



September 23, 2008

My Turn: On 'Targeting end of pesticides to kill lamprey'

By Frank Stanley

Candace Page chooses to give significant weight to the opinion of an Arizona-based preservationist organization with no fisheries biologists working on the Lake Champlain lamprey issue in her article "Targeting end of pesticides to kill lamprey" (Aug. 14). Their comments are driven by anecdote and ideology and offer no viable solutions to this devastating ecological and economic issue.

The Center for Biological Diversity follows a "wildlife first" ideology. What does this mean? In my opinion it means everything else comes second: the economy, tourism, jobs, human welfare and nontargeted species. Their mission calls for working through science, law and creative media to secure a future for all species, great or small, hovering on the brink of extinction. All I have seen is creative media.

Along with opposing the current lamprey program and expansion, the organization has made public statements concerning the proposed comprehensive conservation plan for the Conte Refuge in northern Vermont. A few of their goals are halting snowmobiling, prohibiting any economic use of the land, accelerating the phase out of private camps, closing roads to limit human traffic and recreation, and so on. Along with opposing protection of the Lake Champlain fishery, the organization seemingly opposes the traditional land use practices and the working landscape that is a big part of Vermont's identity and economic base.

For over four decades studies have been conducted on the use of and how lampricide reacts in aquatic ecosystems. Study after study, risk assessment after risk assessment, have shown that when properly applied and monitored, use of lampricide is safe, having little, if any, effect on nontarget species.

Reports of lamprey attacking people are climbing, which could devastate local tourism. It's no secret that lamprey is limiting the recovery of the endangered lake sturgeon or that fish wounding rates were high before the 1990s experimental lamprey program started. The program was successful and the rebound of the lamprey population since 1998 is due to a suspension of that program until 2002.

Each year state and federal agencies go through the regulatory and public comment process, and concerns about the use of lampricide are heard, and along with it, a collage of "what if" science from preservation groups. Each year the follow-up surveys reveal little or no negative effects on nontarget species. Science shows the long-term negative impacts caused by a lack of lamprey control. Where is the science that shows the long-term negative impacts on the lake due to chemical lamprey control?

Many preservation groups call for more studies and grant money. This issue has already been studied to death. We don't need more studies on lampricide. We need to go forward with a long-term program just as the Great Lakes Fishery Commission has done since it was founded in 1955. The Lamprey control program was successful in the 1990s and, according to 2007 wounding rates and trapping surveys conducted by Vermont fisheries biologists, the program is working now.

There cannot be any further suspension of chemical treatments until a suitable alternative has been found. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent on research for alternatives, but to date none have been considered successful. The do-nothing approach, is not an option. The Center for Biological Diversity and its allies would do well to spend less time grandstanding and more time finding a solution we can all agree on. More balanced coverage from Candace Page on this issue going forward would be appreciated.

Frank Stanley of Bolton handles government affairs for the Vermont Traditions Coalition.
