
Area 2 Pictou, Guysborough and Antigonish Counties

Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2009 Fall RFAC Meeting

The RFAC meeting for Area 2 was held on November 24, 2009 at the Greenway Claymore Inn in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 20 people in attendance. Don MacLean, Asst. Director of the Inland Fisheries Division chaired the meeting while biologist, John MacMillan and fish hatchery manager, Darryl Murrant from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture were also present. John Mombourquette, Director of Enforcement, Dept. Of Natural Resources and Craig MacDonald, Conservation Officer, 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

Don reviewed the 2009 regulation changes specific to this RFA from Page 4 in the Angler's Handbook.

2008 General & Salmon Licence Sales

Don 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 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 included 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 were presented. Assessments will continue in the West River of Antigonish in 2010. Plans are to reassess River Denys in 2012 or 2013.

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. Applications are available online at gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/

John presented the results of the acoustic telemetry tagging project on sea trout in West River Sheet Harbour. Sixteen brook trout were tagged and 4 were implanted with temperature and

depth sensor tags. Fourteen receivers were placed in various locations of the freshwater and estuary to record fish movements and habitat parameters. Trout migrated downstream in May and remained in the estuary for about 50 days. While in the estuary, sea trout usually remained in shallow (<1m), cool (<19.6C) water. The maximum distance travelled from freshwater was 13km. Future research includes feeding and predator evaluations.

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

Don reviewed 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. The project will continue in 2010.

Extension

Atlantic Salmon Enhancement

Don 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 Waugh's 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.

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 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.

Don 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

Don 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. Don 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, sportfish development officer, Tara Marshall trained 2 groups to deliver the L2F program in their area and still has one group left to train in the program. Don also thanked all the sponsors and volunteer organizations who supported L2F.

Don reviewed Nova Scotia's first FUN (*Families United with Nature*) events. He explained that this initiative resulted from other programs such as BOW (*Becoming an Outdoor Woman*) 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.

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

Don 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. Don 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 RFA2 in detail. He noted that the hatchery has discontinued its stocking of land-locked Atlantic salmon, at least for the immediate future, as the Department is currently focusing its efforts on sea-run Atlantic salmon. The only lake affected by this decision in RFA2 is Goose Harbour Lake, Guysborough Co., which 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. All rainbow trout currently distributed are all-female stock. All lakes in RFA2 which are stocked with Rainbow trout are open year round with a reduced bag limit during the winter season (January 1 - March 31). He mentioned that the Antigonish Town & County Anglers Assoc. may be sponsoring a Rainbow trout derby (non-competitive) on Gillis Lake, Antigonish Co., during the Winter Free Fishing Week-end, February 20-21.

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

Dr. Sean Mitchell, from the St. Mary's River Assoc. provided an update on the St Marys River Project. Adopt-a-Stream initiatives are continuing and improvements to habitat have been undertaken.

Dave MacNeil, of the Antigonish Town & County Anglers Assoc., said the group was able to complete their habitat improvements on the South River this past summer.

Ken MacAulay, from the Antigonish Town & County Anglers Assoc. inquired as to the possibility of opening the James River for a night fishery for Brown trout. The subject was discussed and there was general acceptance that this would provide an opportunity with little risk to the trout resource on this system.

Bob Ferguson, representing the Pictou County Rivers Assoc. inquired into what gear was allowed in the native food fishery. Craig MacDonald, DFO, stated that lures with single or multiple hooks are allowed but jigging is prohibited. The use of nets varies from band to band depending on their agreements and that the number and size of nets is regulated. Tags are required for all fish retained. He further stated that the Millbrook and Pictou Landing communities have been very proactive in controlling their harvest activities and are very concerned about the future of the fish.

Antigonish County councillor, Angus Bowie, stated that there seems to be some confusion as to the eel season. There is a season for spearing but the Anglers Handbook and Summary of Regulations stated that there is no closed season for eels. Don MacLean, explained this is because the Handbook only applies to angling not spearing.

Craig MacDonald inquired as to where the Waughs River salmon fry and parr will be released. Don replied that they were to be stocked above the new fishway in habitat previously devoid of Atlantic salmon.

Bob Ferguson inquired as to how best to time stocking activities for L2F and trout derby events. Don replied that it is always a "balancing act" to provide the best opportunity for the participants while not restricting public access.

Questions were directed to Craig MacDonald regarding the re-installation of the gaspereau trap on the West River and what effect it might have on Sea-run brook trout. He replied that local DFO officers had monitored the operation and did not find any infractions associated with it.

Bob Ferguson commented that Smallmouth bass from Middle River have now found their way into Landsdown Lake and wondered what if anything can be done to remove bass when they are discovered in a new location.

Brian Williams asked if the West River Antigonish study will provide the size distribution of the Speckled trout population, John replied that it would. Brian noted that he felt that the regulations brought in on the Salmon River Guysborough had caused changes in the size structure, allowing more small fish to reproduce. John noted that having looked at 15 years of data from Special Trout Management Areas, he was confident in saying that a 35 cm size limit allowed for a fish to spawn at least once and possibly twice and allowed more larger fish to contribute to succeeding generations.

Ken MacAulay inquired as to what will be done with the data collected from the River Deny's survey. John replied that it is base-line data that the study will hopefully be re-visited after 5 or 6 years.

Numerous comments were made as to apparent abundance of 2 - 4 pound Striped bass in local

estuaries in Pictou and Antigonish Counties and along the coastline and why is there still no fishing season for them. John explained that this is a species managed by DFO, and not his area of expertise, but offered that a number of factors are responsible for DFO's reluctance to allow a fishery for them. Some of these are: all spawning activity for this fish takes place on a small section of the Miramichi River in New Brunswick; it is a species that is characterized by large fluctuations in population size; DFO managers demand the spawning population to exceed requirements for a number of years prior to giving consideration of opening the season and that is not yet the case.

Some comments were made concerning reports of bag limits being exceeded on the South River estuary. Craig MacDonald stated that local DFO and DNR have been able to have a presence in this area during the early part of the season and did not observe that this was the case.

Dave MacNeil asked if tube flies for Atlantic salmon were considered to be weighted and thus illegal. Craig MacDonald replied that it may depend on the material the tube is made of i.e plastic v.s brass and that it might be best to check with the local DFO prior to using them.