

***Area 3 Halifax and Lunenburg***

## **Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2009 Fall RFAC Meeting**

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The RFAC meeting for Area 3 was held on November 23, 2009 at the Dartmouth Ramada Inn, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 24 people in attendance. John MacMillan chaired the meeting while Don MacLean, Anthony Heggelin, Tara Marshall, Mike McNeil, Darryl Murrant and Ralph Heighton from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture were also present. Greg Stevens from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans was 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 Sportfishing Regulation Changes for 2009 and Proposed Changes for 2010**

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

### **2008 General & Salmon Licence Sales**

Don Maclean 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.

#### **Woodens River**

George Taylor, Development stresses on the Wooden's River will continue as the river is in close proximity to Halifax. Acidity is another factor limiting trout production. Past studies have indicated that trout population numbers are small. For these reasons Trout Nova Scotia would recommend that Woodens River remain under catch and release regulations. Ken Nickerson indicated that other productive trout waters are acidic such as Big Five Bridges and low pH does not seem to have a negative impact on trout in this region. Don MacLean indicated that the results of a recent survey on PCP contaminants in fish in Woodens River will be available shortly and we should wait for those results prior to further regulatory discussion on this river.

### **Review of 2009 Activities and Preview of 2010 Field Activities**

#### **Coldwater Unit**

John presented electrofishing data from two streams that flow through Dartmouth Crossing. Restoration of pools and spawning habitat was carried out on Frenchmans Lake Brook and Grassy Brook. Trout population densities were above average and compared to the data collected from other cold water streams, the results suggest that trout have benefitted from restoration. John acknowledged partnerships that included Dartmouth Crossing Ltd, EDM of Halifax, ACL construction, and Adopt A Stream organizations.

Walter Regan suggested a complete closure of the angling season on Frenchman's Lake Brook as well as Grassy Brook. John indicated that based on the electrofishing data collected such a regulation would produce little benefits to the trout population. High population densities suggest that over-fishing is not an issue. Bob Rutherford indicated that there have been a number of challenges associated with obtaining permits and funds for this project and would like to see more work done on this system.

John MacMillan reviewed the results from current and past studies on brook trout populations in lakes in Nova Scotia. Fisheries in Nova Scotia lakes are diverse and understanding factors that influence fish populations is a challenge. Large differences among trout populations are found across Nova Scotia, CB highland Lakes tend to be inhabited by many small trout whereas in mainland lakes growth is rapid and trout obtain larger sizes. Important parameters that relate to size of trout are the level of crowding in the populations and the presence of competitors species such as perch, eel, and white sucker. The importance of competitors is one of the main reasons that our Department is very concerned about the spread of Invasives such as pickerel and smallmouth bass and the impact on our trout resource.

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 include 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 have been calculated. Assessments will continue in the West River of Antigonish in 2010. Plans are to reassess River Denys in 2012 or 2013.

Ed Halfyard 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 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/](http://gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/)

George Taylor asked what were the plans for next year. John responded that we will continue to collect data on West River of Antigonish and start and evaluation of restoration initiatives (i.e, habitat improvement structures) on trout habitat and populations. Future plans include initiation of long term evaluations on selected trout lakes will be carried out to define annual trends and limiting factors on trout populations and fisheries.

## **Warmwater Unit**

Anthony Heggelin reviewed the 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**

Tara Marshall 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 Waughs 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 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.

Tara 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**

Tara Marshall 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. Tara 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 Tara trained 2 groups to deliver the L2F program in their area. Tara mentioned that she still

has one group left to train in the program. Tara also thanked all the sponsors and volunteer organizations who supported L2F.

Tara reviewed Nova Scotia's first FUN (*Families United with Nature*) events. She explained that this initiative resulted from other programs such as BOW 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.

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

Tara 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](http://www.gov.ns/fish/sportfishing/photocontest). Entries must be received by December 31, 2009. Tara said the Department will be introducing a "Kids Art Contest" this spring.

### **Hatchery Report Spring Stocking**

Mike McNeil reviewed the spring stocking program for RFA 3. He mentioned that a list of lakes that are stocked during the fall and spring enhancement program are available on the government website: [www.gov.ns/fish/sportfishing](http://www.gov.ns/fish/sportfishing).

### **Office of Boating Safety**

Michael Norris with Transport Canada provided an overview of safe boating regulations, their compliance strategy and research and analysis on accidents. He indicated that the leading cause of drowning in Canada often (40%) results from alcohol related accidents. He 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). Michael also described the operators pleasure craft competency program and the procedures for boat licencing. The presentation ended with a video called cold water boot camp which was very informative.

### **Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor**

Greg Stevens thanked Don Maclean and Inland Fisheries for involvement and initiatives in Baddeck and Middle rivers. Carl Purcell recognized Greg Stevens as well as Don Maclean for all of their successful efforts to maintain a salmon fishery in Baddeck and Middle River.

Andrew James, LaHave River SA, stated that there were difficulties obtaining an angling licence in fall in the Bridgewater area. Vendors are required to return angling licences prior to being issued hunting licenses in the fall. Access to online licenses may provide a way of addressing this issue.

Walter Regan provided an update on the recent spill of fuel oil into Sackville River. Walter said that plans include stocking in sites upstream of contaminated areas to restore salmonid populations.

Carl Purcell made a presentation on behalf of NS Salmon Association. Carl indicated that there were concerns about the black salmon fishery in some Gulf Rivers. DFO relies on license stub returns from salmon anglers to estimate AS population sizes and it is important to return these stubs. Additional encouragement measures may be required to increase rate of return.

Larry Shortt indicated that an online reporting system for salmon anglers is available in NFL. Larry also reported that Ed Woodsworth has compiled a petition that supports a catch and release system (river and lakes) in each RFAC.

Kenny Nickerson asked if Inland Fisheries is planning to use triploids in future rainbow stocking initiatives. Don MacLean said that we are currently using triploids in our rainbow trout enhancement program. Triploids grow fast and do not reproduce and reduce potential impacts on native salmonids.

Stephen Boutilier voiced opposition to current catch and release regulations on Woodens River. Don suggested that this will be discussed further after results of recent surveys are made available on PCB levels in fish.

Paul Morris asked what has Inland Fisheries done to address issue of invasives (smallmouth bass and chain pickerel). John indicated that Inland fisheries has undertaken a lot to spread awareness about the impacts of invasive species. Regulatory changes are also being pursued. Greg Stevens DFO, explained some of the challenges associated with changing fisheries regulations that are associated with The Fisheries Act.