
Area 6 Colchester and Cumberland Counties

Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes 2008 Fall RFAC Meeting

The RFAC meeting for Area 6 was held on October 14, 2008 at the Best Western Glengarry Inn, Truro, Nova Scotia. Present from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture (NSDFA) were Al McNeill, John MacMillan, Reg Madden, Darryl Murrant and Mark Hamilton who chaired the meeting. Greg Stevens from Department of Fisheries & Oceans was in attendance as well as Ralph Heighton, Fisheries Coastal Resources Coordinator for the region. In addition to NSDFA staff, there were 12 people in attendance. The meeting began at 7:00 pm with a brief introduction of staff 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 was 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/>.

Warm Water Species Management

John MacMillan on behalf of Jason LeBlanc provided an update on the smallmouth bass project in Lake Ainslie, Inverness County. Bass were first reported in Lake Ainslie in 2003 and since that time monitoring has been done to assess the likelihood of colonization, evidence of nesting activity and success and changes in abundance. Bass have persisted in small numbers and young of the year survival may be prohibited in some way by shorter growing seasons and long cold winters. During 2008 sampling several age 2+ bass were captured indicating successful nesting and fry development occurred in 2006 that was not detected during the 2006 field season. Young of the year survival in 2007 may have been compromised by high winter mortality as few 1+ fish were observed. Fry were observed on nests in mid-July this field season which may not allow for enough growth by then end of the season to allow adequate winter survival to produce a year class in 2009. Young of the year that survive their first winter grow very well in subsequent years and are in good condition as represented by mean relative weights >100 which is the North American average. The mean relative weight (RW) for bass in Nova Scotia is 77. This high RW is typical of newly established populations where forage abundance is not limiting growth. In most situations RW decreases after 8-10 years and a balance is established between bass abundance and forage availability. Several bass caught in 2008 were 8 to 9 years old indicating that bass may have been present in Lake Ainslie as early as 1999. Catch rates as depicted by catch per unit effort (cpue) have increased for bass since 2003. Trout catch in 2008 predictably decreased from May through July as lake temperatures increased. Anglers are encouraged to keep track of the number of bass they catch while trout fishing and the number of hours they fish. A report will be available over the winter.

Hatchery Program Report

Darryl Murrant reviewed the Fall Stocking Program from Fraser's Mills Fish Hatchery. Darryl explained that the fall stocking program usually covers 200 sites province wide and about 500,000 fall fingerlings are released. In Area XX there are approximately 40 sites that are stocked. Darryl reminded the audience about the free fishing week-end in February and encouraged clubs to sponsor an event.

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.

Al also provided an overview of the Sportfish Habitat Fund activities in 2007. 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 MacMillan 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 provided \$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. Other initiatives included reports on three smallmouth bass tournament lakes and data collection on trout in the West and South Rivers of Antigonish. Partners involved in 2009 initiatives included the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, Habitat Unlimited, and the Port Morien Wildlife Association.

Striped Bass Update

John indicated that many anglers have expressed concerns regarding the status of striped bass and the potential for a fishery in the Gulf of St Lawrence region. John explained that Scott Douglas, the DFO biologist who is responsible for striped bass was unable to attend the meeting, although he did send some slides which summarised assessment efforts. All striped bass in the Gulf are believed to come from one spawning population in the lower Miramichi River. Estimates of abundance indicate dramatic changes in the number of spawners from year to year. Although the total number of bass on spawning grounds was large last year, the proportion of mature female spawners was relatively small. DFO Science Branch has concerns over the health of the striper population. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Species in Canada (COSEWIC) is currently proposing the Southern Gulf striped bass population as "threatened." Greg Stevens (DFO) was in attendance and he briefly spoke about the topic.

Proposed Regulation Change:

- 1) *River Philip: night fishing for brown trout*
No comments from the floor / No objections
- 2) *Harrison Lake: review management status*
No comments from the floor / No objections
- 3) *Mattatall Lake: extend bass season*
No comments from the floor / No objections

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

- 1) An audience member recommended that a high harvest smallmouth bass fishery be created on the Stewiacke River to help protect native fish species.