



Fisheries and Aquaculture

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Area 1

Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2009 Fall RFAC Meeting

The RFAC meeting for Area 1 Cape Breton was held on November 26, 2009 at the Alexander Graham Bell Historic Museum Baddeck, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 28 people in attendance. Darryl Murrant chaired the meeting while Don MacLean, Alan McNeill, Tara Marshall, Jason LeBlanc, Sean Neary, Eugene Sampson and John MacMillan from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture were also present. John Mombourquette, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Gary MacDonald, Nicole Sampson, Nadia MacPhee with Department of Fisheries and Oceans were also present. The meeting began at 7:00 pm with a brief introduction of those present, and a review of the agenda by the Chair.

Sportfishing Regulation Changes for 2009 and Proposed Changes for 2010

Darryl Murrant acknowledged the recent passing of our colleague, John MacInnes after a courageous battle with cancer. John was widely recognised as an enthusiastic supporter of regional development including recreational fisheries and has worked with many organizations in western Cape Breton to help improve the trout fishery, especially in the Mabou River. Darryl then reviewed the 2009 regulation changes specific to RFA 1.

Leonard Forsythe said there is a barrier falls at Sarach Brook in Middle River and said it doesn't make sense to have it in a Special Management Area. Ed Woodsworth asked how removing the maximum size limit on Brook trout in the highlands STMA would change the size structure of the population. John MacMillan said it probably won't considering the level of exploitation. Gordie MacKinnon agreed that removing the 10 inch size limit would result in high-grading and keeping only fish over 10inches. John Hart asked if there had been any changes (more, bigger fish) since the implementation of the Highlands STMA, John indicated that the 2008 survey was the first in the time series, so it is too early to tell. Peter Hill and Ed Woodsworth both asked if the Department could reassess Lake O'Law Brook since it has been five years since the reduced bag and size limits have been implemented.

2008 General & Salmon Licence Sales

Al McNeill reviewed the 2008 General and Salmon fishing license sales. General fishing licence sales were up from 2007 at 57,618 licences sold, while salmon licences were down slightly at 2,026 licences sold in 2008. Both General and salmon licences sales have been fairly consistent over the past five years.

Review of 2009 Activities and Preview of 2010 Field Activities

Coldwater Unit

John MacMillan reviewed the results from current and past studies on brook trout populations in

lakes in Nova Scotia. Fisheries in Nova Scotia lakes are diverse and understanding factors that influence fish populations is a challenge. Large differences among trout populations are found across Nova Scotia, CB highland Lakes tend to be inhabited by many small trout whereas in mainland lakes growth is rapid and trout obtain larger sizes, Important parameters that relate to size of trout are the level of crowding in the populations and the presence of competitors species such as perch, eel, and white sucker. The importance of competitors is one of the main reasons that Inland Fisheries is very concerned about the spread of invasives such as pickerel and smallmouth bass and the impact on our trout resource. Angling can be an important factor and results of studies were used to develop management strategies.

Data from Highland lakes suggest that they are the most productive in terms of trout per hectare but have an overabundance of small fish. The current length limit that allows for only two trout over 25 cm may not be a useful regulation. In order to take advantage of this productivity in the highland lakes, John indicated the Department is considering opening a few lakes for a winter fishery for brook trout. John asked if there were any suggestions for lakes. Leonard suggested Siefferts and Big Lakes.

John reviewed Special Trout Management Area program. West River Antigonish and River Denys are two important systems that support a large sea run trout fishery. Past studies include angler creel surveys and sampling with live trap nets. Data were preliminary and analysis will be completed after the 2009 field season. Harvest and population estimates have been calculated. Assessments will continue in the West River of Antigonish in 2010. Plans are to reassess River Denys in 2012 or 2013.

Reg Madden continues to analyse scales from angled Rainbow trout from Bras D'or Lakes. Rings patterns on scales of trout can be used to distinguish growth rates and origin (hatchery or wild). The assistance of Gordie McKinnon and other anglers was noted.

John described the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative (FFRC). The objective of the FRCC is to partner with other government departments and universities to assist in the collection of data that is relevant to inland fisheries management objectives. The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture will provide \$30,000 annually to support the FFRC. Funds will cover 50% of total project cost and the research projects will be designed to address concerns related to the management of fisheries including issues raised at RFAC meetings. A Terms of Reference for the FFRC will be developed in 2008.

John thanked enforcement officers from the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Fisheries and Oceans Canada for spending time in Special Trout Management Areas and allowing regulations to improve fisheries.

Warmwater Unit

Jason LeBlanc reviewed the 2009 field activities for the warm water species section including the first annual Inland Fisheries smallmouth bass tournament and workshop. The purposes of the event were to: promote bass fishing in Nova Scotia, increase awareness of responsible bass fishing, provide a forum for organized bass anglers to develop connections with those who don't usually fish smallmouth bass, provide an opportunity for non-bass anglers to learn from those who have experience, and finally to utilize a workshop format to discuss topics relevant to bass management in Nova Scotia.

Preliminary data for size of young of the year (YOY) bass was presented. The project is being developed to document the average size of YOY bass heading into their first winter as it is thought that they need to attain a critical size (approximately 50 mm) to survive. Early analysis suggests there are differences between lakes and between regions and that many of the samples collected in Lake Ainslie were near 50 mm. The project will continue in 2010.

Jason also provided an update on the ongoing project to monitor smallmouth bass in Lake Ainslie and announced the unfortunate news that both smallmouth bass and chain pickerel have been illegally introduced into Blacketts and Gillis lakes, respectively. This represents the first known occurrence of chain pickerel in RFA 1. Jason provided an overview of the history of illegal introductions of chain pickerel in Nova Scotia and discussed some of the negative consequences they could have on the watershed.

Leonard Forsythe asked Jason if any bass were caught during the alga bloom on Lake Ainslie? Jason said no, but many white perch were caught. Ed asked if fertilizer may have caused the bloom. Jason said excess phosphorous is the main cause of blooms, but the source was unknown, although the event did occur after a heavy rainfall. Harry Vickers asked if it caused any permanent damage to fish habitat? Jason said no.

There was a general discussion about smallmouth bass introduction, Jason indicated that he represents the Department on a national committee on aquatic invasives and across Canada education is recognized as one of the most practical ways to prevent illegal introductions. Jason also mentioned that there are confirmed records of Chain Pickerel and smallmouth bass in Blacketts and Gillis Lakes in Cape Breton County. Ed Woodsworth asked if Jason had seen the report on aquatic invasives in Novasociatfishing.com. Jason said he was preparing a response. One angler asked what was the goal of the Lake Ainslie study. Jason said it is to look at mechanisms for establishment of bass populations in marginal bass habitat. Also it is intended to compare the habitat use of bass in the Margaree to other important salmon rivers such as the LaHave.

Extension

Atlantic Salmon Enhancement

Al McNeill provided an update from the Atlantic Salmon Enhancement Program, Sportfish Habitat Fund and the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation. New salmon stocking programs were initiated in the Waughs River, and the Baddeck and Middle Rivers in Cape Breton, while efforts on the Margaree, St. Francis Harbour and Mabou River continue. The salmon stocking program was concluded on the West River (Pictou) and the River Pjhilip. Five rivers (West River (Pictou), River Philip, Mabou River, St. Francis Harbour River and the Margaree River) were stocked with 296,000 salmon fry, parr and smolt in the spring and fall of 2009. A total of 365,000 eggs were collected from 84 wild adult Atlantic salmon broodstock from five rivers in September and October, 2009.

There was considerable discussion regarding the choice of the Baddeck and Middle Rivers. Harry Vickers expressed disappointment that the other rivers on Cape Breton were not open and that there was also no assessment on them which in his opinion should be required before closing them (eg. Mabou, River Inhabitants, North Aspy). He feels "discriminated against" and suggested that if they do not re-open the rivers he will not continue to purchase salmon licences and only angle for trout. He added that he feels DFO cannot be trusted and will encourage all other salmon

anglers to not purchase licences either.

AI explained the process used to determine aboriginal allocations and that the negotiations with DFO and the Province resulted in a recreational fishery on Middle and Baddeck rivers instead of no fishery at all.

Ed Woodsworth suggested that in the past there was not an aboriginal allocation on the Middle and Baddeck rivers. John Hart said that there was a limited aboriginal harvest and a suggested small hooking mortality. The natives were only allocated a small number of grilse on those rivers. An angler asked if Inland Fisheries can represent the interests of anglers in DFO? Aboriginal negotiations? Don MacLean said no, we are only observers, Aboriginal groups deal with DFO only. John Hart said that both governments and first nations bands in work well together in the Collaborative Salmon Initiative.

Harry Vickers And Gary Gibson expressed concerns regarding fisheries management priorities and disagreed with decision to close salmon fishing on some Rivers in Fishing Area 19. John Hart was concerned about the resultant increased effort placed on the few rivers that remain open to fall salmon angling. Ed Woodsworth stated that the small amount of mortality associated with hook and release was compensated by allocation of a small number of returning salmon in order to maintain angling opportunities for salmon in Baddeck and Middle River.

The Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund raised \$242,000 in 2008 resulting in 22 volunteer groups receiving funding to work on 45 watercourses. 85,000 square meters of fish habitat was restored and 73,000 square meters of riparian habitat was protected. The liming project in the West River Sheet Harbour also received funding. Since it's inception in 2005, the Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund has contributed \$1.1 million dollars to fish habitat restoration projects across Nova Scotia. Matching cash and in-kind contributions have totalled \$2.4 million for a grand total of \$3.5 million. John Hart praised the habitat restoration efforts on tributaries on Margaree River and the work of Adopt A Stream and volunteers.

AI provided an update on the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Fund explaining the Provincial Advisory Committee role and a list of eligible project types. A disbursement of \$52,800 was allocated to each province in 2009. Seventeen project proposals were received for Nova Scotia, of which six were funded. The amount of funds available in subsequent years should be greater and will depend on the investment income from the Fund. A call for proposals and the application process began November 1, 2009 and will close December 18, 2009. The ASCF website is: <http://www.ascf-fcsa.ca/index-en.html>.

Promotion and Development

Tara Marshall reviewed the 33 L2F (*Learn to Fish*) events that took place through the province in 2009. The program was held in schools, youth clubs such as Big Brothers and Sisters, recreation camps and cub packs. Tara explained how the program has grown from 60 students in 2006 to just under 1000 students taking part this year. This past summer and fall Tara trained 2 groups to deliver the L2F program in their area. Tara mentioned that she still has one group left to train in the program. Tara also thanked all the sponsors and volunteer organizations who supported L2F.

Tara reviewed Nova Scotia's first FUN (*Families United with Nature*) events. She explained that this initiative resulted from other programs such as BOW and L2F. FUN provides families the opportunities to learn outdoor recreational activities together. The first event was held this summer in Digby and the hosts were the Digby East Fish and Game Association. Families signed up and participated in the fishing program and an introduction to camping. The second FUN event was held at Murphy Lake, with seniors from Dykland Lodge.

Tara explained the very successful fall 2009 Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program at Mount Traber Camp in Musquodoboit. She also mentioned the upcoming winter BOW program will be held February 19-2, 2010 at the Gaelic College in St. Ann's, Cape Breton. Tara also reminded those present of the upcoming winter Free Sportfishing Weekend on February 20-21, 2010.

Tara also reminded anglers about the 2009 Fishin' Nova Scotia Photo Contest and showed some of the winning photos from 2008. Contest details and entry forms are available online at www.gov.ns/fish/sportfishing/photocontest. Entries must be received by December 31, 2009. Tara said the Department will be introducing a "Kids Art Contest" this spring.

Hatchery Report

Fall Stocking

Darryl Murrant gave a brief overview of the provinces hatchery programs and reviewed the fall stocking program for RFA 1 in detail. He noted that the hatchery has discontinued its stocking of landlocked Atlantic salmon, at least for the immediate future, as the Department is currently focusing its efforts on enhancing sea-run Atlantic salmon populations. The only lake in RFA1 affected by this decision is Gabarus Lake, Cape Breton Co.. In nearby RFA2, Goose Harbour Lake, Guysborough Co., will no longer receive landlocked salmon but will continue to be stocked with Rainbow trout. He also noted that plans for 2010 Rainbow trout stocking will include sterile triploid fish which have the potential to grow larger and faster than is normally the case. It is hoped that these fish will provide exciting angling in the Bras d'Or Lakes. All triploids destined for the Bras d'Or Lakes will be adipose fin-clipped for easy identification by anglers. Anglers will be asked to continue to voluntarily submit catch information from Rainbow trout angled in the Bras d'Or. Rainbow trout currently distributed by the province are all-female stock. Aside from the Bras d'Or Lakes, Lever's Lake, Cape Breton Co. and #20 Dam Pond, in Glace Bay are also stocked with Rainbow trout and are open year round with a reduced bag limit during the winter season

(January 1 - March 31). He mentioned that the Port Morien Wildlife Assoc. Will be sponsoring a Rainbow trout derby on #20 Dam Pond during the Winter Free Fishing Week-end, February 20-21.

Sean Neary, gave an update of the activities at the Margaree Hatchery. Approximately 120,000 Atlantic salmon parr were stocked this fall into the Margaree River and over 90,000 Brook trout fingerlings were stocked in the Margaree and surrounding watershed. 45,000 salmon parr are being overwintered at the hatchery to be released as smolt next spring and 10,000 yearling speckled trout will be available from the hatchery next spring as well.

Gordie MacKinnon asked if we can use Margaree Hatchery to raise fish for other Cape Breton Rivers. Darryl said we are actively pursuing this but still have some issues to discuss with DFO before we get the go ahead. Gary Gibson asked why we don't stock Grand River. Darryl indicated Grand River is under consideration for a Special Trout Management Area and that would be the first step helping to improve wild trout population. John Hart remarked that stocking River Inhabitants with brown trout may compete with Atlantic salmon.

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

Enforcement

Gary Gibson asked if you could fish salmon with a trout licence. Darryl said no. Peter Hill said that habitat enhancement efforts will all be for nothing unless more enforcement is directed towards illegal jigging, particularly on the Baddeck and Middle rivers. Gary MacDonald said NSDNR does most of the inland fisheries enforcement in this area. He thanked all anglers for the quality of information provided and that as a result, they have laid three charges in association with an illegal fishing incident. Gary mentioned that aboriginal fishing issues are complex, the DFO takes it's direction from the Supreme Court of Canada. Gary said most bands have a communal licence to fish which is negotiated each year. They must abide by the terms of the licence or DFO can charge individuals with violations of the licence agreement. Harry Vickers thanked Gary and said DFO were doing a good job on enforcement. John Hart encouraged anglers to call enforcement officers when they witness violations occurring. Both John Mombourquette (DNR enforcement) and Nicole Sampson (DFO enforcement) mirrored these comments.

Other

Garry Gibson reported that habitat loss has occurred as a result of ATV trail construction beside River Tillard at a site close to the Highway 4 crossing. He has contacted regulatory agencies for a meeting on this issue. Gary also interjected to discuss his disappointment with the process involving native salmon allocations on the Middle, Baddeck and North rivers.

John Hart, Margaree Salmon Association, clarified the request to change the permitted angling hours on Margaree River to 6am till 2 hours after sunset.

Harry Vickers asked if we could add Big Pond to the Rainbow Trout stocking program.

James Langley presented a written submission from the Lower River Denys and Denys Basin Anglers Association to open the River Denys on April 15 instead of the current 15 May for the purpose of conservation. Gordie MacKinnon and Peter Hill and others supported the current Special Trout Management regulation on River Denys and said it has resulted in larger, better conditioned fish.

Clifford Boudreau presented a resolution to ask the Department to monitor brook trout populations in the Bras d'Or Lakes, and in particular, to determine if the 5 trout bag limit is sufficient to ensure the resource for future generations.

Ed Woosworth Presented a petition with over 600 signatures for a catch and release river and lake in each of the 6 Recreational Fishing Areas in NS. Ed expressed concern about overfishing on River Denys. Ed suggested that novascotiafishing.com as a useful resource for anglers.

John Hart commented on the pursuit of a retention fishery for striped bass in Margaree River. Striped bass seem to be abundant in the Margaree Harbour.

The meeting ended at 10:06 pm.