

Upper Black River Watershed Restoration Committee

Minutes from the Meeting of January 20, 2006

Attendance: Bud Slingerlend, Paul Rose (Montmorency Conservation District), Tim Cwalinski (DNR Fisheries), Valerie Olinik-Damstra (Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council), Barb Travis (Canada Creek Ranch), Mike Moreau (Montmorency Conservation District), Todd Wills (DNR Fisheries), Andy Nuhfer (DNR Fisheries), Susan Wells (USFWS), Heather Rawlings (USFWS), Neal Godby (DNR Fisheries), Roxanne Ramirez (MDEQ-LWMD), Richard Bruot, Lon Weaver (Montmorency Road Commission), Donna Hardies (Montmorency Conservation District), Richard Kropf (Pigeon River Country Association)

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order by Chairman Bud Slingerlend.

WELCOME / INTRODUCTIONS

FINANCIAL REPORT

Donna reported that total income was \$22,657.61 and total expenses were \$23,929.04. The income includes a balance from Huron Pines RC&D and funds from USFWS. Expenses include wages, duckbill anchors, temperature loggers, and chainsaw.

BROOK TROUT SPECIAL REGULATION WATERS

Andy Nuhfer, MDNR Fisheries Research Biologist, gave a presentation looking at simulated effects of different angling regulations on the Black River. Andy reviewed basic trout population biology; mortality rates; hooking mortality by regulation type; simulations of catch, harvest, and size structure of catches under different regulation types; and evaluations of regulations changed in 2000. He indicated that growth rates must be fast for special regulations to have a measurable effect on brook trout population structure, and gave growth rate information for brook trout in Black River compared to other rivers in the state; growth rates in the Black River are fast compared to most other Lower Peninsula streams, but mortality also must be considered. Brook trout in Michigan streams have very high natural mortality rates. From 70-90% of brook trout alive in one year are dead a year later even in streams managed under no-kill regulations (e.g. South Branch and mainstem Au Sable) and in streams that are closed to fishing (e.g. Hunt Creek within the boundaries of the research area). Because the fraction of total mortality caused by angling is relatively small predicted increases in abundance of brook trout over 10 inches long under more restrictive regulations are quite small.

Andy then reported on evaluations of regulation changes than occurred in 2000 on the Au Sable and Manistee Rivers in the Lower Peninsula and the Iron and Paint Rivers in the Upper Peninsula. An increase in the size limit for brook trout from 8 inches to 10 inches did not result in increased abundance of brook trout over 8 inches long in the upper Manistee River, or in the South Branch or North Branch Au Sable rivers. Brook trout more than 2 years old (over about 10 inches long) are very rarely captured during late summer surveys in no-kill waters of the Au Sable (e.g. Chase Bridge area or in the mainstem between Burton's Landing and Wakeley bridge). August population estimates of brook trout over 8 inches long in the Black River near Main River Bridge were the same in 1996 under the old regulations as in 2005 under type 2 regulations (9 brook trout over 8 inches long/1000 feet).

Evaluations of the change from a 7-inch minimum size limit to type 2 regulations (10 inch limit & reduced creel limit) in the South Branch Paint River (Iron County) did not result in significantly increased abundance of brook trout over 8 inches long or numbers over 10 inches long. In the Iron River (Iron County) abundance of 7.0-9.9 inch brook trout was significantly higher under the more restrictive regulations although abundance of brook trout over 10 inches long did not change. Factors such as

reproductive success appear to be more important than angling regulations in determining subsequent abundance of larger individuals in brook trout populations.

The role of social considerations in gear restrictions was also discussed.

2006 WORK PLAN AND PROJECTS

The work crew will continue to do stair maintenance, remove dams, and place instream log structures. Montmorency Conservation District is willing to administer the funds again next year. The work crew will go through training before starting work this year to insure work is consistent between the Thunder Bay and Black River crews. USFWS has some funding available for river restoration work on the Black River in 2006, and has also applied for additional monies from the USFWS Fish Habitat Restoration Funds.

The Cheboygan County Road Commission plans to have the following road-stream crossings done by late 2006 or 2007: Adair Creek (Knight Rd), Oxbow Creek (Oxbow Rd), and Gillis Creek (Kisser Rd).

The Otsego County Road Commission plans to complete the road-stream crossing for Saunders Creek (Gingell Rd), although a scheduled construction date is unknown.

The Montmorency Conservation District and USFWS will meet to further discuss the details of the 2006 work plan.

Canada Creek Ranch is working to obtain their DEQ permit for the Wilson Bridge project. The project will include bridge replacement, sand trap cleaning, and large woody debris placement. The permit application was withdrawn to add more detail, and will be resubmitted for approval.

NATURAL RIVERS SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE

The Natural Rivers subcommittee met to discuss how to proceed with Natural Rivers designation for the Upper Black. The subcommittee was joined by Brian Bury and Dan Pearson of the MDNR Natural Rivers program. The group decided the first step was to spend the spring getting to know the area of the Upper Black better, as well as getting more familiar with the details of the Natural Rivers program, before public education and outreach could begin. Tim volunteered to organize a tour of the Upper Black River for the subcommittee to learn more about the stretches that would be considered for Natural Rivers designation. It was also discussed that the Upper Black Restoration Committee should lead this effort as a citizen's group to build public support. It was agreed that watershed residents may be more receptive to the designation if the proposal was coming from citizens themselves, rather than being seen as a DNR effort alone.

REVISED PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The group briefly discussed the Partnership Agreement, and that the committee is already acting on some of priorities stated in the Agreement (i.e. researching trout regulations and Natural Rivers designation). Huron Pines has the document and will bring to the next meeting.

NEXT MEETING: April 14