected to have made its way to the Great Lakes in ballast water in 1990. It spread to all the Great Lakes within 5 years. In July 2021, round goby was detected at the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. The LCBP Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response Task Force has been evaluating the risk of round goby introduction into Lake Champlain. Round gobies are aggressive egg eaters, there are concerns about them displacing our benthic species and they are likely to impact lake trout egg nests. They carry pathogens, including Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) which spurred the emergency baitfish regulations in the late 2000s. VHS can affect over 25 different species of fish and we do not want it in Lake Champlain. The task force is working with the U.S. Geological Survey to increase monitoring between the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson rivers at Cohoes and the Champlain Canal passage. The closer a viable population of round goby gets to the Champlain Canal, the higher the risk of an unintentional or intentional bait bucket introduction to Lake Champlain. LCBP is partnering with US Fish and Wildlife and NYSDEC to support an

Aquatic Invasive Species Outreach Specialist focused on the Champlain Canal corridor to conduct targeted outreach to anglers, communities, and other relevant stakeholders to increase awareness of the round goby, reduce the risk of overland transportation of round goby via bait bucket, and to inform groups about the impacts of the inter-basin transfer of AIS through the Champlain Canal. More information on the position is available [here](#).

- Vic noted that round goby has a suction plate under its belly designed to navigate fast water and cling onto substrate which helps it move upstream. [**Correction: Round goby do not have a suction plate. The pectoral fins of the round goby are fused, giving the appearance of a suction cup.**]

Champlain Canal Aquatic Invasive Species Barrier Feasibility Study: Partners have been working for the past 15 years to explore the need for hydrologic separation to prevent all taxa from moving between the Hudson and Lake Champlain watersheds. In 2017, NEIWPC/LCBP agreed to serve as a local sponsor and secured Section 542 USACE Assistance to initiate Phase I of the Champlain Canal Barrier Feasibility Study. The study targets the height of the canal between locks 8 and 9, upstream of the mouth of the Glens Falls Feeder Canal. Phase I of the study examined the physical, mechanical, and chemical separation of Lake Champlain from the Hudson River. The Phase I study includes three selected alternatives for constructing a berm south of Lock 9 and lifting boats up and over the berm with a decontamination procedure (alternative 2), and two options for lifting boats over Lock 9 with a decontamination process (smaller and larger boats) with the option to pass commercial traffic through the canal at lower risk times for aquatic invasive species spread (alternatives 4 and 5). Alternative 2 does not allow for future commercial use of the canal. There has been no commercial traffic in the canal for the last two or three years. Phase I of the study is complete and the report should be released soon. Phase II of the study includes data gathering and analysis, a NEPA process, and full design of the barrier. Phase III involves implementation of the barrier and is the long-term approach to prevent all taxa from moving between the Hudson and Lake Champlain watersheds. Round goby is a present challenge that needs to be addressed before the all-taxa approach can be implemented.

- Tom asked what will be done to prevent transporting eggs and larvae on the lift slings while vessels are being transferred. Meg clarified that all infrastructure that comes into contact with the water will be decontaminated with hot water and internal areas will be flushed. The lift slings themselves would be sprayed down as they move from one swing to another. If the slings are saturated with hot water, organisms impinged between the fabric and the vessel will be killed. That water will be collected in a barge and treated. The next phase of the study will go into further detail about the mechanics of the decontamination process.
- Tom suggested the study look into the lift system at Peterborough on the Trent-Severn Waterway. Boats are lifted and transported by a carriage. Meg noted that the study is familiar with that technology and they do not spray down the vessels for invasive species. She shared a video of the Peterborough lock lift ([here](#)). If there are more questions about the engineering component during the Phase II study, she can raise those questions with the US Army Corps of Engineers.
- Walt asked if round goby had been found upstream in the Hudson River. Meg shared they have not been found there yet. They did move through the Erie Canal and got into the Hudson River. Once they arrived in the canal system, it prompted concern for Lake Champlain. USGS will be sampling locations between the Champlain Canal and the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. Sampling will start this spring as soon as the ice is out.
- Vic asked if the Army Corps will conduct an environmental impact statement. Meg confirmed they will need to go through the entire NEPA assessment as part of Phase II.

- Tom asked if the remaining portions of the study or funding for the study will be impacted if round goby gets into Lake Champlain. Meg clarified that round goby is elevating the need for the Champlain Canal barrier which is an all taxa approach to preventing the spread of invasive species between the two watersheds. Stakeholders are evaluating the need for a stopgap measure to prevent round goby entrance into the Champlain Canal as the all-taxa hydrologic barrier may not be able to be implemented ahead of the round goby spread to Lake Champlain through the system.
- Tom asked if anyone was working on this issue in Quebec. Meg confirmed that they are working with the Quebec Ministry of the Environment to track round goby in the Richelieu River and early detection monitoring will be expanded into Quebec.

William Cooke, Policy Advisor with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), emphasized the imminent threat of round goby to Lake Champlain and asked members to contact the Governor to close one of the Champlain Canal locks and instead utilize a boatlift as a stopgap measure to keep round goby out of Lake Champlain until a more permanent solution can be implemented. He shared that the canal system has been a superhighway for aquatic invasive species. TNC scientists have shared that it is possible for round goby to get from the Hudson to Lake Champlain in one season. New York State needs to act to keep the canal system closed by May 20th to ensure we have more time to deal with round goby before it reaches Lake Champlain. Opening the canal system will facilitate round goby's introduction to Lake Champlain. Once they are introduced, there will be a significant decline in juvenile lake trout within the first 2-3 years of introduction and within 10 years, they will devastate the bass population. He added that New York State is in the process of violating its agreement with Vermont by not complying with the [Strategic Plan for Lake Champlain Fisheries](#). The potential for round goby introduction puts a \$300 million/year fishery at risk. TNC has spoken with the Canal Corp operators at lock 7 and, according to them, there were no commercial vessels and only 40 boats that went through the locks and returned last season. New York State is in a position to keep round goby out of Lake Champlain and protect a \$300 million/year fishery. If the canals open on May 20th to accommodate the 40 boats/year that travel through the locks, round goby could make it up the Hudson in just one season.

- Vic asked if there is something the State of Vermont could do and whether TNC is doing outreach to municipalities. William noted that TNC has asked Governor Scott's office to urge Governor Hochul to take action against round goby and Vermont DEC to reach out to NYSDEC. TNC has also reached out to Senator Leahy. TNC just got Essex County to write a resolution in support of closing one of the locks, they have reached out to chambers of commerce, marinas, other stakeholders, and have launched a media campaign to ask people to contact Governor Hochul in support of closing one of the locks to keep round goby out of the lake. Governor Hochul recently signed legislation to help prevent aquatic invasive species in Adirondack Park, round goby is where the rubber meets the road.
- Tom asked whether TNC had contact with Trout Unlimited. William confirmed they have been in contact with Trout Unlimited and Bass Nation.
- Erin shared that some bass anglers are interested in having round goby because they believe bass will eat them and they will end up with a larger catch. William shared that that is not accurate over the long term. Round goby feed on bass eggs and fry. Although adult bass will increase in size in the short term because they have an abundant, new food source available, the round gobies are eating the juveniles. Over 10-20 years, the round goby will wipe out the bass fishery.
- Erin added that another challenge is not knowing how quickly round goby will move upstream. William reiterated that scientists are telling us they can make the journey upstream in as little as

one season. We may have up to two years before round goby gets into Lake Champlain, but that is not a risk worth taking when there is potential for them to make it up in one season.

- Erin shared that education and outreach is an important component as well, as in other places where round goby have spread they have been moved in bait buckets. William agreed that education and outreach is important, but that is less pressing than closing a lock this year. If we do not succeed in closing one of the locks, there is little chance that round goby won't spread through the canal.
- Jackie noted it was interesting to hear that there has been no commercial traffic through the canals in the last 2-3 years, it is a persuasive point. The Adirondack Council will be producing an action alert on this. Is this something the CAC wants to take collective action on?
- William asked attendees to reach out to the governor in whatever capacity they can and ask their family and friends to do the same. New York State has until May 20th to protect the lake from round goby. New York can stop round goby from getting into Lake Champlain by not operating one of the locks that connect the Hudson River to Lake Champlain. We have the technology to lift boats around the lock. Until a permanent solution is in place, not operating the lock this season protects the lake and a \$300 million/year fishery at the minor inconvenience of 40 recreational boats.

1:45 – 2:45 pm

4. LCBP 2022 Opportunities for Action – LCBP Staff

Eric Howe, Director of the Lake Champlain Basin Program and Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership, introduced Opportunities for Action (OFA), the comprehensive management plan for the Lake Champlain Basin. The new draft includes feedback from the June 2021 Summit. It is organized by our four goals: clean water, healthy ecosystems, thriving communities, and informed and involved public. Each goal has a series of objectives, strategies, and tasks. It is important for LCBP to be comprehensive with this plan, if something is included in the plan we can fund and support it. If not, it is much harder for LCBP to support, especially with EPA funding.

Matthew Vaughan, Chief Scientist, reviewed the Clean Water Goal section. The black text is largely the same as the 2017 OFA, the red text is new ideas primarily from the June Summit.

- Vic noted that a river's job is to move sediment and asked whether the amount of sediment contributed per tributary is incorporated. Matt shared that the Lake Champlain Long-term Monitoring Program (LTMP) collects data on total suspended solids on all 22 major tributaries. That data combined with streamflow data can estimate sediment load per day back to 1990. More information can be found in [this report](#). In addition to that, we've been sampling since 1990, part of the expansion of the LTMP will include instruments equipped with turbidity samplers that will take measurements every 15 minutes. Vic added that total suspended solids don't cover substrate, which seems to be key in measuring water quality impacts as substrate is what increases water temperatures and fills up channels and creates deltas in the lake. Matt noted that studies that focus on substrate movement are possible, but they take several years and are expensive. Vic added that substrate movement informs erosion control practices upstream - if one tributary implements a hydroseeder, ditch programs, road salt monitoring improvement program, etc., we eventually can squeeze that out of the data.

Meg Modley, Aquatic Invasive Species Management Coordinator, reviewed the Healthy Ecosystems section of OFA. New objectives include climate change and evaluating ecosystem management programs and policies.

- Vic noted that sauger is not mentioned. Meg shared that with the continued success of water chestnut management, we are gaining sauger habitat back. She was not sure if sauger is covered under the species of greatest conservation need, but can bring that up with the relevant committees. Vic added that with climate change, he can foresee a possible reintroduction program. Meg shared that the fisheries management plan does target sauger and Steve Hurst is interested in a reintroduction program. She can ask again if that is something they want to highlight in OFA.
- Jim asked if endangered mussels are a concern. Meg will ask if we want to call out specific species in OFA. LCBP is currently funding research on mussels to maintain the diversity of the native mussel populations. Jim added this would have implications for the Sea Lamprey Management Program.

Jim Brangan, Cultural Heritage and Recreation Coordinator, reviewed the Thriving Communities section of OFA.

- Jim Dawson suggested keeping consistent formatting when referring to different groups of people and suggested naming the indigenous and new American communities referenced in III.C.1.c.
- Vic noted that there was no evaluation of census data in the presentation. There is some very interesting information from the Adirondack Park Association that shows only 55% of homes in the park are owned by residents which has serious implications for thriving communities. Residents support infrastructure, arts, and public services. It is interesting to see how that data equates to LCBP and our efforts to protect the lake. There is a significant part-time population that needs to be educated while they are here.

Colleen Hickey, Education and Outreach Coordinator, reviewed the Informed and Involved Public section of OFA.

- Jim noted there was a numbering issue in the task section.
- Jim asked if LCBP had discussed environmental education programs in higher education. Colleen noted that LCBP does a lot of work with the University of Vermont's Natural Resource courses through our Resource Room in Echo. LCBP also works with SUNY Plattsburgh through Lake Champlain Sea Grant and Curt Gervich. LCBP has also started working with Champlain College. Higher education entities have started to tap into our large education and outreach grant category, but that is usually to work with k-12 students.

Eric shared the remaining tasks and timeline for the release of OFA. It is on track for approval by the Steering Committee in April, then it will be sent for endorsement by EPA, New York, Vermont, and Quebec. There will be a public comment period coordinated with the CACs. OFA will be distributed in a digital format, a hardcopy summary document might be produced. LCBP is in the process of updating the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Vermont, New York, and Quebec, it is just waiting on Governor Hochul's signature. The MOU is the formal agreement between jurisdictions that creates the Lake Champlain Steering Committee.

2:45 – 2:55 pm

5. Member Updates

There were no updates from members.

6. ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on Draft January 31st NYCAC Meeting Summary

- Motion by: James C. Dawson
- Seconded by: Walt Lender

- Discussion on the motion: Vic Putman requested an edit to page 3 to define the acronym AWI.
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: None

2:55 – 3:00

7. NYCAC Discussion “Where Do We Go from Here?” – Vic Putman, Katie Darr, and Erin Vennie-Vollrath

Vic shared the water issues the town of Saranac is facing including high costs to the limited user base to achieve regulatory compliance and all three water systems need to be updated. He suggested sharing our meeting minutes with town supervisors and others who might have comparable problems. Notably, we had David Miller from the Adirondack Council provide comments and a summary of the Council’s work to address water and sewer infrastructure in the park and the programs that do not address small community issues with regards to affordability. David Miller testified to the State Senate recently regarding Adirondack Park water infrastructure and the inadequacy of the State’s grant and loan mechanisms to meet those needs (full testimony available [here](#), summary available [here](#)).

- Members supported sharing our meeting minutes with town supervisors and others. Jackie added that it is important we have transparency with towns to show this conversation is continuing in many arenas and the NYCAC can be a resource for them as well.
- Katie will develop a list of town supervisors and other contacts for the CAC to share meeting minutes and materials with.

There is a **virtual meeting on the State of the Lake Champlain Salmonid Fisheries on Saturday, March 26th from 1-4 pm** hosted by Vermont Fish and Wildlife, NYSDEC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lake Champlain United, and Trout Unlimited. The draft agenda and registration information are available [here](#).

Vic suggested the NYCAC host a joint meeting with the [Champlain Watershed Improvement Coalition of New York](#) (CWICNY); they do much of the on-the-ground water quality work in New York.

- Members were supportive of pursuing a joint meeting with CWICNY.

Colleen Hickey asked members to think about what events and local activities are lying ahead for the summer that they think LCBP should be at. LCBP staff can do informal tabling for State of the Lake or other topics.

- Meg noted that the Boat Launch Stewards will be present at the Antique Boat Show and there will be an education and outreach table there as well.
- Tom Metz suggested LCBP table at the Mayor’s Cup Regatta and Festival in Plattsburgh in July and the Battle of Plattsburgh Commemoration.

Fred reminded the committee that we will need to start planning the legislative day or meeting with legislators.

- Vic confirmed the CAC will add that to the next meeting’s agenda.

Katie asked if the committee would be interested in recording upcoming meetings. The VTCAC records their meetings. It could be helpful to share recordings of certain presentations with town supervisors and others.

The NYCAC meets next on **Monday, March 28th from 1-3:30 pm**.