
Area 4 Southern: Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne and Queens Counties

**Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council
Minutes 2008 Fall RFAC Meeting**

The RFAC meeting for Area 4 was held on Monday, October 06, 2008 at the Liverpool Regional High School, Liverpool, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff Inland Fisheries Division staff, there were 21 people in attendance. Jason LeBlanc chaired the meeting while Don MacLean, Al McNeill, John MacMillan, Mike McNeil and Mark Hamilton from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture 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.

**Review of 2008 Field Activities
Cold Water Sportfish Management**

John MacMillan provided an overview of cold water species management and the importance of research and Special Trout Management Areas. John reviewed the work from projects in River Denys, West River Antigonish, Cape Breton Highlands and rainbow trout assessments in the Bras D'or Lakes. In the River Denys Special Trout Management Area staff captured, tagged and released 341 anadromous brook trout prior to the opening of the angling season. Angler interviews were conducted to determine harvest, preferred angling methods, tag recaptures, angler demographics, and catch per unit effort. A total of 250 anglers were interviewed over the course of the River Denys study. Data were also collected from the capture of upstream migrating trout caught with live-release nets. John explained that Cape Breton Highland lakes trout suffer from overcrowding and therefore have slower growth rates. A very small percentage of trout in this area exceed 25 cm in length compared to mainland Nova Scotia lakes. Creating additional angling opportunities on lakes in the highlands may be considered in the future.

John discussed the ongoing tagging study of the West River Special Trout Management Area and explained that over 130 anadromous brook trout were captured, tagged and released prior to the opening of the angling season and angler surveys were conducted to examine harvest and angling effort.

Detailed reports from major field work projects are available on our Departmental website <http://www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/reports/>.

Dave Dagley asked John about the populations of trout and lake classes in Queens County and South West Nova. John indicated that there have been few direct population assessments conducted in this region and the results from three lakes that were assessed in the 1930s indicate that trout production is limited.

Water quality (pH) issues and the presence of competitors like smallmouth bass, chain pickerel, and perches can have a serious impact on trout production. John said that Inland Fisheries is interested in assessing more trout lakes in this area.

John also provided information on a project which is studying a parasite in eel populations in Nova Scotia. The parasite, which is found in the swim bladder, has been found in eels collected in Cape Breton and mainland Nova Scotia.

The Inland Fisheries Division of NS Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture is assisting Cape Breton University, Saint Mary's University, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada in assessing the current distribution of this parasite in the Maritimes as well as the rate of spread and the infection levels in local populations. Discussion followed and concern was raised regarding the impact this parasite may have on eel populations. It was suggested that the elver fishery should be stopped until more information becomes available. Further information on this parasite can be found on this website:

http://www.projectufo.ca/drupal/Eel_swimbladder_parasite

Warm Water Sportfish Management

Jason LeBlanc reviewed recently released reports for smallmouth bass in Ten Mile Lake, Queens County and Ogden, Parr and Petes lakes in Yarmouth County. The reports summarize data collected from tournaments from 1995-2005. The average length of bass brought to weigh stations in Ten Mile Lake from 1995-2005 was 34.3 cm and 14% of all bass weighed in were longer than 45.5 cm. This is the highest among all lakes in the data series. It takes 4 years for bass to reach 25.4 cm, 6 years to reach 30.5 cm and 8 years to reach 35.5 cm which is similar growth to other Nova Scotia lakes. The relative weight, a measure of condition or plumpness, of bass in Ten Mile Lake is lower than the average for Nova Scotia (RW = 77) and averaged 72.1 over the time series, however, the average weight required of 5 fish to win a tournament approached 4 kg. In contrast only 3% of all bass weighed in on Ogden, Parr and Petes lakes were longer than 45.5 cm, although still higher than other Nova Scotia lakes. ON average it takes 5-6 years for bass to reach 30.0 cm and a 50 cm bass is likely 15 years or older. The relative weight, a measure of condition or plumpness, of bass in Ogden, Parr and Petes lakes is near that for Nova Scotia and averaged 79.3 over the time series. Ten Mile Lake and Ogden, Parr and Petes lakes continue to be a popular tournament lakes and are managed as a Special Bass Management Areas using trophy regulations. Detailed reports on these lakes and others are available on our Departmental website: www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/reports

Hatchery Program

Mike McNeil reviewed the Fall Stocking Program from the McGowan Lake Fish Hatchery. Mike explained that the fall stocking program usually covers 200 sites province **wide** and about 500,000 fall fingerlings are released. In Area 4 there are approximately 23 sites which are stocked. Mike reminded the audience about the free fishing week-end in February and encouraged clubs to sponsor an event.

Mike was asked about the sea run trout stocking program and how long they stayed in the ocean. He replied that they generally go out in the spring and spend several months feeding before returning in June and July.

Sportfish Extension Programs Atlantic Salmon Enhancement Program

Al McNeill provided an update from the Atlantic Salmon Enhancement Program. Four rivers (Mabou River, St. Francis Harbour River, West River Pictou and River Phillip) were stocked with 80,000 salmon fry or parr in the spring and fall of 2007, while in 2008 these four rivers were stocked with 65,000 juvenile salmon. Fifty-two adult salmon broodstock were collected in October, 2008.

Bev Davison asked Al if any consideration had been given to enhancing salmon stocks in recreational Fishing Area 4. Al replied that the Department welcomed any suggestions regarding salmon enhancement in this area.

Al also provided an overview of the Sportfish Habitat Fund activities in 200. Al indicated that with a slight increase in fishing licence sales this year, there is about \$240,000 in projected revenues for the Fund in 2008. Al asked if there were any groups in the audience that had received funding and wanted to comment on their projects. Al also provided the group with an update on the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund. Fifty thousand dollars was allocated to for four projects were in 2008. The organizations which were eligible for funding included the Cumberland County River Enhancement Association, Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation, Sackville River Association, and the Mulgrave and Area Lakes Enhancement Association.

Sportfish Promotion and Development

Mark Hamilton provided an overview of the Learn to Fish (L2F) Program. There is a recognized need to foster the next generation of stewards of our resource, which is most effectively done through early introduction to angling. He covered the curriculum of the L2F program and spoke of the positive response of teachers, recreation leaders, and the kids themselves. This has led to a rapid expansion of the L2F program, from 60 kids participating in 2006 to 525 taking the L2F course in 2008.

The next step in the program's development is to train volunteers to present the program, which will enable Inland Fisheries staff to expand efforts into new regions. Mark outlined what would be expected of clubs participating in these presentations and what the Division can offer by way of training and support. He encouraged volunteers to contact him about training. The L2F program has enjoyed generous support, and Mark thanked program partners Shakespeare Fishing Tackle, Shimano, Lucky Strike Bait Works, Mark Weare First Cast Radio Show, Hammerhead Lures, Sportfishing Organizations (Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers & Hunters, Port Morien Wildlife Association & Hants West Wildlife Association) Community Groups/Boys & Girls Clubs, HRM Community Development and MetroTransit.

Mark gave an overview of the Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program, having just returned from a very successful Fall BOW weekend in Cape Breton. The program is in its 11th year and has had more than 1,000 women participate.

He encouraged attendees of the RFAC meeting to introduce their female friends and family to this exciting and informative program, and announced the date of the next BOW program: September 25 - 27, 2009 at Mount Traber Bible Camp, Cooks Brook (near Middle Musquodoboit). For more information see the website at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/outdoor/> or contact Pam Grace at (902) 424-5832 .

Mark then spoke about the new Families United with Nature (FUN) outdoor skills programs, designed to encourage families to get involved in active outdoor recreation. The first presentation is tentatively booked for Oct 18, 2008 at Jerry Lawrence Provincial Park (Formerly known as Lewis Lake Provincial Park.) For information contact Mike Pollard (902) 434 -1925, or email mikepollard@ns.sympatico.ca [Please note that this date has been changed. The first FUN event will be held on May 23, 2009.]

Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative (FFRC)

John gave an overview of this new initiative. The objective is to partner with other government departments and universities to assist in the collection of data that is relevant to our management objectives. The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture will provide \$30,000 annually to support the FFRC. Funds will be used to support research projects designed to address concerns related to the management of fisheries including issues raised at Recreational Fishing Advisory Council meetings. Terms of Reference for FFRC will be developed over the winter. In an effort to increase knowledge on the species and abundance of external and internal fish parasites, the Inland Fisheries Division partnered with two parasitology researchers; Dr. K. Martha Jones from the University of Cape Breton and Dr. David Cone from Saint Mary's University. This joint effort will facilitate research on fish parasites, ultimately aiding in better understanding the health and status of Nova Scotia's fish populations

Proposed Regulation Changes:

Darryl Tingley from the Medway River Association presented the Association's revised proposal regarding sportfishing on the Mewway River in 2009 and beyond. The Association proposes that:

"Fishing on the Medway River, Queens County, from the Highway 103 bridge upstream to Ponhook Lake, not including Ponhook Lake or tributaries, from April 01st to May 26th be restricted to single hook lure/fly/bait hook. That the hook be barbless or have pinched barbs.

And

"From May 26th to the end of all fishing seasons artificial fly with barbless pinched barb hooks only."

Darryl reviewed the rationale for the proposed regulations. Last year anglers caught 49 kelts(slink salmon) as they left the Medway and he suggested that it is important to maximize the survival of these fish to ensure as many as possible return to spawn. Bev Davidson from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans stated that 249 large salmon were released in the Fall of 2008 and these fish should be leaving the river in the Spring of 2009. Dave Dagley questioned whether a regulation change was required or is this an enforcement issue. Dave suggested that there is almost no enforcement presence on the river and that more officers on the river during the spring would help prevent much of the illegal activity taking place. He added that most of the salmon have left the river in May. Discussion followed on enforcement and there was general agreement that three areas were of particular concern, Lake Pool, Deans Brook and Mill Village. The Chair agreed to pass on this information to the Nova Scotia Dept. of Natural resources and see if they could increase enforcement during the spring in these areas.

Al McNeil outlined that the suggested regulation change will be listed in the 2009 Regulations Booklet as a proposed change for 2010. This will give people the opportunity to provide comments and suggestions. In addition it will be on the agenda at the 2009 RFAC 4 meeting in the Spring and Fall. Following the 2009 Fall meeting a decision will be made whether the regulation will be in place for the 2010 season.

Discussion/Agenda items from floor

Concern was raised regarding eel weirs and kiack berths. It was suggested that salmon could be caught in this fishing equipment during their migration up, or down the river.

David Dagley asked Jason if any progress had been made in preventing the live transport of fish in Nova Scotia. Jason replied that while it is illegal to introduce fish into new habitats no charges have been laid in Canada as it is very difficult to enforce. He added that the Department continues to work with DFO on this issue and is also reviewing options under Provincial legislation.

Louis Wamboldt raised the issue of the condition of the fish way at Harmony. He suggested that it needs to be repaired if it is to continue to allow fish passage.

Meeting Adjourned

The meeting adjourned at 9 pm.