

## **Bristol Mills Dam Advisory Committee Hosts Wetland Bird Expert**

*Bristol, Maine – February 28, 2017* - The Bristol Mills Dam Advisory Committee hosted a Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (IFW) expert on wading birds at its most recent meeting on February 28. Biologist Danielle D’Auria provided the group with information about bird habitat in the Pemaquid River wetland area between the Bristol Mills Dam and Biscay Pond’s outlet.

The wetland upstream of the Bristol Mills Dam is partially impounded by the Dam and designated as a High Value Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat (IWWH). D’Auria explained that the Pemaquid River wetland ranks highly as an IWWH because of its size (over 140 acres), diversity and dominance of various plant communities, percentage of open water, and the interspersed nature of these features within the wetland. Each IWWH incorporates a 250ft-wide swath of surrounding upland because some waterbirds rely heavily on wetlands and adjacent uplands for habitat. This swath of upland habitat can also protect the wetland from surrounding disturbance. However, Maine IFW indicates that the 250ft-swath is not a “no build zone”. Instead, it provides IFW with the opportunity to comment on development activities planned to occur in or near the IWWH, with the goal of avoiding and minimizing disturbance to the natural communities within.

D’Auria also presented information about the types of wading birds and waterfowl that may use wetlands like the Pemaquid River IWWH. These included wading birds such as the well-known Great-Blue Heron, but also species that are less often observed due to their relatively cryptic behavior or low numbers, such as Virginia and Sora rails, Pied-Billed Grebe, Common Snipe, and American Bittern. D’Auria also played recordings of these species’ highly unique vocalizations.

Waterfowl using the Pemaquid wetland can include Canada Geese, dabbling ducks which favor shallow water, diving ducks that are built for deeper water, and mergansers that specialize in fish-eating. Other species that don’t fit neatly into the categories of waterfowl or wading birds but also make extensive use of wetlands in Maine include loons, songbirds, hawks and eagles, shorebirds, crows and even terns.

Each species has different feeding, nesting, and migration strategies. Some make brief use of the wetland as a critical refueling stop during long migrations, while others take up seasonal residence over winter or during the warmer months to breed and raise broods. A few species are even year-round residents. A wetland with diverse habitats, such as the Pemaquid River wetland, helps support a diverse assemblage of species.

The high value of this wetland emphasizes the need to be sure that any recommended plan for the Bristol Mills site maintains water levels upstream. The Bristol Mills Dam Advisory Committee is charged with guiding development of a feasibility study that is investigating several alternatives for the Dam. Options for the Dam’s future that are under consideration include repair and modification of the Dam and rebuilding the Dam’s fishway, and also partial or full replacement of the Dam with nature-like water control structures. Each of the alternatives are meant to maintain water levels in the wetland and upstream.

During the next meeting of the Bristol Mills Dam Advisory Committee on March 14<sup>th</sup>, experts from Maine IFW and University of Southern Maine will focus on resident and highly migratory fish species in the Pemaquid River. The Committee meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month from 6-8pm at the Bristol Town Office. All meetings are open to the public and all Committee materials, including supplementary reports and background information, are available at the Town Office. We hope to share this process with as many town residents and interested people as possible. Please join us to learn more about this valuable resource.