

Area 5 Annapolis, Kings and Hants Counties

Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2010 Spring RFAC Meeting

1. Review of Agenda

The RFAC meeting for Area 5 was held on Wednesday April 14, 2010 7:00 - 9:00 pm at the NSCC Kingstec Campus Room A106, Kentville, Nova Scotia. Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff present were Al McNeill (meeting chair), Mike McNeil, Reg Madden and Anthony Heggelin. A representative from the Department of Transportation was in attendance and started the meeting with a boating safety presentation. The meeting began at 7:00 pm with a brief introduction of those present, and a review of the agenda by the Chair.

2. Boating safety presentation

Shannon Sellers with Transport Canada provided an overview of safe boating regulations, their compliance strategy and research and analysis on accidents. She stressed the importance of understanding small vessel regulations (equipment requirement), speed limit restrictions within 30 m from shore – 10 km /hr, and pre-departure check lists (eg. Trip plan, cold water survival). Shannon spoke about the pleasure craft competency program and ended the presentation with a video called cold water boot camp. For additional information contact Shannon.sellers@tc.gc.ca or visit www.boatingsafety.gc.ca

3. 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: Gaspereau River, Kings County: White Rock Pond, from a point 152m downstream from the bridge at White Rock (Deep Hollow Road Bridge), downstream to the first highway bridge upstream from the White Rock Power Station, April 1 to June 1, single hook lure or artificial fly only.

Al also summarized the proposed changes for 2011.

Province-wide initiatives include a review of high harvest regulations for smallmouth bass and a reduction in the bag limit for rainbow trout to 2/day from 1 September through 31 March. Al noted that management of rainbow trout is directed toward allocation of a stocked resource rather than conservation. Al also encouraged anglers to complete the angler survey that will be sent out this year. The data collected in this survey is very important to sportfish management.

4. 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. Consultations with the

Department of Natural Resources and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations on electronic licencing and options for reporting catch. Other topics included a "Catch & Release" licence which is available in other provinces and the availability of licences late in the season for winter fisheries. Most vendors are asked to submit angling licences to DNR in the fall before they are able to receive hunting licences. Online licensing would provide another means through which anglers can purchase a licence in the fall without difficulties.

5. Preview of 2010 Field Activities

Coldwater Unit

Reg reported that declines in annual catch of speckled trout since the 1980s spurred development of Special Trout Management Areas (SMA). Results of studies suggest that they are reducing harvest in targeted areas and improving the number of large trout caught. Understanding the factors that limit trout production is important when attempting to gauge how a regulatory change may impact a fishery. Angling regulations will work only when exploitation is an important factor influencing the number of large trout in a lake or river. Important factors that influence trout production including competition, density and water quality, all of which play a role in the selection of Special Trout Management Areas.

Reg stated that the spread of invasive species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel are having a direct impact on native brook trout populations. Nova Scotia's trout populations in many lakes are in trouble because of the spread of invasive species. Discussions regarding the relative importance of invasive species are common with the awareness of this important issue. Brown trout have been compared to smallmouth bass as an important species impacting native populations of Atlantic salmon and brook trout. Another important factor to consider is related to the rate at which different invasive species are spread across Nova Scotia. For example, catches of brown trout have remained relatively stable for the past 40 years. On the other hand the catch of other invasives (i.e., smallmouth bass) have increased dramatically along with their change in distribution. Smallmouth bass and chain pickerel have serious impacts on native species once they are introduced to a lake. The rate at which smallmouth bass are spreading across the province is more than 2 times faster than the spread of chain pickerel. It seems clear which species is the most important invasive impacting the sport fishery in Nova Scotia. Another point is that our data is probably 5-10 years behind the true distribution as it may take this long for bass to become established and caught by anglers and reported to Inland Fisheries. Currently, it is probable that there are more than 10 new smallmouth bass lakes in Nova Scotia each year.

Reg gave an overview of the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative and the projects that will be undertaken in 2010. Work continues on the monitoring of migration patterns of brook trout through the use of acoustical tagging, assessing the impact of Special Trout Management Areas, and the impact of Adopt-A-Stream projects throughout the province. Additional information on the FFRC and related projects are available on our website <http://gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/>

Warmwater Unit

Anthony Heggelin 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. Anthony 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.

Anthony 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. Anthony 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. Anthony 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.

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.

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 meters of fish habitat were restored and 73,000 square meters of riparian habitat was protected. The liming project in the West River Sheet Harbour also received \$8,000. 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.

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> Dave Dagley asked how much is currently in the Fund. Al indicated the principle was about \$24 million last year.

Promotion & Development

Al McNeill reviewed the Learn to Fish (L2F) events and 3 summer science camps planned for 2010. Al gave an overview of the classroom and field components of the program and explained how the program has grown. Al also thanked all the sponsors and volunteer organizations who support L2F.

Al reminded anglers of the NS Sportfishing Weekend on June 5-6, 2010. Al reviewed the Winter 2010 Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program. Al explained that there is one scheduled FUN (*Families United with Nature*) event planned for late June and the L2F program will be incorporated for families enrolled.

Al described Inland Fisheries new Kids Fish Art Contest focussing on our provincial fish, speckled trout. Winning 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. Entry forms are available online at www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/photocontest. Entries must be received by December 31, 2010.

5. Hatchery Report

Mike McNeill reviewed the spring stocking program for RFA 3 and provided an overview of operations at McGowan Lake. Mike noted the trucks were on the road early this year thanks to good road conditions. About 150,000 speckled trout yearlings, 3,000 two-year-old trout and about a million sac fry were distributed this year. Mike is in the process of hiring a new full time technician to fill a vacancy. Mike will contact NSDNR and DFO when stocking will take place in their area. Mike noted that NSDNR has been supportive to patrol recently stocked lakes.

6. Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

Anglers would like to see more trout research being conducted in RFA 5.

Anglers inquired if certain lakes were still being stocked.