

Avalonia, DEP tackle Anguilla Brook dams

■ Restoring fish runs would help alewife, herring, American eel.

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STONINGTON — The fish in Anguilla Brook may be getting a lift from local conservationists.

The Avalonia Land Conservancy and the Nature Conservancy, in conjunction with the state Department of Environmental Protection, would like to restore migratory fish runs in the brook by changing one dam and eliminating another.

About 20 people attended an informational public meeting at the La Grua Center Tuesday night to learn about the proposed fish way in the Stonington brook. The information was presented by Duncan Schweitzer of the local Avalonia Land Conservancy,

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Sally Harold of the Nature Conservancy, and Steve Gephard from the Inland Fisheries Division of the Department of Environmental Protection.

Gephard, a fish biologist, said the improved fish way will help diadromous fish, which are fish that live part of their lives in fresh water and part in salt water.

In Anguilla Brook, most of the diadromous fish are alewife and blueback herring, but that category also includes the American eel, known as *Anguilla rostrata*. Gephard noted that the brook was named after the eel species.

"This has always been a hot spot for eels," he said of the brook and the adjoining Wequetequock Cove.

Restoring the fish way for those three species is particularly important, he said, because their population numbers are dropping steeply all along the East Coast. Scientists don't know why, he said, but the answer appears to be in the ocean.

Although the proposed project is designed to help those particular species, Gephard said it will help many more, such as brook trout and mussels.

"It's good for the fish; it's good for the birds; it's good for all the creatures that live there," he said.

The plan, which will need to be funded by grants because the state's role is only advisory, includes making changes to the two dams in the brook, both of which are privately owned.

The first dam is the Wequetequock dam, most of which is composed of one large rock. Gephard said the plan is take natural stone from the brook and rebuild a stone wall on one side with appropriate gaps that can fit a board to regulate water flow. There would also be graduated stone weirs to make travel easier for the fish.

"Instead of the water dropping all at once, it's going to drop in steps," he explained.

Once built, the new fish way will be operated by the dam owner, but monitored by the state. The second dam is the Rutan dam off Lane Way, which will be destroyed. That dam, which Gephard said "leaks really bad" made news this summer when hours of torren-

tial rain threatened to overwhelm it, prompting an evacuation of the so-called Birdland development downstream.

Dam owner Linda Rutan said that although she will lose the 1-acre pond and waterfall that is now in her backyard, she was pleased to be able to help the ecosystem. Dismantling the dam is appropriate for "many reasons," she said, "not the least of which is we can't rebuild the dam."

Harold said that grant funding for the project could hopefully be obtained by March.

Schweitzer added that project updates would be available on Avalonia's Web site, www.avalonialandconservancy.org.

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