

**Bristol Mills Dam ad hoc Advisory Committee**

Minutes of Meeting Tuesday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Bristol Town Office

Committee members present: James Albright, Phil Averill, Bill Benner, Claire Enterline, Chuck Farrell, John Freburger, James Hatch, Abby Ingraham

Absent: Pam Allen

Also present: Chris Hall (Town Administrator), Rick Poland.

The meeting was called to order by chair Enterline at 6:00 pm with a quorum present, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

A motion to accept the Minutes of 8/12 was proposed by Benner, seconded by Farrell, with the amendment to Ingraham's remarks reported in paragraph 8, to now read 'Ingraham expressed the opinion that this stretch of the river is muddy and swampy, and unsuitable for swimming.' Carried unanimously.

There were no amendments to the agenda.

Chair Enterline introduced Herb Hartmann, former state Director of Parks and Recreation, who served on the Town of Whitefield's Coopers Mills Dam Committee.

Hartmann gave an overview of the history leading to Whitefield's 2016 decision to remove the dam, at no cost to the town due to funding provided by the Atlantic Salmon Foundation. The dam became an issue around 1997 when the Sheepscot River Watershed Council was formed by the Downeast Salmon Federation, with the goal of enhancing the salmon run in the river. Fish passage was becoming increasingly difficult as leakage at the sides of the dam created alternative attraction flows, diverting fish away from the deteriorating Denil-style fish passage. Leakage was also leading to the dam pool's dry hydrant being out of water for perhaps two months each year.

In 2002 Trout Unlimited proposed to the town to remove the dam, replacing it with a rock weir to better allow passage of salmon and alewives, and improve fire protection water availability. The proposal was turned down by the 2003 Town Meeting, but Trout Unlimited paid for a 2005 study of the dam by Kleinschmidt Associates. This, and a separate report by the state's dam inspector, highlighted serious deficiencies including water undercutting the dam, and the non-functionality of the gates. A proposal to allocate \$50,000 for repairs was voted down at the 2004 Town Meeting, but \$5,000 was appropriated to allow minimal work.

Opposition to dam removal was based on aesthetic and historic sentiment, as well as interest in retrofitting the dam for small hydro generation. Study of this option in 2007 suggested that the dam could power around 90 homes, but that the payback period was too long to merit the investment.

Further deterioration of the dam continued, until in 2015 the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the Sheepscot Valley Conservation Association (now part of the Midcoast Conservancy) made a new proposal to the town to remove the dam, at no expense to the town. They offered in addition to pay for alternative fire protection water sources, and for establishing a recreational riverside park at the dam site.

The Selectmen formed a Dam Committee with representatives from stakeholders in the town such as the Fire Department and the Historical Society, plus other volunteers. It met for a year, during which time opponents of dam removal made their opinions known. The key breakthrough came when the Fire Chief agreed to support a plan to establish three new dry hydrants – two on the main stem of the Sheepscot River above and below the dam site, and one on the West Branch of the river. With this, the Fire Department changed their position and supported dam removal, as a result of which no-one spoke in opposition to removal at the 2016 Town Meeting.

Work has not started on dam removal due to the extended permitting process. Some work has been done on site clearance and on installation of the dry hydrants, but the main work is hoped to be done in 2018. Once permitting is complete the town's Planning Board will have the final say on the work to be done.

The Atlantic Salmon Federation has committed to a guarantee that the dry hydrants will provide adequate water, in addition to a pledge of \$7,000 a year to maintain these; and has given the town \$25,000 to develop access to the river, including a small park with five parking spaces at the dam site. ASF has also paid for an unrelated culvert replacement on a stream in the town. Herb Hartmann felt that the ASF will end up spending around \$1 million, which has only been made available on the condition of full dam removal.

It is understood that very few salmon use the Sheepscot River – only three were counted in 2016 – but a significant alewife run exists and will likely grow following the partial removal of the Head Tide Dam. He believed that the ASF were using the Endangered Species Act as a lever to achieve the goal of restoration of a free-flowing river, to which restoration of the salmon run is only incidental. ASF's Andy Goode, at their Brunswick office, believes that species which will chiefly benefit from dam removal include shad, alewives and eels.

Half a mile upstream of the dam is Long Pond, a popular recreational lake shared between Whitefield, Jefferson, Windsor and Somerville. Property owners on Long Pond repeatedly expressed fears that their water levels would be affected by dam removal, but hydrological studies have shown that this is not the case; the mean water level in Long Pond is some 13 feet above the level of the dam impoundment, and is governed by rock ledges between the lake and the dam.

In discussion, Farrell asked if the town's decision would have been different if the town had to pay, which Hartmann agreed was likely. However, he noted that the town faced the potential threat of regulatory action to compel dam restoration or removal, plus the liability issue of potential dam failure if no action was taken.

Hartmann reported that some in the town had been skeptical of Kleinschmidt's cost estimates for dam repair. As a result, the ASF paid for a second opinion which was sought from Myron Petrovsky, a Portland engineer who reported that the cost estimates of \$350,000 to \$450,000 for full repair were reasonable, as would be \$50 – 60,000 for immediate emergency repairs. Hartmann agreed to send a package of additional detail from his files.

Averill noted that there are more similarities than differences between the Coopers Mills and Bristol Mills dams. He asked about the height of the dam, Hartmann saying he believed it to be 8 to 10 feet. Averill went on to describe the Bristol fishway, which like the Coopers Mills dam has poor attraction flow; Ingraham added that the intake is sited wrongly. Hartmann noted that a major difference is the recreational use of the Bristol Mills dam; Coopers Mills' dam had been largely inaccessible until recent clearance work. He noted that there had been a concern expressed about sediment release following dam removal, but a study by the Damariscotta office of the hydrologist firm Inter-Fluve, showed no likely issues.

Hatch enquired who controls alewife quotas, Enterline replying that ultimately these are set by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, with enforcement through municipal ordinances.

In reply to a question from Ingraham about salmon, Hartmann reported Andy Goode of ASF as saying that the salmon are suffering 'death from a thousand cuts.' He stressed again that the Atlantic salmon are used as a tool to get Endangered Species Act funding.

Benner asked about the history of the mills at Coopers Mills; and also whether the committee was appointed or volunteer. Herb Hartmann noted that the committee was appointed to reflect a balance of interests in the town. Benner also noted that Whitefield has some noted historians, including Bill Bunting, author of 'A Day's Work.' Enterline thanked Mr. Hartmann for his time and the interesting discussion.

It being 7.15 pm, the chair moved to general discussion as per the agenda. Hatch raised the subject of seeking grant funding for one or more of the options under consideration, which triggered a debate about whether this is properly within the terms of reference of the committee. Albright and Farrell both expressed concerns that in a limited time the committee might not be able to do a thorough job of identifying funding, while a partial job might inadvertently sway a decision among the available options. Hatch and Averill, on the other hand, argued for getting as much information as possible, and that there are sufficient resources to do the research sitting at the table. Farrell asked for clarification whether, independently of funding, all three options are equal in meeting the town's goals. Enterline responded that there are in fact known grant sources for all three options – for example, the town had identified a revolving loan fund for dam repairs, while Deb Wilson had provided another model for funding fish passage. Benner stressed that the committee's job is to give a full report on the options, and leave it to Selectmen to seek funding. Hall expressed concern about timing, noting that the release of the Wright-Pierce report in October might lead to pressure to respond to public concerns, and that the Selectmen needed time to consider the report before compiling

any budget requests in January. With four members in opposition to studying funding, that subject was dropped from future consideration.

Enterline then asked for suggestions for the agenda for October 10. It was agreed to hold a review of the past presentations to the Committee; to discuss a communications plan for public information about the Wright-Pierce report; and a review of the 2017 alewife season from the Fish Committee. It was also agreed to try to get Joe McLean of Wright-Pierce back to meet with both the Parks Commission and the Fire Chief ahead of the October 10 meeting.

It was moved by Farrell, seconded by Hatch, to adjourn at 7.36 pm; motion carried 8–0.

Respectfully submitted,  
Chris Hall  
Town Administrator