



Fisheries and Aquaculture

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Area 1 Cape Breton, Inverness, Richmond and Victoria Counties

Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes 2010 Spring RFAC Meeting

The RFAC meeting for Area 1 was held on April 7, 2010 at the Delta Sydney Hotel, Nova Scotia. Present from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA) were Don MacLean, John MacMillan, Anthony Heggelin, Jason LeBlanc, Sean Neary, and Al McNeill who chaired the meeting. In addition to NSDFA staff, there were 35 people in attendance. Federal Fisheries and Oceans was represented by Paul Morash, Nicole Samson, and Pat Young. The Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources was represented by Dougal MacNeill. The MikMaq Rights initiative was represented by Jeff Purdy and Jessie MacPhee. Transport Canada was represented by Michael Norris. The meeting was called to order at 7:10 pm with a brief introduction of staff present, and a review of the agenda by the Chair. A discussion on striped bass was added to the agenda

Transport Canada Office of Boating Safety - Cold Water Presentation

Michael Norris gave a ½ h presentation and took questions afterward.

Q: What happens if you lose your small craft operator certificate?

A: Contact your teacher or contact.

Q: Ronnie McIsaac asked if you need the course if you are not using a motor.

A: No motor - no course required

Q: Dave Harding asked if you should try to swim to shore after you are in cold water.

A: No, try to get as much of your body out of water, get into huddle position, and wear a PDF.

Sportfishing Regulation Changes for 2010 and Proposed Changes for 2011

Al McNeill reviewed the 2010 regulation changes from page 3 in the Angler's Handbook.

Q: Gary Gibson asked if we would be doing any work in Cape Breton County.

A: We have worked on some of the following in Victoria County: Bell, Big Island and Snake Cat Lakes. We will continue projects on smallmouth bass and chain pickerel in Cape Breton county.

Gordie MacKinnon said that Bell Lake gets lots of pressure and suggested we take it off the list of lakes for winter fishery even though he is in favour of the winter fishery. It was suggested that Seifferts Lake have a winter fishery instead of Bell Lake.

Richmond Wildlife Association submitted a written recommendation that the daily bag limit for rainbow trout on the Eco-Trail Pond be reduced to two fish, year round.

Leonard Forsythe asked which Trout Lake was included in our winter fishery. A clarification was made.

David Harding suggested we include maps or sketches in the regulations book that would help identify what regulations are applicable in specific areas.

John Hart wanted clarification on single hook lures. It was explained that this included treble hooks.

Q: When will the bag limit be changed to 25 for smallmouth bass?

A: It will come into effect for 2011.

Gordie MacKinnon suggested that we reduce the bag limit to two rainbow trout year round. Al clarified that this regulation would be for all rainbow trout waters, not just stocked lakes.

David Harding suggested we put a size limit on rainbow trout that could be retained to give them a chance to reach larger sizes. We are considering this.

It was suggested that the Margaree and Gallant rivers be fly only from June 1 to the end of season.

Q: Bob Rhyno asked how rainbow trout affect other native fish stocks. John MacMillan said that they compete with other species for food but benefits to the sport fishery outweigh the negative aspects.

Gary Gibson commented that saw a DFO video stating that rainbow trout eat small Atlantic salmon and brook trout.

We said we are raising triploids at our hatchery because these fish do not reproduce and will have less of an impact on native species.

Cole Porter suggested that warning letters be sent out to anglers that don't return their catch report.

Q: David Harding asked if fishing licences would be required for the Bras d'Or Lakes.

A: DFO is still considering it but it won't happen this season.

2009 General & Salmon Licence Sales

Al McNeill reviewed the 2009 General and Salmon fishing license sales. General fishing licence sales have been relatively stable over the last five years with small increases in senior licences. Salmon licence sales remain low but stable.

Preview of 2010 Field Activities

Coldwater Unit

John MacMillan provided an overview recent field work. He added that declines in annual catch of speckled trout since the 1980s spurred development of Special Trout Management Areas (SMA) in 2002. He was pleased to announce that a new SMA is being implemented for Grand River Richmond County starting for the 2010 angling season. The regulations will similar to that of the West River, Antigonish County which have been very successful. The Grand River will have a gear restriction of single hook lure or artificial fly only from April 15 to September 30 and the bag limit reduced to 1 trout (either brown or brook) which must be 35 cm (13.8 in) total length or longer.

John added that for the last few field seasons data has been collected to evaluate efficacy of SMAs in the West River, Antigonish County and River Denys, Inverness County. John summarized the River Denys project noting that : angler effort decreases from the start of the angling season, the catch per angler/hr is approximately 0.4 fish and the estimated harvest was about 2200 in first month of the season. John added that the relative weight, condition of the trout, did not change which was an unexpected result. There may be behavioural differences in the timing of when fish use the estuary compared to other rivers we have examined. John added that we may consider future changes to regulations which may include a reduced bag limit. Plans are in place to continue the creel survey throughout the retention season (15 May - 30 August) to better assess changes in the fishery.

John also provided an overview of the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative and the projects that will be done in 2010.

Q: John was asked if he had any tag returns from upper River Deny's and if the fish seemed bigger since the regulation changes.

A: John said he had 25 tag returns from anglers and still had to assess if there had been a size change.

Q: Will there be any more surveys on the basin?

A: John answered that we would likely do a creel survey this year or next year.

Warmwater Unit

Jason LeBlanc outlined field activities planned for 2010 which will include populations data from High Harvest Management Areas such as Micmac, Gaspereau, and Rocky lakes. Nesting surveys and young of the year collections will continue as well as a more focussed effort to update the distributions of smallmouth bass and chain pickerel in the province. Jason outlined smallmouth bass young of the year collections to date. The size of young of the year (YOY) bass heading into their first winter seems to be an important factor for winter survival. YOY lengths from initial sampling range from 49-91 mm depending on the lake and associated thermal characteristics. It has been suggested that YOY need to reach approximately 50-55 mm by the fall to survive the winter. In some lakes, in some years (eg. Lake Ainslie, Inverness County) this critical size may only be reached by a low percentage of the population which could impact recruitment. Three lakes were sampled in 2009 which included Lake Ainslie, Shortts and West Horseshoe lakes. They had average YOY lengths of 60.7 mm, 73.0 mm and 69.0mm respectively. The percentage of samples equal to or less than 55 mm ranged was 55.6% (n=9) or Lake Ainslie, 0% (n=16) for Shortts Lake and 2.9% (n=35) for West Horseshoe Lake.

Jason also led a discussion on aquatic invasive species and outlined some of the initiatives our Department is involved in to address this serious issue. Projects include a provincial monitoring program for smallmouth bass and chain pickerel occurrences, outreach and educational materials and a review of regulatory options. Jason also reviewed work being done by the national Aquatic Invasive Species Committee which consists of representatives from the federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. One of the initiatives Nova Scotia is involved in for aquatic invasive species is development of the Rapid Response Framework. Jason indicated that he will be reviewing the Rapid Response approach to assess how it can be used to address aquatic invasive species in Nova Scotia.

Currently we have reports of 20 new pickerel lakes and 40-60 new smallmouth bass lakes in Nova Scotia.

Q: Are there chain pickerel in Blacketts Lake?

A: Yes

Gordie MacKinnon asked if trout would be excluded from a possible regulation that would prohibit the possession of live fish. We thought that they would be included in this regulation but we were still discussing it.

Carl Purcell asked if there would be a report out on Lake Ainslie? Jason LeBlanc replied that her would have one ready for the NSSA meeting in the fall.

Q: What caused the blue-green algae outbreak in Lake Ainslie and was it the toxic type?

A: It was not the toxic type and there were not any reported fish kills. It was likely caused by two storm events which introduced lots of runoff and nutrients into the lake.

Extension

Atlantic Salmon Enhancement

Al McNeill provided an update from the Atlantic Salmon Enhancement Program, Sportfish Habitat Fund and the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation. Salmon stocking programs continued in the Waughs River, the Baddeck, Middle, Mabou and Margaree Rivers in Cape Breton and St. Francis Harbour. Four rivers were stocked with 296,000 salmon fry, parr and smolt in the spring and fall of 2009. It was noted that fewer males were seen in the rivers in 2009 and that the grilse were noticeably smaller.

The Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund raised \$266,581 in 2009 from angling licence sales resulting in 22 volunteer groups receiving funding to work on 45 watercourses. 85,000 square metres of fish habitat were restored and 73,000 square metres of riparian habitat was protected. The liming project in the West River Sheet Harbour also received \$8,000. Since its 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. It was asked if the Sport fish Habitat Fund is only focussed on native species. Al indicated that it has thus far but all anglers contribute, regardless of the species they target. Projects designed to improve access to the sport fishery are also eligible for funding.

Al also 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 for 2010 is \$50,000. Fourteen project proposals were reviewed and six recommended by the Board of Directors. The ASCF website is: <http://www.ascf-fcsa.ca>

Extension/Education

Al reviewed the plans for the L2F program for 2010. Forty L2F events and 3 summer science camps are planned for 2010. Al provided an overview of the classroom and field components of the program and explained how the program has grown from four events delivered to 60

students in 2006 to the this year where 1200 students and youth group members are expected to take part.

Al reviewed the very successful Winter 2010 Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program at the Gaelic College in St. Anns, Cape Breton. Al explained that there is one schedule FUN (*Families United with Nature*) event planned for late June and Tara will be delivering the L2F program for families enrolled. The Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters (NSFAH) and their partners in government want to make that same kind of experience available to the whole family. All thanked Gordie MacKinnon for BOW support.

Al also informed anglers about the Kids Fish Art Contest focussing on our provincial fish, Speckled Trout. There are 4 grade group winners, and art work will be displayed in the Anglers Handbook. Contest details and entry forms are available online at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/extension/fishart.shtml>. Entries must be received by December 31, 2010.

Al also reminded anglers about the 2010 Fishin' Nova Scotia Photo Contest and showed some Contest details and entry forms are available online at www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/photocontest. Entries must be received by December 31, 2010.

Hatchery Report

Sean Neary reviewed the spring stocking program for RFA 1 and provided an overview of our three hatcheries (Margaree, McGowan Lake and Frasers Mills). Sean summarized the derbies that are being held in RFA 1 in 2010. He also provided an update on the status of salmon broodstock.

Q: Where are the discussions at for the release of Margaree hatchery fish outside the watershed. What can anglers do to help speed up the process?

A: Discussions are ongoing and Don MacLean suggested sending letters to DFO.

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

Carl Purcell summarized the 3 resolutions adopted at the Nova Scotia Salmon Association annual general meeting. These resolutions included: fishing out of season and increased enforcement for people illegally targeting salmon, salmon report cards, and a proposed catch and release salmon angling licence. There was some opposition to a paying for tags fishery.

Carl was also pleased to announce that the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission and the Nova Scotia Salmon Association signed a 5 year \$500,000 agreement to support the Adopt-a-Stream Program.

Richmond Wildlife Association is concerned about smelts and trout by-catch overfishing.

Dougal MacNeill commented that officers did not do as many checks because of ice conditions. However, they did lay some charges. He encouraged anglers to keep the reports coming.

Leonard Forsythe asked about commercial fishing in Antigonish harbour. He heard that 80000 pounds of silversides was the quota, he was very concerned. Don MacLean said he would check into this.

Brent Baker said that there is not enough enforcement in the estuary for the Mira River. Pat Young said there are hundreds of trout taken each year during the smelt fishery as bi-catch. Was MacDougals Cove ever checked? Some want it closed to ensure this does not happen. The level of enforcement is not effective and closure is the answer.

Harry Vickers was apposed to any catch and release regulations in the Margaree.

Carl asked about a blue ribbon fishery. NSDFA received a petition and we are not going to pick an area for this. Areas can be brought to our attention and go through the RFAC process.

Striped bass. No changes for this season, still closed. We said we would ask Scott Douglas to attend the next meeting in the spring.

Meeting adjourned 10:25 PM