

Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future

Monday, May 9th, 2022

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

APPROVED MEETING SUMMARY

Committee Members Present: Mark Naud (Chair), Denise Smith (Vice-chair), Eric Clifford, Karina Dailey, Wayne Elliott, Bob Fischer, Lori Fisher, Rep. Carole Ode, Hilary Solomon, Jeff Wennberg

Committee Members Absent: Sen. Chris Bray, Sen. Randy Brock, Rep. Kari Dolan,

LCBP Staff in Attendance: Sarah Coleman (VTANR), Katie Darr, Eric Howe, Lauren Jenness

Speakers: Meg Modley, Commissioner Chris Herrick, Eric Palmer, and Mike Michrowski

Public Guests: James Maroney, Ricky Laurin, Vic Putman

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

5:00 – 5:15 pm

Welcome and Introductions

Mark welcomed attendees. The VTCAC appointments are going through an additional due diligence review in the Senate Natural Resources Committee.

Public Comments

James Maroney provided a comment about how conventional farming cannot be adjusted to become climate friendly and asked whether the VTCAC will advise the legislature of conventional farming's inherently flawed design and of organic farming's capacity to remedy it in the upcoming Action Plan. His full remarks are included in the meeting materials.

Mark thanked James for his comment. The CAC spent lots of time looking at the Global Warming Solutions Act during the development of the 2022 Action Plan and integrated and supported elements from the plan where appropriate. The CAC will continue to have discussions about conventional agriculture and dairy in Vermont and will bring up James' points in these discussions. This issue requires committee discussion to develop consensus before putting it in the Action Plan. It will be on the agenda for the July Retreat.

ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on the draft April 11th meeting summary

Lori moved to approve the April 11th meeting summary. Karina seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

5:15 – 5:30 pm

Round Goby Response Follow-Up – Meg Modley, Eric Howe

Meg Modley, LCBP Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, provided an update on the first round of eDNA surveys that were completed on April 14th (press release available [here](#)). This was a huge effort by USGS and USFWS. Round goby was detected at the confluence of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers in New York but was not detected at the six additional monitoring sites in the Hudson River upstream of the confluence area through Lock 7 in Fort Edward, NY. This monitoring effort suggests that round goby have not advanced closer to Lake Champlain. Another round of sampling is scheduled for June with additional monitoring sites and sampling techniques, including trawling and electrofishing. If any round goby are collected, they will be tested for pathogens including viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS). The data is publicly available through a USGS data release ([here](#)). Canal Corp has proposed double flushing of locks and scheduled locking. Canal Corp is also

starting to explore interim measures like acoustic, bubble, and electric barriers specific to round goby until a more permanent solution can be employed. Phase 1 of the Champlain Canal Barrier Feasibility Study is complete, it should be released soon. LCBP is working on sourcing local match for Phase 2 of the canal barrier study. The report discusses different proposed all-taxa barrier options and includes multivariate and cost-benefit analyses. NYSDEC, Canal Corp, and a subset of the Rapid Response Task Force are working on a round goby-specific rapid response plan. LCBP has secured its top candidate for the Aquatic Invasive Species Outreach Specialist position, which will be co-funded by LCBP and USFW. The AIS Outreach Specialist will start in June and will communicate with municipalities, business owners, anglers, and other stakeholders along the canal corridor about the threat of round goby, bait bucket transfers, and the need for an all-taxa barrier. The Canal is scheduled to open on May 20th with double flushing and limited lockages unless something is detected in the interim. Shawn Good from VTFW wrote an article about the threats of round goby, it is included in the meeting materials.

- Lori thanked Meg and Eric for their work. Lori asked for clarification about sampling timing and round goby behavior this early in the season. Meg clarified that USGS and USFW tried to sample as early as physically possible because the results might have impacted the canal opening. Round goby tend not to move around as much in the winter, she expects sampling later in the season to indicate if they are really moving or not. The Champlain Canal is closed in the winter and the locks into Lake Champlain have been closed. USGS has advised the first week of June as the best time for sampling, though there will be discussions about whether earlier sampling is required.
- Mark asked about round goby sampling in the Richelieu River. The Richelieu River was not sampled in April. The Quebec Ministry of the Environment will be conducting routine sampling at over 70 sites in June. They will take advantage of that routine sampling to analyze samples at select locations for round goby. Mark noted that the Quebec Ministry of the Environment provided a comprehensive round goby report at the Steering Committee and suggested sharing that information with the VTCAC. Quebec has a fairly aggressive tracking protocol and a ban on live bait.
- Mark asked if Shawn Good's article mentioned concerns about bait bucket transfers or getting the angling community on board? Meg confirmed that the article is targeted toward anglers of all different kinds. The issue of the use of live bait was not raised in the article. Shawn addressed the different angler angles to possible impacts and need to do AIS outreach to this community. Canal Corp is looking to potentially utilize boat launch stewards along the canal. Many years ago, Canal Corp had a PSA about aquatic invasive species, this could be a pathway to deliver messaging to those who are in and using the canal system.
- Karina thanked Meg and Eric for their work and asked Meg to walk through the USGS eDNA data. Meg noted that USGS does not usually do the QAQC process until the end of the field season. The raw QAQC data is shared in this data release. A report should come out at the end of the year. She will check to see if she can share the short report from USFW.

5:30 – 6:00 pm

June Meeting and July Retreat Planning – Mark Naud

The June meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 13th from 5-7 pm via Microsoft Teams. Potential presentation and discussion topics:

- Additional round goby follow-up, including information about Quebec's work on monitoring in the Richelieu River
- USGS study of glyphosate entering Lake Champlain

- Post-mortem of legislative agenda

The July retreat will likely be an in-person/hybrid event in a quasi-outdoor space with good ventilation and masking when indoors. Lori noted the benefit of having all 4 of our Legislative members at the Retreat, they provide important historical perspectives and help the committee identify issues and approaches for the annual action plan. Potential presentation and discussion topics:

- Follow-up on how farming will help meet climate goals
 - Carbon sequestration, water quality impacts
 - Alternative methods to traditional farming
 - Tile drains
 - Josh Faulkner may be a good speaker for many of these issues
- Aquatic invasive species and the larger issue of funding AIS management

6:00 – 6:50 pm

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Update– Commissioner Chris Herrick, Eric Palmer, Mike Wichrowski

Aquatic Invasive Species

VTFW is working with NYSDEC and is encouraging them to see the protection of Lake Champlain with the same urgency as Vermont. They have had some success in that area. The canal has been a vector for a number of aquatic invasive species, round goby is the current threat but not the only threat. The NY Canal Corp has an interest in keeping the canal open for tourist and commercial traffic, VTFW would prefer to see the canal closed until a more permanent AIS barrier solution can be implemented. VTFW's Shawn Good serves on the AIS Rapid Response Taskforce.

- Mark noted that this is the first he had heard anyone from the department aligned with the VTCAC's round goby resolution to keep the canal closed until a long-term solution is determined. Eric and Chris clarified that this is VTFW's position, not that of Governor Scott or the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. There are multiple entities involved with different interests. VTFW sees the canal as a significant threat and would like to see this important issue addressed.
- Mark mentioned Quebec's ban of live bait and asked for details about live bait issues and the potential ban of live bait in Vermont. Eric shared that live bait has been a topic of discussion for a long time. Significant changes to baitfish regulations were made following the discovery of alewife in Lake St. Catherine. Further restrictions were implemented following the spread of VHS in the Great Lakes, including who could collect bait and how it could be moved. The movement of bait has not been banned in Vermont, or New York, but Vermont has developed a variety of restrictions. More information available [here](#).
 - Mark emphasized the importance of consistency of baitfish regulations in New York and Vermont so the basin is managed holistically. Eric felt that NY has a greater disease risk associated with baitfish movement due to the presence of VHS in Lake Ontario which is a source of baitfish collection. VT regulations require bait to be collected on site, held, and tested for multiple years before it can be moved. Initially, they had tried to direct people to use commercial bait, however, there have been issues with undesirable species in commercial bait recently. Some anglers feel it is safer to use bait collected in VT than imported bait. Some in-state restrictions have been eased as long as the bait is not collected from high-risk water bodies where we know AIS are present.
- Jeff asked if it would be correct to say that the single largest threat to the future 'health' (the ability of the lake to continue and improve its current and traditional ecosystems) of Lake Champlain is invasive

species, assuming the focus on reducing nutrients makes reasonable progress? Eric believed it may be a bigger threat to the health of the lake than nutrient issues. There are some solutions that can improve nutrient issues in the lake, but once an invasive species is introduced into the lake it is nearly impossible to remove them. The Lake continues to change as each new AIS is introduced. Addressing the threat of aquatic invasive species, the vectors, and doing good public outreach is important.

- Meg shared the Boat Launch Steward program’s great success in addressing overland transfer as a pathway of introduction. They have been able to document which access sites see the greatest threat of the introduction of AIS. Last year, they successfully implemented a decontamination station at Malletts Bay launch. She extended an invitation to discuss the possibility of placing a decontamination unit in the upper lot to more effectively get boats inspected and decontaminated. Commissioner Herrick and Mike welcomed a conversation about where to site the unit to make it more accessible and why last year’s location did not work as well. The upper lot needs some repairs which should be completed in a few weeks. DEC runs a greeter program within the inland lakes, similar to the Boat Launch Stewards program. Both programs work well to get the word out about AIS threats and what can be done to prevent them.
- Wayne asked if there is similar coverage and resources for boat launches as we move south from Colchester. Meg shared that LCBP will have someone stationed at Converse Bay. Many of the locations south of there are small, in need of fixing, and have not warranted having a steward there. Stewards will be stationed at Converse Bay, Shelburne Bay, Perkins Pier, US Coast Guard Station in Burlington, Colchester Point, Malletts Bay, South Hero, St. Albans, and Swanton launches in Vermont. Paul Smith’s College Adirondack Watershed Institute covers most launches on the New York side. LCBP covers Plattsburgh north to Point au Roche. LCBP provides a grant to Quebec to train stewards and get the same data on Missisquoi Bay.
 - Mark asked if Lake George is the only place on the New York-side where boat inspections are mandatory. Meg confirmed that the Adirondack Northway is not mandatory. The Lake George Park Commission has full control over all access points to Lake George. All trailered boats must get inspected and “sealed” at a regional inspection facility before launching into Lake George.
- Wayne asked if any public education or outreach has been done at private marinas, particularly as Canadians and other tourists return to the region. Meg provided a round goby /canals presentation to the VT Boat & Marine Association in early April. Marinas are busy, but tend to be open to receiving information and distributing it. LCBP has a good partnership with Lake Champlain Sea Grant and is working with VTFW to provide education and outreach at marinas and provide AIS rack cards.
- Commissioner Herrick asked if Meg has ever worked with the Agency of Transportation and asked them to distribute AIS-related materials. Meg shared that in NY, you cannot get a boat registration or renewal without clicking through a “clean, drain, dry” invasive species messaging. Vermont requires a special permit for tournaments that directs organizers to contact LCBP to receive AIS rack cards, though not all do that.
 - Mark thought it was an interesting idea to create this linkage. In the last 2 years, the CAC has recommended the consideration of mandatory boat inspections to mimic the one that is on 87 in the Adirondack Northway and locating it at weigh/inspection stations in the Colchester and Milton area.
 - Meg mentioned there is a possibility that some infrastructure bill dollars could be used to support the development of a decontamination site and equipment.

- Mark asked if there were additional funds available from ARPA or the infrastructure bill to make more than the ordinary course of business improvements or development or acquisition of access areas. Commissioner Herrick was not aware of additional funds beyond those for EV charging stations which would be limited to certain sites. Mike confirmed that there was no funding specifically for acquiring decontamination stations. They are targeting some high-dollar projects to retrofit the Colchester site.
- Meg shared that there have been some challenges storing the high-pressure hot water decontamination stations. She asked if it might be possible for VTFW to store the units if the resources to purchase the units were found. If VTFW was able to own and store some of these units, it would help advance the program. Commissioner Herrick asked how much a unit typically costs, what their footprint is, and whether they need to be stored inside in the winter.
 - Meg shared that a 400-gallon unit that does not require electrical or water hookups is ~\$25,000. Cheaper units are available for sites that have water and power available. The largest is ~10 feet by 12-15 feet, it is loaded on a trailer. Some units can be winterized and stored outside if they are protected.
 - Commissioner Herrick thought it would be possible to work with partners across the state to find places to house them, assuming it wouldn't be a dozen units.

Otter Creek and South Lake Access

VTFW is looking to create an Otter Creek Fishing Trail. Otter Creek is the longest river completely within Vermont. They have identified 9 VTFW properties that need access improvement. They are seeking to create more paddling access. The plan is to have 5 improved sites by the end of the year. Conversations are occurring with Rutland, Middlebury, and Wallingford about improving recreational access in their municipalities. They are also thinking of targeting 1-2 private landowners who have informally allowed access to their land to create a more formal access agreement. Active acquisition of another access site is occurring. The intent is to create a point-to-point paddling trail that goes from Mount Tabor to Lake Champlain. VTFW is close to closing on a property that will expand Laraby's Point access as well and would create parking on the southern part of the lake. They had a contract last year to improve the Fort Cassin boat ramp, that process was slowed because they discovered the boat ramp sits on top of a 5,000-year-old Native American site. The site is still intact. Additional work has been required to ensure those resources won't be damaged.

- Jeff offered to help with Rutland if needed.
- Mark shared that Sen. Bray was very interested in this and may be helpful in his region. The CAC has long advocated for southern lake and paddling access and appreciates this work.
- Lori expressed interest in connecting the fishing trail and helping to promote it through the Lake Champlain Paddlers' Trail.
- Mark suggested installing some interpretive signage about the Native American site next to the boat ramp.

6:50 – 7:00 pm

Meeting Wrap-Up Discussion

Katie and Mark will follow up with meeting planning for the June 13th meeting and the July Retreat.

ACTION REQUIRED: VTCAC Members, please email Katie with dates between June 27th-July 22nd that **WOULD NOT work for you to meet.** Katie will follow up with a doodle poll.