

Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources
Monthly Highlights
October, 2008

Issue Priorities:

Connect New Yorkers to Nature

Habitat Stamp Project Nearing Completion - The Franklin County Federation of Sportsmen obtained a \$14,000 grant from the Habitat Stamp program to construct a disabled access fishing platform on the Salmon River in the City of Malone. Design of the platform was based on engineering plans submitted to DEC for similar projects. Site clearing and construction work was performed by the Franklin County Highway Department. Prior to construction, considerable effort was made to rid the site of two invasive nonnative plant species: Japanese knotweed and purple swallowwort. The platform overlooks a good trout fishing hole. Remaining tasks include paving the parking area and access path, stabilizing exposed areas with mulching and seeding, and erecting signage. A grand opening ceremony is expected in the spring of 2009 to coincide with the opening day of trout season. This project complements ongoing efforts by the City of Malone to enhance river-based recreation.

Bureau of Fisheries

Bill Schoch

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Trout in the Classroom (TIC) - DEC staff attended the fall TIC workshop conducted at Hyde Park. Staff from Catskill Hatchery were on hand to provide brown trout eggs to teachers primarily from the southeastern portion of the state participating in the TIC program. Central Office and Region 2 and 3 staff provided a display describing the I FISH NY Program and were on hand to speak with teachers about future programming in the classrooms. Central Office staff also presented information on procedures TIC participants need to follow to safely conduct these classroom projects while minimizing the potential for the spread of fish pathogens or aquatic invasive organisms in the state. DEC has supported the TIC program since its inception by providing small numbers of inspected, pathogen free eggs to classrooms across the state. TIC is an educational program that helps students gain an appreciation for the importance of clean water and healthy aquatic habitats. At the conclusion of the classroom phase of the program, fish stocking permits are issued so that surviving fish may be released into waters approved by Regional Fisheries Management Units.

Bureau of Fisheries

Phil Hulbert

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Pheasant Propagation Program Offers Variety of Opportunities - Over 60,000 pheasant hunters benefitted from an outstanding production season at the Department's Richard E. Reynolds Game Farm. Staff at Reynolds hatched and distributed over 100,000 pheasants for a variety of Department and cooperative pheasant rearing and release programs. This includes 60,000 day-old chicks and 15,160 young pheasants (7-10 weeks old) distributed to cooperators in the Day-old Pheasant Chick Program and Young Pheasant Release Program. Cooperators, including 4-H youth from thirty Cooperative Extension offices, farmers and other landowners, sportsmen's clubs, and county federations of sportsmen, raise and/or release the birds with guidance from the Department. The Department also raises adult pheasants (18 weeks or older) for a number of hunting programs. Adult pheasants are released on more than 100 sites across the state before and during the regular pheasant hunting season providing a month or more of hunting opportunity. This year 28,000 adult pheasants were released, 3,000 more than the annual goal due to an excellent pheasant production season. Some of these adult pheasants were released for the second annual Youth Pheasant Hunt Weekends. These weekends allow Junior Hunters (12-15 years old) the opportunity to go afield under the guidance of a trained hunter prior to the opening of the regular pheasant hunting season. The Department also provided over 1,200 adult pheasants for twenty-nine special hunts sponsored by sportsmen's clubs and conservation organizations. The over 700 participants in these hunts included youth, novice, women, and people with disabilities. The sponsored hunts are run by volunteers and usually include practice shooting clay pigeons, meals, lessons in gun safety, and hunting over a well-trained bird dog. All Department pheasants must be released on land open to public hunting, thus opening thousands of acres to fall pheasant hunting.

Bureau of Wildlife

Mike Murphy

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Breeding Bird Atlas Exhibition Opened in NYS Museum - An exhibition on the New York State Breeding Bird Atlas opened on October 3 in the NYS Museum in Albany. The exhibit is called "Mapping the Birds of New York - The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State" (<http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/exhibits/special/BreedingBirdAtlas.cfm>). It shows the changes in our breeding bird populations since the first atlas was completed 20 years ago. Original artwork from 15 artists is displayed, alongside professionally prepared display panels describing the Atlas project and showing a sampling of the results. Bird mounts of several species, including Sandhill Crane, Loggerhead Shrike, and Black Vulture round out the exhibit, which will remain in place through May 2009.

Bureau of Wildlife

John Ozard

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Promote a Toxic Free Future

DEC Partners with NOAA's Mussel Watch on the Upper Hudson River - In September, Josh Thiel and Sean Madden of the Natural Resource Damages Section participated in the collection of zebra mussels from the Hudson River as part of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) Mussel Watch. For over twenty years, Mussel Watch has monitored contaminants, such as mercury and PCBs, in sediments and bivalves from estuaries and coastal areas all over the U.S. With dredging of PCBs from the Upper Hudson scheduled to begin in 2009, NOAA expanded its Mussel Watch to include several new sites in the Hudson River to establish a baseline for monitoring during and after the dredging process. The data generated will serve as an important source of information for policy makers, resource managers, scientists, and the general public for determining the effects of dredging on contaminant levels in Hudson River organisms. <http://ccma.nos.noaa.gov/about/coast/nsandt/welcome.html>

Bureau of Habitat

Sean Madden
Josh Thiel

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Interstate Evaluation of PCBs in Striped Bass and Bluefish Aims to Standardize

Consumption Advisories - The final "Report of the Interstate Workgroup on Evaluating Atlantic Coastal Advisories for Recreationally Caught Striped Bass and Bluefish Based on PCBs" has been released. This cooperative effort of environmental and health agencies for the 13 states having striped bass and bluefish fisheries documented PCB concentrations throughout the species ranges, and assessed potential health risks to consumers of the two species. PCB concentrations were shown to be greatest in areas associated with discharges of PCBs (the Hudson River was the most prominent). The study revealed that there was no relationship between size and PCB concentration in striped bass but a size-PCB relationship did occur for bluefish. Analysis also showed that there have been significant declines in PCB concentrations coast-wide in both species, and that life history of the fish (e.g. age) does influence the PCB concentrations observed. The report includes recommendations for standardizing health advisories for coastal stocks but recognizes that states may need to issue site-specific advisories for fish stocks near PCB sources. Major contributions to this effort were made by Larry Skinner and two Department retirees, Ron Sloan and Byron Young. To view the report, visit http://maine.gov/dhhs/eohp/fish/9_08Final.pdf.

Bureau of Habitat

Larry Skinner

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Measuring Mercury in Fish - How do they do that?- Mercury (Hg) is a global pollutant that has worldwide human health impacts with significant economic and social costs. The most troubling health impacts of mercury are neurotoxic, including permanent brain damage, with impacts being the most serious in the developing fetus and very young children. The dominant pathway of exposure resulting in nervous system damage is the ingestion of fish and seafood. At the DFWMR's Hale Creek Field Station, Environmental Chemist Brian Buanno conducts almost daily analyses for mercury in wild-caught fish, seafood and game from locations throughout New York State. He uses the method of atomic absorption spectrophotometry to measure

mercury in the edible tissues of his samples. Ninety-five percent of the mercury in the tissues occurs as methyl-mercury, the form of mercury that is most toxic to the human nervous system. Brian's method consists of releasing the methyl-mercury from the tissues using strong acids, vaporizing the mercury atoms, passing a light energy beam through the atoms, measuring the amount of light energy absorbed by the mercury, and determining the mercury concentration from a calibration curve. Brian's results are forwarded to the NYS Department of Health (DOH), where toxicologists evaluate the potential health risk for persons consuming wild-caught fish, seafood and game from those locations. Because Brian's analyses are of the highest quality, DOH can rely on them when considering whether to institute species-specific recommendations to restrict fish consumption or to eat no fish from certain bodies of water. The statewide recommendations are published in DOH's *Chemicals in Sportfish and Game: 2008-2009 Health Advisories*. To find out more, visit <http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/outdoors/fish/fish.htm>.

Bureau of Habitat

Tony Gudlewski

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Safeguard New York's Unique Natural Assets

Otsego Lake netting: The 4,200 acre Otsego Lake in Region 4 was netted for the 22nd time since 1969 to monitor the abundance of lake trout. The wild population is supplemented with the stocking of approximately 5,000 yearling lake trout annually. Six 450-foot-long gill nets were set overnight at standardized netting locations. A total of 123 lake trout between 7.6 and 30.2 inches was caught for an average catch of 20.5 fish/net. This was down slightly from the record catch of 20.8 fish/net recorded in 2006. The catch of legal (≥ 23 in) lake trout numbered 20 or 3.3 fish/net. This new record high was only slightly higher than the 3.2 legal fish/net recorded in 2006. In nettings prior to 2006, the previous high catch per net for all size and legal fish was 14.8 in 2002 and 3.0 in 1998. The lake trout population in Otsego Lake remains at or near record levels and fishing should remain very good. Contrary to popular opinion, the opening of the lake to year round fishing for lake trout in 1998 has not negatively impacted the abundance of lake trout or the quality of the fishery.

Bureau of Fisheries

Norm McBride

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Restoration of Gilt Darters to Allegheny River System:

Biologists McKeown and Clancy traveled to East Brady, PA to collect gilt darters. Gilt darters, listed as an endangered species in New York, were last collected in New York State in the 1930s and are considered native to the Allegheny River system. Fortunately they continue to be relatively abundant in the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania. With support from the Pennsylvania Fish Commission, Penn State University and California University of Pennsylvania, hundreds of gilt darters were collected by pulling a bottom trawl upstream with the boat in reverse. A sub-sample of thirty adults was air-shipped to a lab in Tennessee for use as brood stock and all made the trip in



good condition. Offspring produced from these broodstock will be stocked in preferred habitat of the Allegheny River system of New York. Restoration of gilt darters to New York is funded through the federal State Wildlife Grants program.

Bureau of Fisheries

Michael Clancy

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Pre-Fish Passage Sampling on Chautauqua Creek: A survey of eight electrofishing stations in Chautauqua Creek was completed during October to estimate the abundance of juvenile steelhead and to collect information on the fish species assemblages both above and below the dams. This was the second year of the survey, which is being conducted in anticipation of a fish passage project scheduled in 2009. Additional surveys will be conducted post-fish passage at the same eight sites to determine the effects on steelhead production and the overall fish community.



Results of the survey indicate that overall steelhead production in the creek was much higher in 2008 compared to 2007, most likely due to better water flows during the summer of 2008. Also of note was the absence of juvenile steelhead from the headwaters of the creek during 2008. This is likely due to the low flow conditions experienced during Fall 2007, making passage over the dams more difficult and further passage upstream to the headwaters unlikely. Steelhead production just below the dams was substantially higher in 2008 compared to 2007, supporting the theory that the dams are a significant hurdle for migrating steelhead and other fish species.

The survey also expanded the horizons of local high school students. Staff from the Environmental Education class at Forestville Central High School helped conduct the survey at two different stations. The class then took the data and determined the density of both trout and smallmouth bass in the stream. They also learned fish identification and how to use a fish key. All of this information was put into a poster and presented at the school's open house during October.

Bureau of Fisheries

James Markham

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Spruce Grouse Habitat Research - The Spruce Grouse is endangered and declining in New York State. Recent studies by DEC and SUNY Potsdam have indicated that the species occupies mid-successional spruce-tamarack forests and that populations may be declining due to natural succession. Region 6 staff assisted in designing a study to test the hypothesis that managing spruce forest for younger stands will have a positive effect on the species' occurrence. Nine, one-hectare plots are currently being established on private land in an occupied spruce grouse site at the core of the species distribution in the northwestern Adirondacks. Three types of treatments will be employed this winter to test whether or not spruce grouse habitat will be regenerated, and which management techniques are the most successful. Information such as this is necessary if we are to conserve persistent populations of the Spruce Grouse in New York State.



Bureau of Wildlife

Angelena Ross

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French Creek WMA – Wetland Restoration Project - As part of an ongoing pilot study funded by the Fisheries Enhancement Mitigation and Research Fund, an amphibious excavator is being used at French Creek WMA to create approximately one mile of small channels and openings through dense cattail stands. This procedure will create habitat diversity that will encourage fish spawning and wildlife diversity. The excavator was purchased by the USFWS, which is one of the many partners involved with this research project. The other partners include: SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Ducks Unlimited, and Thousand Island Land Trust. In addition to the excavator there are several other options (i.e. potholes, impoundment) being proposed to manage this wetland. The site was evaluated prior to construction and will be evaluated post construction to determine the best practical and cost effective methods for enhancing wetlands.



Bureau of Wildlife

Bill Gordon

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Oriskany Flats WMA Wetland Enhancement Project - As mitigation for wetland and stream impacts related to the Judd Road Connector Project (PIN 280127), work began on a stream and wetland construction project within the Oriskany Flats WMA, located within the Town of Whitestown, Oneida County. The mitigation project includes construction of approximately 1,969 ft. of meandering stream channel and three wetland basins. The new stream channel will be constructed using natural channel design techniques and will incorporate habitat enhancements. The wetland basins will be excavated adjacent to the new stream channel, and will be connected to it via spillways, creating a total of approximately 5.18 acres of wetland and enhancing approximately 1.26 acres of existing wet meadow wetland. The wetland creation and

enhancement areas will consist primarily of emergent marsh, wet meadow, and open water habitat with lesser areas of scrub-shrub wetland, and forested wetland.

Bureau of Wildlife

Bill Gordon

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Aerial Photographs of Upper Hudson River PCB Remediation Dredge Site Acquired - The Habitat Inventory Unit, along with the New York State Police, used New York State's mapping camera to acquire aerial photographs along the 40 miles of the upper Hudson River PCB remediation dredge site. The dredging, scheduled to start in 2009, will necessarily disturb aquatic habitat and other vegetation along the length of the remediation area. These photographs provide a detailed record of the entire dredge area in the year before dredging is scheduled to begin. The photographs are being scanned on a high resolution scanner. The photographs and scans will enable mapping of such important features as the locations of submerged aquatic vegetation beds and riverine wetlands.

Bureau of Habitat

Wayne Richter

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Dennis Wischman

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Biologists Study Toxicity of Upper Hudson River Sediment - The sediments in the Hudson River near Ft. Edward are well documented to have high PCB concentrations and are targeted for a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency clean-up beginning in Spring 2009. The organisms that live on and in these sediment, called benthic organisms, are an important part of the Hudson River food web and serve as an important pathway for PCBs to move from the sediment into other organisms, like fish. Surprisingly, few studies have tried to assess the toxicity of the PCBs in Hudson River sediments to the organisms that live there and how that toxicity might be reflected in the diversity and structure of the river's benthic communities. During late September and early October, Hudson River Natural Resource Damages Unit biologist Sean Madden collaborated with researchers from Industrial Economics and MacDonald Environmental Science, Ltd. to collect sediment samples from over 40 locations in the Ft. Edward area for a study of sediment toxicity as part of the Hudson River Natural Resource Damage Assessment (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/25609.html>). At each sampling location, enough sediment was collected for chemical and bioavailability analyses, laboratory toxicity testing, and benthic community analysis, which will provide multiple lines of evidence for measuring potential effects of PCBs to Hudson River benthic organisms.

Bureau of Habitat

Sean Madden

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New York State Parks Surveyed for Rare Species and Significant Communities - Kimberly Smith, Botanist; and Julie Lundgren, Ecologist; conducted surveys in over 26 state parks this summer as part of the partnership between the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation and the New York Natural Heritage Program. Dozens of rare species and significant natural community records were updated, and at least 25 new sites for rare species were discovered. Highlights for western New York include updates of two rare freshwater mussel species, a new location for kidneyshell (a rare mussel), and confirmed records for the state endangered bluntlobed grape fern that was last documented in the area in 1931. In eastern

New York, a new population of the state-threatened whorled mountain mint was documented on Staten Island where it was last recorded in 1869. In the Hudson Valley region, numerous locations for the state-threatened Appalachian sandwort were added and a new location was discovered for the Russet-tipped clubtail, a rare dragonfly. These findings illustrate the wisdom of preserving natural areas within New York's state park system.

Bureau of Habitat

*Julie Lundgren
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New York Natural Heritage Completes Data Project on Federally Listed Plants - The Botany program of the New York Natural Heritage Program completed database entry of all census data for federally listed plant species in New York, a project conducted by NatureServe and the Center for Plant Conservation. The project will provide the best available documentation of locations and conditions of known federal plant populations, and the data will be used to assist in the implementation of recovery work for these species. Fortunately for New York, most of our federal species have census data that has been completed in the last 15 years and counts that go as far back as the mid-1800s.

Bureau of Habitat

Steve Young

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Summer Flounder Recreational Catch Data: Wave 4 Released. On October 15, the National Marine Fisheries Service released preliminary estimates of recreational harvest of summer flounder (and other species) through the months of July and August ("Wave 4"). New York's estimate for the period was over 583,000 fish harvested year-to-date. Our harvest limit is 361,000 fish, leaving us with an overage of approximately 222,000 fish. Angler effort appeared to be low early in the season, then increased during July, as did success rates according to published fishing reports. New York was not alone, as six of the nine coastal states with recreational fluke harvest were over their allocations. Implications for 2009 are not yet clear, as the lawsuit is still outstanding and an updated stock assessment characterized the resource as 72% recovered.

Meanwhile, the Federal Court has yet to rule on whether the United Boatmen of New York would be allowed into the suit, and if the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission would be added as defendants.

Bureau of Marine Resources

Stephen W. Heins

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Bluefish Quota Transfers. According to the interstate Fishery Management Plan for Bluefish, unused quota allocated to states may be transferred among states in order to fully utilize the fishery resource consistent with the Plan and keeping within the coastal allowable harvest. New York, because of defective data used to set state commercial allocations, has consistently sought excess bluefish allocation from other states in order to sustain the existing commercial fishery off Long Island. This month, we received transfers from the states of Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maryland and Delaware, to go with quota received earlier in the year from North Carolina and Florida. This will allow us to harvest 410,000 pounds of bluefish which will be used to satisfy demand in New York markets and sustain our commercial fishery. Coast-wide, it

is likely that less than 80% of the commercial quota will be harvested.

Bureau of Marine Resources

Stephen W. Heins

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Work for Environmental Justice

Nothing to report

Combat Climate Change

Assessment for Effective Climate Change Adaptation Strategies in New York - The New York State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) recently awarded \$1 million dollars to Columbia University to develop an integrated assessment to identify critical vulnerabilities, climate risks, and adaptation strategies for key sectors in New York, including ecosystems and water resources (the others are: agriculture, ocean coastal zones, energy, transportation and communications infrastructure, and public health). The DFWMR must continue to manage the state's natural resources in the face of expected impacts due to climate change. As such, Director Riexinger and Conservation Coordinator Tracey Tomajer will work with Columbia and its many partners over the next two years to ensure that natural resource issues are sufficiently addressed. The integrated assessment developed for this project will consider natural and socioeconomic factors, community needs and values, the costs associated with impacts and adaptive measures, and the resources available for implementation.

Bureau of Habitat

Tracey Tomajer

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Foster Green and Healthy Communities

Teal Marsh to be Protected by PCB Cleanup Action - Cleanup of sediments contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) has begun on the Alcan Sheet and Plate site in the Town of Scriba, Oswego County. The cleanup action includes sediment remediation of a half-acre pond/marsh complex adjacent to the Alcan plant as well as 1.5 miles of Tributary 63, a primary source of flow into Teal Marsh. The PCB sediment concentration is as high as 161 parts per million, which is four orders of magnitude higher than what is considered safe for the protection of fish and wildlife. Teal Marsh is an undisturbed, picturesque 285-acre marsh along the shores of Lake Ontario with scrub-shrub and forested wetland, and open water marsh that is hydrologically connected to the lake. Teal Marsh is populated with a variety of fish species including redbfin pickerel, several bass species, and catfish, and is a nesting area for least bittern and pied-billed grebe, a New York State threatened species. The remediation effort is on track to finish in December, with habitat restoration work to be completed next spring. Excavation of the contaminated sediments will ensure a healthy ecosystem for the resident fish and wildlife. A long-term monitoring plan to test the effectiveness of the cleanup in achieving that goal will be implemented.

Bureau of Habitat

Mary Jo Crance

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Organizational Priorities:

Fair and Effective Enforcement

Nothing to report

Partnerships and the Public

Nothing to report

Workforce, Science and Technology

Nothing to report

Sustainability of DEC's Own Operations

Nothing to report