



August 31, 2024

Dear Members of the Commission,

Thank you for taking the time to accept and read our comments regarding the new fishing rules proposal submitted by the N.H. Fish & Game Department recently. While it may be time to address the classifications of some of the ponds with Fly Fishing Only or Designated Trout Pond status, the Pittsburg Anglers Association is adamantly opposed to any changes regarding the state's rivers, especially when it comes to areas of our rivers that are currently FFO or those that have catch and release regulations on them.

Climate change may have had an effect over the last two decades on some of our ponds, requiring some changes to be made, but only empirical data should be used when making this assessment. If the goal is to "streamline the fishing rules", then that is not a viable explanation for dealing with the rivers of New Hampshire. Our rivers are just like the state – diverse and complicated, and a "one size fits all" approach should not be used when it comes to making policy for rivers in various parts of the state.

While the new plan is for the entire state of New Hampshire, **our organization's focus is on our local waters, and specifically the Connecticut River watershed.** It is the gem of fly fishing in New Hampshire, and we are fortunate to have the coldest water in the state (*fish below Murphy Dam in late August if you don't believe me*). We believe that in this case the new proposal would not be "for the benefit of all".

The **various FFO stretches of the Connecticut River are special** in their own right, and therefore deserve special regulations to protect them. **Keeping the regulations "as is" – FFO in the stretches below Second Lake Dam (*also a wild, catch & release fishery*) and First Lake Dam in Pittsburg, and keeping the winter catch and release rules below Murphy Dam, at a minimum, are important in maintaining our fishery and the pristine beauty of these areas, as well as continuing to attract fly anglers to our waters for the local economy.**

Connecticut River's Trophy Stretch: Perhaps the most important economic stretch of river in New Hampshire, and that is because of fly fishing. It's beautiful with classic runs and pools, and visitors love fishing here. Allowing ALO, where the catch and release ethic is not a priority, will result in a fishery that is over by July 15. The majority of the stocked fish will have been taken by then, and without more stocking (*usually not done after July 1*) anglers will grow frustrated over the lack of fish.

Connecticut River Below Murphy Dam: This stretch is the best coldwater fishery in the state, and is responsible for producing the NH record brown trout. Why would the department open it up year-round, even in the fall during the brown trout spawning, and even worse – get rid of the catch and release regulations from January 1 – March 31? Those winter regulations went in to effect approximately 8-9 years ago, and every angler that fishes down there will tell you it's working – why the change in policy?

Connecticut River between Second Lake Dam and Green Point on First Connecticut Lake: This is the worst one of all, taking what is currently a wild brook trout and salmon fishery with catch and release regulations (*yes, there are both types of fish here during the summer months*) and opening it up for ALO. The assumption here is that the state would be stocking this water, so we would be losing a wild trout fishery (*something that I thought Fish & Game was striving for*) and an area that is one of the most beautiful in the state. Not to mention the fishing pressure the salmon would be under during the spring run up the river, even above Magalloway Bridge.

Any real or perceived degradation in the resource will lead to a loss of visitors (*there's other FFO destinations out there – i.e. Maine*) that will impact our local economy in a myriad of ways. Lodges, restaurants, guides and the many businesses that support them will all feel the effect of this loss, and lastly our community will feel it. Business is tough enough in Coos county without intentionally sabotaging an important part of our northern tourism industry. The changes will have a negative impact on the communities of northern New Hampshire, where some businesses have specifically branded themselves to cater to fly anglers, with the blessing of the NH Fish & Game Department for decades.

The Pittsburg Anglers Association was formed in 2015 to augment the numbers of trout stocked by the state in the Trophy Stretch, a massively important economic driver for Pittsburg and all of Coos county. We have steadily grown, as have the numbers of trout that we stock in May. Many of these fish are being caught (*and released*) throughout the summer and early fall fishing season, as these trout provide enjoyment for multiple anglers. We have had a lot of compliments from visitors that love our fish, river and town. Most of them plan on coming back to visit, fish, and spend money, but that will be put in jeopardy if we lose what separates us from other areas in New England. **If the new proposal goes in to effect in Pittsburg, the Pittsburg Anglers Association will cease operations and stop stocking the Trophy Stretch. Our**

fish are an investment in trying to get tourists to return to our area, not for spin fishermen to take, day after day, until they're gone.

Many fly anglers will not return to New Hampshire if our river sections are opened up to Artificial Lures, and we will have lost one of the traditions that makes northern New Hampshire special. The fly fishing and conservation-minded heritage that we are known for will be over, and with it a lot of tourist dollars and tax revenue for the state will be lost. Lure fishermen will not make up the difference of what will be lost either – N.H. Fish & Game will have to sell a lot more licenses with the new regulations.

In our opinion, such sweeping changes to the fishing rules and regulations should be undertaken in a transparent manner, in cooperation with the Department and the various user groups in the resource. We also believe that these decisions, with major implications for our northern tourism-dependent communities, should be undertaken deliberately and not be entrusted to a rushed process. Generations of anglers are depending on it.

Thank you for your consideration,

Bill Bernhardt, President

Nick Proulx, Vice-President

Tom Caron, Treasurer / Secretary

Peter DePontbriand, Director

Charles Degray, Director

David Stevens, Director