

Projects can hurt restoration of salmon

Wild Atlantic salmon (and those hatchery-raised fish that play an important role in restoration efforts) face plenty of obstacles during their lives.

When they're young and small, nearly anything in a river or stream can gobble them up.

When they head down their rivers to the sea, pollution, commercial fishing, and other pitfalls await.

But as Patrick Keliher pointed out on Wednesday, sometimes, life-or-death situations arise for these prized fish after they've seemingly beaten the odds and finally returned home.

Keliher has reason to be concerned, on a number of counts. He's the director of what used to be called the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission (now his group is called the Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries & Habitat, and is a division of the Maine Department of Marine Resources).

On Wednesday, he gathered with a small group of area salmon anglers to discuss the possibility of opening the Penobscot River to its first spring season since the river was closed to salmon fishing in 1999.

Opinions were shared, and a consensus seemed apparent among the anglers: *Open the river during the spring. Let us fish when there are actually salmon to be caught.*

Keliher won't be the man making the decision. That responsibility belongs to the ASC, which does still exist, but only as a three-person board with responsibility for salmon-oriented issues in the state.

Keliher was in Bangor to listen, and to offer input when asked.



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Plenty of people asked.

And at the end of a spirited hour-and-a-half session, Keliher told a story that illustrated the modern risks that have hampered restoration efforts.

A few weeks back, Keliher explained, someone contacted his staff to report seeing a dead salmon in the Penobscot.

After further research, staffers found that a problem did exist at a small stream called Meadow Brook ... and the problem was bigger than expected.

"That brook has had a tremendous amount of damage because of increased flows and increased sediment," Keliher said.

The brook runs downhill from the built-up Hogan Road area and enters the Penobscot near Mount Hope Cemetery. Large-scale development on Hogan Road has changed the characteristics of the stream over time, Keliher said.

Get rid of grass and trees, and trade it for pavement, and several things can happen. Among those: More water makes it into streams, and isn't absorbed into the ground. And with that increased water flow, more sediment can be moved downstream.

According to Keliher, development near Meadow Brook eventually dropped a large amount of silt at the mouth of the brook. And as it turned out, salmon often journey into the brook when the river tide is high.

The two pieces of water — the Penobscot and Meadow Brook — are slightly different in temperature, and Keliher said even a one-degree difference in temperature lured the salmon into the mouth of the brook.

Unfortunately, the siltation of the stream formed a small pool that the fish couldn't escape when the tide dropped.

Keliher said his staff documented the fact that at least nine salmon died in the same spot after the water dropped.

"We saw as many as 26 to 30 salmon holding in that little channel at high water," Keliher said. "As the water dropped out,

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because there was so much sediment in there, there was a big rock and a pool there, and they couldn't get out."

That's when this sad story gets good.

Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries & Habitat biologists realized that they had the makings of a crisis, and leapt into action. Among those concerned state employees was biologist Richard Dill.

"If anybody in this room sees Richard Dill, you give him a great big pat on the back, because that son of a gun did something that takes a lot of time, and he got it done in four or five days," Keliher said.

What Dill did was work his way through the labyrinth of

regulatory bodies and come up with a solution.

"He got [Army] Corps [of Engineers] permits, he got U.S. Fish & Wildlife to sign off, he got [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] to sign off, and we had a piece of heavy machinery in the water, at the mouth of that brook, re-digging that channel."

Keliher also credited John Jones for his efforts in the project.

Keliher said he and his staff members will work with the city of Bangor in the future, and consult regularly with the Department of Environmental Protection as well, hoping to head off future problems that could hurt salmon restoration efforts.

"I don't want to just point fingers at just what happens on Hogan [Road]," Keliher said. "There's a tremendous amount of development in the upper end of that little sub-watershed.

It just shows you what that heavy development can do."

And thankfully it also shows what a few quick-thinking people can do to solve a sticky problem.

ASC meeting cancelled

At Wednesday's scoping session, Keliher told the crowd that they'd have another opportunity to speak with the three-member Atlantic Salmon Commission at a meeting that was to be held next week.

On Friday, Keliher said that meeting had been canceled due to scheduling conflicts with two of the three commissioners.

Keliher said the ASC has yet to reschedule that meeting, but will post information about the new meeting date on the state Web site when that decision has been made.

Wednesday's session was held to gauge public sentiment toward a possible spring season

for Atlantic salmon fishing in the Penobscot River.

At the meeting anglers were given the impression that the ASC commissioners would take some kind of action on the season soon, possibly as early as Friday's scheduled meeting. The commissioners could opt to propose a spring season, or could decide that doing so would not be in the best interest of the fishery.

If the commissioners make a motion to open the Penobscot for a limited spring fishing season, they would do so at a regularly scheduled meeting. Public hearings would follow, and an eventual decision would be made at a future ASC meeting, presumably late this year or early in 2008.

Salmon breakfast on tap

Atlantic salmon anglers and conservationists will again flock to the shores of the Penobscot River on Sept. 15 for the

opening of this year's fall catch-and-release fishing season.

Those looking to enjoy some camaraderie and share a few salmon tales need look no further than the Eddington Salmon Club, where an opening day breakfast is planned.

A joint effort of the Veazie, Eddington and Penobscot salmon clubs, the breakfast will begin at 6 a.m. and run until 10. Among the menu items: beans, eggs cooked to order, pancakes, home fries, biscuits, doughnuts and beverages.

The cost of admission is \$6 for adults, and \$3 for children 12 years old and younger.

The Eddington Salmon Club is located at the corner of Route 9 and Route 178, just outside of Brewer.

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