

**Ashokan / Pepacton Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Zoom Chapter Meeting Minutes of Wednesday February 24th, 2021**

The speaker to be: **Bob Adams DEC Region 3 Fisheries Biologist**

7:05 pm:

Mark L. With his virtual gavel called the meeting to order.

Minutes:

Mark L. indicated that initially we started with a recitation of the previous meeting minutes but we have now opted to put them on the **APWCTU** website. He mentioned that the previous meeting minutes are a synopsis only, because my (chapter secretary) internet was down. **Mark L.** went on to say that the synopsis minutes are published on the chapter website. Anyone who wanted to consult the minutes could access them at www.apwct.org. Furthermore if they have any corrections, additions or deletions to suggest, please let us know and we will address those suggestions.

So In lieu of recitation of the minutes we direct you to the website respect to the speaker's time.

Treasurer and Acid Rain Reports

Jody H. indicated that the General Operating Fund had **\$12,271.07**; the Conservation Fund had **\$787.68** bringing the **Total Cash Assets** to **\$13,058.75** and no income or expenditures.

Announcements and Comments

Mark L. indicated we were pretty much in limbo regarding funds, until we get the **\$200.00** check from **Vincent Bilota** plus a **\$125.00** check from **Lois Ostapczuk**, the proceeds from the sale of a painting she'd done. Thanks Lois. With the **Ostapczuk's** in mind, **Mark** referred us to the **Blue Mountain News** that **Ed O.** sends out every month to all our members.

Mark L mentioned that the **newsletter** is really exhaustive and has everything that's going on TU related, and more with valuable links to organizations, agencies and individuals of relevance and/or interest. He suggested to check it out and conveyed renewed thanks to **Ed O. for doing an exceptional job on that.**

Mark L. mentioned the "**Silver Trout Award**" that we have, that is to be awarded to a school board member who shall remain unnamed. **Chet Karwatowski**, who is out of town currently, wants to create an effective PR campaign over the presenting of this award, which should further benefit the recipient as well our chapter. So we'll be working on that and possibly scheduling it for the **March Chapter Meeting.**

Mark L. indicated next that our board has some really big issues, one being the new **NYS trout management regulations**, another being the **turbidity** in the **Esopus Creek**, and another being the proposed **Hydro Turbine Project**. But rather than take time from **Bob's** presentation, it would be tabled for another time. It was suggested that **Bob** would want to talk about it and it's something that we will have to take up in depth on our **Tuesday, March 2nd BOD meeting.**

Mark L. Asked if anyone had any old business that they thought should be aired, and with no takers the virtual floor was ceded to **Bob Adams** who is an **Aquatic Biologist for the NYS DEC Region 3** and thought to be **Mike Flaherty's** successor who was a good friend of the Chapter. It was noted that we hoped that we would have the same excellent relationship with **Bob.**

Bob Adams' Presentation

Bob began by saying that he was not **Mike Flaherty's** successor rather the **Aquatic Biologist for Region 3.**

Bob indicated that **Ryan Colter** was doing an excellent job filling two positions. Firstly, as the **Regional Biologist for East of the Hudson**, secondly: filling in for a lot of the jobs that **Mike** was doing as **Manager of Regional Fisheries.**

He went on to say that it's been sort of a rocky first year in the job with **Mike F.** retiring and all the other stuff going on. But that he thought they had done very well considering and that he was proud of what he had accomplished last year.

Bob A. started by indicating that he wanted to go over the new regulations and what the status of same is. He added that though, he believed most of us knew, it's been a long time coming and we (us fisher-people) were involved in a lot of the planning meetings they had. He wanted to go over the basic plan the plan quickly, as we have seen these slides over and over but he wanted to catch us up again, as this is a new approach.

Most of the updates and/or important features, new or in the drafts, of the new Plans and Regulations were outlined by Bob as follows:

- **“Approval Status of New Regulations”** all of the new regulations have been approved and the new management plans have also, and that implementation will begin on **April 1st of this year**.
- **“Classifications & Categorizations”** the new plan classifies not streams but reaches as either wild or stocked. There are going to be 3 categories of wild and 2 of stocked each with pretty clear distinctions. Those distinctions are going to come from surveys that they are doing such as pressure estimates, all new habitat evaluations, and how much public access there is.
- **“Statewide Harvest Season”** is going to start on April 1st and end on October 15th. There is going to be a catch and release season from **October 31st to March 31st** thus providing year round fishing. The slide up then showed the sub-categories of “Wild”, “Wild quality”, and “Wild Premier” and “Stocked”, and “Stocked Extended”. Bob indicated, on the slide that was up, the two different classifications of “Stocked” and “Wild” and that he had slides that indicate what those terms and there “subcategories” mean, that we can go over later if you wish. Bob welcomed all to visit their website.
- **“Important Mention”** all of these regulations are applicable to publically accessible trout streams or reaches.
- **“New Plan Aspects”** New, is that the plan is split in two parts. The first part is bare bones structure, and the second part is **categorizations**. This enables revisiting and possibly changing **categorizations** as they collect more data, and they are planning to collect the data every February and assess ratios and will change designations if warranted.
- **“The Categorizations Plan”** is to be a living document, and the **“Trout Management Plan”** is to be viewed as describing the whole of what they are trying to accomplish.
- **“New Designations”** There have been a couple of sites that have been re-designated this year, one of them being the **Esopus Creek** as **“Wild Quality”**.
- **“New Online Interactive Map”** **April 1st** they are going to try to rule out the use of the DEC info locator which is a draft only. They're looking into creating an internet based map/application that would enable anglers, or interested parties to go in and highlight certain areas and/or zoom in to see if the spot had angling possibilities. The interactive map would also have **“categories”** and other pertinent information on it as well.
- **“Another project”** To find and/or identify reaches that most are not aware of, that have access as well. This would make them **“wild streams reaches”** by definition in the regulations. Because these locations have not been traditionally sampled, they'll take some time to research but they are hoping to have them on the interactive map by 2024.
- **“Sampled Reaches”** The **“categorization”** and **“regulations”** of reaches will be available by clicking on them. With **“Stocked Reaches”** the same is true but it will also indicate how many fish they are planning to stock the reach with, and their planned stocking schedule. As the stocking schedule is updated by sampled depletion rates, they are hoping to link it to a table that will be updated about every month. Accessing that table will enable anglers to have more up to date information than initially planned for.

- **“Another Aspect”** There will also be **shading** over sections of reaches that are actually accessible. Clicking on the area will indicate the **type of access**, such as **PFR** or **State Forest**.
- **“The interactive map”** should be a really valuable tool, as an angler could go in and print the desired area to PDF and then print on paper or simply make it available on their cell phones.
- **The Esopus**
Public comments solicited last year indicated that Esopus anglers, several of whom are NYS licensed guides, were experiencing catch rates that easily demonstrated the metric of 30 fish per mile was met, or as should be indicated, 40 pounds per acre. This prompted the DEC to have an internal review, a look back at their data, and make quick surveys and re categorize the **Esopus** as **“Wild Quality”**.
- **“In lieu of current samplings”** **Bob** displayed a graph from their data base, the Y-axis of which indicated “wild trout” pounds per acre in all. The green indicated “Wild Quality” (40 lbs. per acre) and the red “Wild Premier” (60 lbs. per acre). He also displayed a bar graph the indicating the number of multi-category fish handled above and below the portal.
- **“Multiple Sampling”** **Bob** indicated that they had done multiple sampling runs and came up with pretty consistent numbers of “fish per mile”. Each time they came up with over 300 fish per mile (the “Wild Quality” metric), supporting angler reported perceptions.
- **“2020 Sampling”** “Four sites above the portal and 1 site below were sampled, incidentally with the help of our own **Russel Martin**. In 3 of the 4 sites the sampling results exceeded 300 hundred fish per mile. They were able to sample only 1 stretch below the portal as they were stopped because of limited resources and some equipment failure. The 1 site below the portal yielded 350 fish per mile.
- **“Summarizing by Combining data”** Through weighted means, the numbers of trout handled came to 185 fish per mile combining species, though the majority were rainbows. Consulting the charts again, the Brown Trout were part stocked, part wild or holdover and larger. They were between 7 & 15 Inches with two were over 15. All rainbows were small between 6 & 12 inches, with a few over twelve.
- **“2012 Acid Rain Study Fisheries Sampling”** this group sampled just above the portal near Alaban and got pretty much the same results as Bob’s crew did in 2020, a bit farther upstream. Below, in 4 of the 6 years there were over 300 fish per mile. On average of the 6 years they saw about 325 trout per mile.
- **“Esopus Wild Quality”**. Putting all this data together, and considering angler input, they made the decision to make the whole **Esopus** from the **Ashokan** all the way up **“Wild Quality”** as most of us already knew. This changes the regulations. There will be no more stocking unless future sampling warrants it and the keeper amount will change to 3 trout per day and no more than 1 over 12”.
- **“The Esopus Tributaries”** are considered to be in the **“wild”** category, which means that 5 trout per day and no more than 2 over 12” can be taken. Bob said he believed there are some productive areas in the tributaries, so he’s hoping to do sampling up these.
- **“Continuing this Categorization”** Is this a **“Wild Quality”** stretch or not? They already have a draft management plan up to Albany for their review. That plan goes through the history of the fishery, some challenges facing it, and the desired state of the fishery, and then some management objectives and goals. After that an internal review should produce a request for edits and once those are completed it will go to public comment.

- **“Probable New Public Meetings”** The new submission creates another opportunity for anglers to voice their opinions with regards to the Stream Managements Plan’s appropriateness.
- **“Objectives”**: Bob indicated that above the portal he’d like to repeat every 3 years what the sampling they had done this year and see if there were any improvements or not. Maybe they’ll see more and bigger trout since stocking had ceased.
- **“The Next Years below the Portal”**: should be really interesting to see how this creek responds after 100 years of stocking. With new equipment and volunteers they will be able to sample below the portal particularly with an eye toward monitoring yearlings so verify no decline. If declines are noted it will trigger more samplings.
- **“The Ashokan Reservoir”** They think the rainbows at the end of year one or two then are going out and back in. What portion of those is contributing to spawning and are there any rainbows that are remaining in the Esopus? The same questions with brown trout what portion are coming out and contributing to spawning. So what is the spawn relationship to reservoir trout? This needs to be studied.
- **“Another Thing”** is making sure that there is a good variety of fish. Are we are still catching rainbows and browns? Is one species taking over? It’s thought that one of the draws of the Esopus is the opportunity to catch different species. It’s going to change now that browns are not being stocked so they have to monitor that.
- **“Angler Satisfaction”** Are anglers satisfied with what’s going after the changes? A digital questionnaire or digital log filled out by anglers would be tremendously useful. Anglers could send emails with catches.
- **“Angling Pressure”** They’d like to do a pressure survey every three years and the Esopus is due for a 10 year in depth creel survey so that will happen this year.
- **“Pressure and Access Surveys”** Angler access and pressure estimates for **“Wild Premier Streams”** match what we are trying to do so they are good goals for us which means 130 hours per acre. Surveys we have are for Public Land and PFR access. But they are to be always looking for new land acquisitions.
- **“Angler parking”** maintenance is an issue they hear a lot about. Something in this plan they’d like to put forward is that they do parking lot studies spring to fall. They’ve worked pretty hard on mapping routes all across our region where they can do quick drive up assessments. They’ll be doing that this year.
- **“Signage”** new regulations require new signage to be put up and old conflicting ones taken down so anglers will know where and how they can fish. Also these changes will be reflected in the DEC brochures and online. Being out there will enable them to see how things are and if waters are flowing well.
- **“Water Quality”** It being the reason that we have such a great fishery. **Bob A.** said he intends to be working with **Mike Flaherty** and the **“Ashokan Stream Management Program”** as much as possible. He is filling in for some of **Mike’s** former jobs that **DEC** hasn’t found a replacement for yet. The Esopus Creek water quality is greatly impacted by the ongoing work at the **Shandaken Portal**.
- **“The Shandaken Portal”** in addition to keeping in the loop with the **ASMP** they want to make sure that they are in the loop as far as decisions made. They are fortunate enough to have the **Water Division** of the **NYC DEP** request that they be present.
- **“Ongoing Status of the Fishery”** **Bob A.** said that they will be sending out a sort of report card bi-annually of their progress with the Objectives they had planned, as well as a status report of the fishery in general. This coming out of internal technical briefs they submit tri annually.
- **At this time Bob A.** indicated that he would open the floor for questions about this draft management plan.

Submitted Questions & Responses Offered

Mark L. Indicated that it seemed to him, **as a Guide**, that there were a lot more Rainbows hanging around **upstream**, not making that annual migration down to the Reservoir. Though it was anecdotal evidence, other anglers he had talked to observed the same.

Bob A. indicated he thought there was some kind of gradient and that he'd like to tap into that and that this was something we might collaborate on.

Mark L. complemented Bob for a great presentation and wanted to ask, how long Bob thought it would take for the wild trout fishery to reach to reach its full fecundity.

Bob A. indicated that as the Esopus has been stocked since the turn of the century, it was really hard to say. But he went on to say the work on the bypass when completed could have a very positive effect, being able to draw from two levels would allow them to draw from the less turbid water up high and all spring to preserve the deeper cold water for a longer period of time for release.

Bob went on to say that with a couple of uneventful years and the Shandaken project completed we are going to see pretty quick results. He said that it should provide better conditions for them to monitor, and that a key element was to get out there every three years, as the old model of every ten years was insufficient.

Mark L. said Bob sounded like an optimist, but he thought he shared Bob's optimism as it is an incredibly healthy aquatic environment.

Mark went on to mention the **SPDES** permit meeting via zoom at 10:00 the next day.

Tony C. said that he thought **Bob's** point that there were 12 or 14 inch rainbows that were mature and able to spawn without going up the stream was on point, and thanked **Bob** for putting it out there. Further **Tony** said he recognized though, that it would be hard to define.

Bob A. indicated that they he thought they were not doing enough sampling of the Ashokan Reservoir and that he was proposing to sample that in the future. And remarked that the two studies (Esopus and Ashokan) coupled would give a much clearer picture of what is going on in both or either.

Mark L. Complemented Bob's Involvement in the "**DEP Access to Recreation Meetings**". He went to say that there were maybe a half dozen places in play regarding access, including possibly, the, so called rock cut, (where the new rte. 28 bridge has been going in). People, some on the APWS board, see new access as a double edged sword. There are so many anglers on the Esopus now do we want to encourage more?

Mark L brought up the "**Pump Storage Proposal**" and asked if the DEC had any notice of this before it going public.

Bob A. indicated that they had not and that he thought it a bad business practice to plan something probably having an effect on drinking water without consulting the people who drink it, and their agencies. He thought it a **nonstarter** as the **DEP** is very protective of their drinking water.

Mark L. mentioned our upcoming **APWC BOD** meeting and that we anticipated there would be much discussion about the "**Pump Storage**" issue and he encouraged attendance.

Bob A. went on to mention that they would be targeting as many streams in "**Region 3**" that they possibly could that were of particular interest. He also noted that some of the tributaries are known by some to have good trout populations, but not known by the public at large. He intends to sample these and indicate results publically.

Ed O. asked if they would be stocking the Sawkill in Woodstock and mentioned that he and **Tony C.** had fished it but found there was little legal access. **Ed** also asked whether they were managing the **Rondout** below the reservoir.

Bob A. indicated that they wouldn't stock the **Sawkill** and went on to say that he was intending to study all streams without formal access and reflect that on the new map. This would include the **Rondout**.

Mark L. asked if they were budgeting for additional man power and went on to say that our chapter had willing people to help where and when they could.

Mark L. went on to say that we were in a sort of limbo with regards to activities, but we looked forward to being able to get out as a fishing community. He also suggested that this new plan seemed a huge experiment that would impact the fishery that was the life blood of not only the angling community, but to the broader community as well, economically and environmentally.

He indicated that there was already increased angling pressure and remarked that, as a guide, he was seeing a whole new set of anglers. Many of whom were younger first time anglers that were coming in increasing numbers. Also he mentioned that the fishery was known internationally, again stressing the importance of protecting and improving the fishery.

Bob A. mentioned that they too considered the value of this great asset and that he intended to be diligent with regards to monitoring it and making that information available to the public.

Mark L. indicated appreciation for the work that **Bob** was doing and further indicated that he found **Bob's** presentation incredibly rich and detailed which prompted indications of agreement from many chapter members. With that, he asked if there were any more questions at that time. As there were none he thanked Bob, as did many attendees, and suggested we all sign off thus ending the meeting.

8:35pm: Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Thom Frankel
Secretary of APW Chapter of TU

Note: All dialogue attributed to individuals was not literal, rather paraphrased and/or condensed or possibly not cited correctly. I welcome any comments, regarding changes, deletions, and/or omissions you think should be made.