



MassWildlife

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Wayne F. MacCallum, *Director*

Peter Farmer
Lancaster Conservation Commission
695 Main Street
Lancaster, MA 01523

January 3, 2012

RE: Proposal to remove the dam at Bartlett Pond, Lancaster

Dear Mr. Farmer:

Thank you for requesting input from the Division's Fisheries Section relative to the proposal to remove the dam at Bartlett Pond, Lancaster. The Division has conducted surveys of the Wekepeke Brook watershed since the 1970s. Surveys of the brook and two unnamed tributaries (one along Route 12 south of Route 190 in Sterling and one in Lancaster crossing Brockelman Road) have yielded blacknose dace (*Rhinichthys atratulus*), bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*), native brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), brown bullhead (*Ameiurus nebulosus*), reproducing brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), chain pickerel (*Esox niger*), common shiner (*Notropis cornutus*), fallfish (*Semotilus corporalis*), largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), longnose dace (*Rhinichthys cataractae*), pumpkinseed (*Lepomis gibbosus*), slimy sculpin (*Cottus cognatus*), tessellated darter (*Etheostoma olmstedii*), white sucker (*Catostomus commersoni*) and yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*).

The presence of warmwater pond species such as bluegill, brown bullhead, chain pickerel, largemouth bass, pumpkinseed and yellow perch are a result of the habitat created in impounded areas of the brook such as Bartlett Pond while the remainder of the documented species are indicative of riverine systems. Additionally, the presence of native brook trout and slimy sculpin confirm that Wekepeke Brook and its unnamed tributaries are coldwater fisheries resources. Coldwater fisheries resources are highly susceptible to changes in water quality and/or quantity such as siltation and run-off, water level fluctuations, loss of riparian habitat, stream fragmentation and alterations of the temperature regime. Additionally, according to the findings of the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (<http://www.brookie.org>), brook trout are undergoing a decline throughout its native range (Maine to Georgia) due to habitat degradation and Massachusetts is certainly no exception. The Massachusetts Wildlife Action Plan includes brook trout as a Species in Greatest Need of Conservation (SGCN) due to widespread habitat loss. Brook trout are particularly sensitive to a wide range of habitat alterations, including but not limited to reductions in tree canopy (which causes increases in summer temperatures), siltation (which can lead to changes in reproductive success), run-off from impervious

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surfaces (again a temperature issue), and stream fragmentation caused by dams and poor road culverts.

Fisheries surveys conducted this past fall on the reach of Wekepeke Brook below the Bartlett Pond dam revealed a mix of riverine and ponded species but none of the indicators of a coldwater fisheries resource. The habitat, however, is among the most suited for these species within the reach just above the dam to the confluence with the Nashua River. Removal of the dam will allow access to this reach for the first time since the construction of the dam. While the Bartlett Pond Dam is not the only impairment on the brook, its removal will improve habitat for species that are important to the state's native biodiversity. The Fisheries Section is therefore in favor of the proposed removal of the dam.

This letter of support is based on the initial analysis which presented options for a simple short term repair, replacement or removal of the dam. Should the town vote to remove the dam, the Division looks forward to reviewing the project as it moves through the regulatory process. Also, the proponent should contact Amanda Veinotte of the Division's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program at (508) 389-6380 as their database of rare and endangered occurrences and their supporting habitat is constantly being updated. Thank you again for an opportunity to provide input during this early stage of the proposal and should you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact me directly at (508) 389-6330.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard A. Hartley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Richard A. Hartley
Warm/Coolwater Project Leader