



Cape Fear River Partnership Winter 2022 Session

December 14, 2022
9 AM – 11:30 AM
Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Virtual Meeting Attendees

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Fred Scharf	scharff@uncw.edu

Welcome and Introductions

Dawn York (M&N and CFRP Coordinator) welcomed the Partnership. She stated the last 2022 virtual meeting will be focused on updates, celebrate accomplishments, and plan for 2023. The following are the key topics and points of discussion by the Partnership.

Striped Bass Fisheries Management Plan

- Joe Facendola and Todd Mathes (DMF): DMF is in development of the striped bass Fisheries Management Plan (FMP). Changes in FMP include slot limits and hook types to protect the larger fish. (<https://deq.nc.gov/marine-fisheries/fisheries-management/striped-bass/amendment-2/open>)
- Joe Facendola (DMF): DMF is working on bycatch reductions strategies with UNCW and crab fishermen for the diamondback terrapin, a State listed species of special concern, throughout the lower Cape Fear River to Bald Head. Joe has terrapin samples to be used for PFAS study.
- Recommended potential researchers and contact for Terrapin PFAS:
 - Dr. Ralph Mead at UNCW: meadr@uncw.edu
 - Dr. Lee Ferguson at Duke University: lee.ferguson@duke.edu



- Chris Stewart (DMF): working with DHHS to evaluate PFAS in 13- 15 species from Fayetteville to lower Cape Fear River. He will keep CFRP updated when the report is released.
- Jeremy McCargo (WRC): WRC has different objectives for FMP than DMF. WRC is recommending an open harvest for striped bass in inland areas. WRC is not recommending stocking striped bass within the Cape Fear until there is improvement with fish passage. The public hearing is in January.

Striped Bass

1. 15A NCAC 10C .0314

Establish an 18-inch minimum size limit and 2-fish daily creel limit for Striped Bass in the Cape Fear River and its tributaries upstream of Lock and Dam 1 to Buckhorn Dam. The harvest season will be March 1 to April 30.

Justification: Despite a harvest moratorium since 2008, the Cape Fear River Striped Bass population remains completely hatchery supported with limited natural reproduction. For Amendment 2 to the NC Estuarine Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan, the NCWRC preferred management option was to allow limited harvest throughout the Cape Fear River. The Division of Marine Fisheries and Marine Fisheries Commission have recommended maintaining the harvest moratorium in joint or coastal fishing waters. Therefore, a limited harvest season in the inland fishing waters is proposed to allow increased angling opportunity for this hatchery supported fishery.

- *15A NCAC 10C .0314 STRIPED BASS (Pg. 18 of the attached WRCAgendaV2.pdf)*

Lock and Dam 2/3 Miter Gate Improvements

- Roger Shew (UNCW): asked if there would be improvements to the lock and dam 2 and 3 gates. 2018 locks have been in disrepair and not operable.
- Jeremy McCargo: WRC supports the USACE to operate the gates to allow fish passage. Moratorium on striped bass harvest in Cape Fear River since 2008. Rule to open harvest in public comment period.
- Dana Matics (USACE): Discussed Lock and Dams 2 and 3 gate improvements. USACE is working with Clemson University and UNCW for monitoring and research efforts. Construction has shifted to March as contract action will take two months. The goal is to make lock and dam 2 and 3 operable.



- Jeremy McCargo: asked what commitment does USACE have to maintaining locks and operating for fish passage? Does USACE have a plan and budget in place to operate dams as needed and maintain repairs?
- Dana Matics: The USACE has two staff for all locks and dams. Locks will be opened a few times each week to lock fish through at 2 and 3. Asking for funding for debris removal from gates.
- Dawn York: There is a need for federal funding for lock and dams 2 and 3 to support fish passage.
- Chance Lambeth: USACE will need to ask for funding and support, but the state would not be able to make the first move for that.
- Fritz Rhode (NOAA): asked for update on 216 disposition study. Will USACE release study for the dams?
- Dawn York: Based on recent discussions with the USACE, the Section 216 disposition study is not active currently.
- Anne Deaton (DMF): asked of USACE ownership of the locks and dams and disposition study.
- Dana Matics: Does not know any updates on disposition study.
- Rich Carpenter (CFRW): states concern for harvest of striped bass above lock and dam 1; striped bass at the size that would be taken have high levels of PFAS, not a good idea to encourage for consumption.
- Dana Sargent: How does inland harvest affect fish passage findings for lock and dam 2 and 3.
- Jeremy McCargo: WRC does not manage fisheries consumption advisories.
- David Williams: Is debris at gate related to Hurricane Florence? Soil and Water offers financial assistance to communities with impacts of stream flow.
- Dana Matric: Hurricane Florence was the start of the degradation within the Cape Fear. Any additional funding received will be used towards operation.

Fish Passage Monitoring Results

- Fred Scharf (UNCW): provided an update on lock and dam 1 in collaboration with Troy Farmer at Clemson. Atlantic Sturgeon tagging and research will begin in Spring 2023. Spring of 2022 they caught and tagged twice the number of adults (10) than compared to Spring of 2021 (5). 1st gravid female caught below lock and dam 1 in early April. 3 males tagged in 2021 came back below lock and dam 1. Catch rates for resident juveniles had little success due to drought conditions. Sampling and tagging through the fall for river resident juveniles and subadults. Submitted a grant through WRC for population mixing within sub adult life stage research. Collaborating with South Carolina and Georgia groups. Spring 23/24 with additional funding is to repeat the Raabe study in 2012. The study includes extensive



acoustic tagging to evaluate passage. Tagging 100 American Shad, 100 Striped Bass, and 20 fathead catfish for both 2023 and 2024. Looking to quantify the number of fish using the lock chamber and evaluate whether fish are using rock chamber or modified rock arch.

- Dawn York: What was the timeframe for the gravid female?
- Fred Scharf: Both adults in 2021 and 2022 were caught in early April. In 2021, all fish moved down river early May. In 2022, adults moved down in April. Expects the fish are in there in March, as early as mid-February. Fred plans on monitoring the receivers a little bit more for returning fish.
- Dawn York: Will the USACE be operating the gates for fish passage?
- Dana Sargent: The USACE is relying on the fish passage to move fish upstream. The Corps will not be passing fish through the gates at lock and dam 1.
- Chris Stewart: concerned about increased pressure if there is open harvest and inability to evaluate fish spawning.
- Jeremy McCargo- who is funding the project?
- Fred Scharf: Troy has additional funding from ERDC. The USACE Sustainable Rivers Program is supporting the sturgeon tagging work.
- Madi Polera: what is the expected take for striped bass?
- Jeremy McCargo: doesn't have an answer at the moment. Harvest would not be opened in whole river, will not be opened in just inland waters. Submit public comment or public hearing for the FMP.
- Madi Polera: fish consumption advisories and fish regulations, two different agencies. Is there any way to combine the rules? It can be lack of communication.
- Todd Mathes (WRC): FMP will include only 2 fish per day, 18 inches minimum, and a closed season.
- Fritz Rhode (NOAA): asked for documentation from the Corps as to when lockage's occurred in 2019-2022 to correlate with sturgeon observation.
- Fred Scharf: no sturgeon was observed acoustically above lock and dam 1. eDNA of sturgeon was detected at lock and dam 2 with acoustic evidence.
- Jeremy McCargo: WRC requested log of lock schedule for fish passage, but they don't document every time lock is opened and closed. Aaron Bunch put in a water depth chamber to log every time lock and dams were opened.
- Jeremy McCargo: Shad use the rock arch weir and can be locked within 2 and 3 when operational. Need to get fish passage for shad and sturgeon for continuing passage of those species.
- Bill Post: want to know that rock arches works definitively for future projects.
- Dawn York: asks Bill and Fritz to speak on the Savannah Bluff project
- Fritz Rhode: Design is ready, but the project has been on hold for the past two years. The first hearing is in January.



Barrier Assessments in lower CFR/AOP Culvert Training by SARP and Kris Bass Engineering

- Kat Hoenke: updated the partnership on the assessment of road stream crossing barriers in the lower Cape Fear River. Received a NFWF grant to implement North Atlantic Survey tidal protocols for assessing barriers. The survey assessed fish passage, tidal restriction, and flooding. 50 culverts were assessed in the lower Cape Fear River, focused on Brunswick County.
 - <https://fws.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/attachmentviewer/index.html?appid=0e60c1c7da4d469d9cb7fd07aa6dd6af> Assessing Road Stream Crossing Barriers in the United States results
- Anne Deaton: mentioned DOT funding and DMF staff is working with Kat for river herring data. Need to update anadromous fish species for tributaries
- Kat Hoenke: looking for funding opportunities for culvert survey opportunities in the future.
- Katie Lokey (Kris Bass Engineering): Surveyed 50 culverts in the Lower Cape Fear River. Surveys looked at debris blockage, flow capacity problems, fish passage, and categorized barriers into priorities. 14 barriers were identified as Tier 1, the highest priority for replacement.
- Training using the SARP protocol in the Cape Fear River will be held mid-February. Reach out to Kat Hoenke or Shawn Fix. Fill out the spreadsheet to register for the free event: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Cc4hqlpQeJLcf9E5MwnOeGtAQChYk3ZYSpP3ZII5U8g/edit?usp=sharing>

Additional Partnership Updates

- Brena Jones (WRC): in partnership with FWS, WRC successfully stocked 500 juvenile Cape Fear River shiners in the upper Cape Fear River.
 - Links to the FWS short story: <https://www.fws.gov/story/journey-back-home-young-endangered-cape-fear-shiners-released-cape-fear-river>
- Nora Deamer (DEQ): Cape Fear River Basin plan should be out by February/March 2023. 45 days for public comments.
- Peter Raabe: American Rivers is looking at the upper portion of the river and partnering with WRC on a fish passage dam removal project.

2023 Next Steps

- February meeting will be virtual, but an in-person meeting will occur in June. In person meeting will include a field trip to parts of the river.



Summary of the meeting will be posted to www.capefearriverpartnership.com

Meeting Adjourned