

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bristol Dam Committee Discusses Options and Hosts Damariscotta Fish Ladder Speaker

Bristol, Maine – Aug 3, 2017 – Deb Wilson, chair of the Fish Committee of Newcastle and Nobleboro, met on Tuesday, July 25, with the Bristol Mills Dam Advisory Committee to present her experience with the Damariscotta Fishway Restoration project.

Following decades of a decreasing alewife run due to poor conditions in the fishway, the Damariscotta fishway was repaired in three major phases from 2004 to 2014. In the first phase, the group repaired pools and a portion of collapsed retaining wall. In the second phase, the middle section of the ladder was removed entirely and replaced with a new concrete structure. This portion was stone faced the following year after the Fish Committee observed that alewives were very resistant to traveling through the bare concrete section. Only 63,000 fish passed that year, a setback after strong numbers in the previous two years. In the third phase, the lower pools were replaced, with a new channel blasted to reduce the height differential between pools. By 2015, the reconstructed fishway allowed the return of over 1,000,000 fish; 2017's count was almost as high, at 950,000.

The Committee also resumed discussion of concepts for the Bristol Mills Dam site with Joe McLean from Wright Pierce Engineering. The dam, which was last repaired in 1994, currently needs repairs and lacks adequate fish passage for alewives and other native fish species in the Pemaquid River. The concepts under consideration are 1) repair and modify the dam to meet community safety needs and replace the old fishway with a new, improved one, 2) partial replacement of the dam with control of water levels and fish passage performed by "nature-like" structures, and 3) full dam replacement with nature-like water control and fish passage.

Each of the concepts is anticipated to provide enhanced fish passage and maintain or enhance firefighting water supplies and recreational opportunities like swimming, and will maintain water levels in the lakes and marsh upstream. After the feasibility study, the Committee will provide the Board of Selectmen with the study results, which will include a summary of each concept's costs and benefits.

During the last meeting of the Committee on July 11, the first option was discussed in detail and the discussion summarized for the Lincoln County News. During the July 25 meeting, the group discussed the concept of a partial removal of the dam with replacement of water control structures.

McLean suggested that for this option, the group could consider lowering the height of dam face which would retain an impoundment for firefighting water supply to still be drawn at 100% capacity. This option would allow for some recreational swimming at the current location, and would retain a portion of the dam those who value the structure as a part of the town's culture. This option would still require constructing a structural fishway or bypass channel around the dam. McLean stressed that any partial-removal solution would require construction of a structure to maintain water levels above Benner Road.

The committee proposed guidance to Wright-Pierce to develop a solution for this option that retains fire protection at the current level, uses a bypass or pool and weir style fish passage that has minimal ongoing maintenance, and does not require a leader for fish access. The option would also include a concept for additional swimming opportunities at Ellingwood Park.

Upcoming meetings of the Committee will include and a discussion with Herb Hartman who will discuss the town of Whitefield's process in determining to remove the Coopers Mills Dam on the Sheepscot River. The Committee meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of every month from 6-8pm at the Bristol Town Office. All meetings are open to the public and all Committee materials, including supplementary reports and background information, are available at the Town Office. We hope to share this process with as many town residents and interested people as possible. Please join us to learn more about this valuable resource. The Dam Committee welcomes Public Comments.