

Area 1 Cape Breton, Inverness, Richmond and Victoria Counties

Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2010 Fall RFAC Meeting

The RFAC meeting for Area 1 was held on November 16, 2010 at the Bras d'Or Lakes Inn in St. Peters, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 20 people in attendance. Al McNeill, Inland Fisheries Division chaired the meeting while biologists, John MacMillan and Jason LeBlanc, Fisheries Technicians Reg Madden and Anthony Heggelin, and fish hatchery manager, Darryl Murrant, Director Don MacLean and Fisheries and Coastal resources Coordinator, Eugene Samson from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture were also present. Pat Young, Grant Timmons and Philip Chaisson, Conservation Officers 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.

Proposed Regulation Changes for 2010

Al McNeill reviewed the 2010 regulation changes from page 3 in the Angler's Handbook. Al also reviewed the Proposed changes for 2011. Al noted that Jason LeBlanc will discuss the high harvest regulations for smallmouth bass and the proposed increased bag limit for bass under the Warmwater Fisheries update. Al asked if there were any objections to the proposed province-wide reduction to the bag limit for rainbow trout from 5 to 2 during the period September 1 through March 31 to spread out the catch of stocked rainbow trout. There were no objections. Grant Timmons (DFO) added that there were a few complaints from local anglers regarding gear restrictions on Grand River but that for the most part there were no issues. Roddie MacIassac asked if we had a size limit in mind for rainbow trout in the Bras d'Or lakes. Al indicated that it is something John MacMillan is looking at but would likely be similar to other size limits we have in place for trout in the region. John Hart requested a small portion of Gallant Brook be fly only and that Margaree Salmon Association members support it.

Licencing

Al McNeill discussed progress the Department has made on a number of licencing issues that have been raised in past RFAC meetings as well as some concerns brought forth by the Nova Scotia Salmon Association. These included regulation changes to reduce what has been termed "dirty fisheries"; that is anglers fishing intentionally for a species during the closed season for that species under the guise of angling for another species which has an open season. Al said the problem still exists but the Department is trying to find solutions to trouble spots without closing the entire season.

Other licencing issues were: difficulties in purchasing a licence from a vendor late in the season, under-reporting of catch and effort (poor returns for General and salmon licence stubs), and being able to purchase a fishing licence on-line. Al provided a brief

over view of the current state of electronic licencing and reporting. The Department has been working with the Departments of Natural Resources and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations to build an electronic licencing system for roll out in 2012. AI also mentioned a mail-out survey of Sportfishing in Canada will be conducted in January,2011 and we will be mailing questionnaires to 2800 anglers from Nova Scotia and abroad. Please respond if you receive a survey questionnaire.

Hatchery Report: Fall Stocking

Darryl Murrant gave a brief overview of the Province's hatchery programs and reviewed the fall stocking program for RFA 1 in detail. He noted the that the fall rainbow trout stocking program included sterile triploid fish which have the potential to grow larger and faster than is normally the case. It is hoped that these fish will provide exciting angling, especially in the Bras d'Or Lakes. The Bras d'Or Lakes received approximately 6,000 triploid rainbow trout and 6,000 all-female rainbow trout. The triploid fish are adipose fin-clipped for easy identification by anglers. Anglers will be asked to continue to voluntarily submit catch information from rainbow trout angled in the Bras d'Or Lakes. In support of the winter rainbow trout season, Lever's Lake, Cape Breton County, was stocked with triploid rainbow trout; #20 Dam Pond, in Glace Bay and Eco-trail Pond, Richmond County were stocked with all -female rainbow trout. These sites are open year round with a reduced bag limit during the winter season (January 1 - March 31). He mentioned that the Port Morien Wildlife Assoc. Will be sponsoring a rainbow trout derby on #20 Dam Pond during the Winter Free Fishing Week-end, February 19-20.

Sean Neary, gave an update of the activities at the Margaree Hatchery. Atlantic salmon distributions for 2010 included 37,000 smolt released into the Northeast and main branch of the Margaree River last spring and 114,000 parr this fall. Last spring 10,000 Brook trout yearlings were distributed to various release sites in the Margaree River, Lake O'Law and Lake Ainslie. Over 90,000 Brook trout fingerlings were stocked in the Margaree River, Lake Ainslie and surrounding watersheds. 40,000 salmon parr are being overwintered at the hatchery to be released as smolt next spring and 10,000 yearling speckled trout will be available from the hatchery next spring as well.

Review of 2010 Field Activities

Coldwater Unit

John MacMillan provided an overview of research activities for 2010 including River Denys. River Denys is a Special Trout Management Area where we delayed the opening of the fishing season to 15 May. As a result of the increased popularity of this fishery, angler activity has increased dramatically and resulted in a greater harvest compared to 2008. As a result, additional measures will be considered to reduce harvest in future to address the increase in effort (angler hours) and subsequent harvest. John thanked all the volunteers for their assistance during mark-recapture and creel survey projects. John also thanked the Departments of Natural Resources and Fisheries and Oceans enforcement staff for an increase in activity.

Ron Boudreau suggested that there was an increase in activity from the Aboriginal community and Gary Gibson was concerned that there was high trout harvest during the smelt fishery but thanked enforcement staff for their efforts. John Boudreau added that there are sensitive coves near Malagawash that hold trout over winter and felt that many of these areas could be closed to angling during that time. He also raised concerns regarding the length of the smelt season.

Additional surveys on lakes in the Cape Breton Highlands have indicated consistent results with previous studies. Highland lakes tend to produce large numbers of small trout and this is believed to be the result of overcrowded conditions leading to stunted populations. Opportunities exist to expand the winter trout season in the Cape Breton Highlands.

Reg Madden provided an overview of: Examining the Occurrence of Wild Rainbow Trout in the Bras d'Or Lakes, Nova Scotia: Using Scale Pattern Analysis to Differentiate Hatchery and Wild Populations. Rainbow trout, a known invasive species and the second most popular sport fish in Nova Scotia were assessed to determine the contribution of wild rainbow trout to the angler catch. Wild juveniles from the Bras d'Or Lakes watershed were directly compared to unknown (angled) and known origin (hatchery) rainbow trout. Rainbow trout reared under aquaculture conditions experience rapid growth resulting in morphological differences from wild juveniles. Mean length and weight at age 1+ of known origin wild and hatchery trout were 13.1 cm (29.5 g) and 27.6 cm (252.8 g), respectively. Scale analysis revealed hatchery samples had more circuli spaced farther apart. The Stepwise Logistic Regression Model used in this project classified 29% of the angled sample as wild origin suggesting that rainbow trout reproducing in the wild contribute significantly to the angler catch.

Reg also discussed that research has shown that densities of juvenile rainbow trout are currently far below those of native brook trout and Atlantic salmon. Compared to other invasive species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel, rainbow trout are believed to have minor influences on native species. For example the catch per unit effort (CPUE) of smallmouth bass in Lake Ainslie increased from 0.3 bass/h in 2003 to 1.63 bass/h in 2008 while brook trout decreased from 1.5 trout/h to 0.11 trout/h during the same time period. Stocking triploid (sterile) rainbow trout into the Bras d'Or Lakes has been initiated to conserve native species while maintaining this popular sport fishery. The full publication can be found at: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/reports/maddenWT10V4.pdf>

An angler asked if juvenile rainbow trout production has increased in Middle River. Reg noted that although they seem to be more abundant, their densities are much lower than speckled trout or Atlantic salmon.

An angler commented that we need to stop invasive species like smallmouth bass from spreading in Cape Breton.

Warmwater Unit

Jason discussed issues surrounding aquatic invasive species in Nova Scotia. There are seven key pathways for introduction or spread in Canada and understanding these primary pathways is important for taking effective action and minimizing the effects of invasive species. They are: (1) shipping, (2) recreational and commercial boating, (3) use of live bait, (4) aquarium and water garden trade, (5) live food fish (6) unauthorized introductions and (7) canals and water diversions. Of these, unauthorized introductions is the most problematic in Nova Scotia followed by recreational and commercial boating and use of live bait. Aquatic invasive species issues are extremely complex, biologically, socially and economically. They involve a wide variety of leadership, coordination and cooperation among stakeholders, all levels of government, many

industry sectors (ex. sportfishing organizations) and non-government organizations. Jason outlined the Canadian Action Plan to Address the Threats of Aquatic Invasive Species which can be found at

<http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/science/enviro/ais-eae/index-eng.htm> There are many aspects of this plan that could be implemented in Nova Scotia. The Department is currently involved in many of these and will look at how best to use them to address issues specific to Nova Scotia such as outreach and education and rapid response frameworks. Jason also indicated that regulation changes and amendments to the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act would be considered to better address issues in Nova Scotia.

Jason also discussed the rationale for revoking the high harvest regulations for smallmouth bass. In most areas there were not accomplishing the desired effect which was reducing abundance and consequently increasing overall size of the bass remaining. There was also a question about the proposed increase in the bag limit for smallmouth bass in some areas to twenty-five/day. Jason responded by adding that in many cases increased harvest would be ineffective in controlling smallmouth bass numbers but suggested that it could slow down their establishment in newly populated lakes where reproduction has not yet occurred.

Extension

Atlantic Salmon Enhancement

Al McNeill gave a report of the salmon stocking and broodstock collection activities from 2010. Approximately 45,000 smolt, 35,600 fry/eggs, and 172,000 salmon parr were stocked in spring and fall, 2010 into five rivers - the Waughs, St. Francis Harbour, Margaree, Middle and Baddeck rivers. Broodstock collections in the fall are expected to yield close to 300,000 salmon eggs for stocking out at various stages in 2011.

The Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund received allocations for \$266,581 in 2010, based on 2009 revenues. Amy Weston provided Al with some slides from the Adopt-a-Stream program. Twenty-four community groups were involved in 2011. Total funds were \$291,600 which included \$100,000 in funding from the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission. Amy organised the second annual Adopt-a-Stream Workshop in Truro in April which allowed many groups from around the province to network and share ideas.

Al also provided the names of the six groups which qualified for the 2010 Atlantic Salmon Conservation Fund for Nova Scotia and mentioned that the 2011 Call for Proposals was now open. Interested groups can visit the website:

www.salmonconservation.ca for details.

John Boudreau discussed issues associated with in-filling and suggested that fine money associated with offences of this nature be re-allocated back to local angling association for remedial work that could benefit sportfishing.

Promotion and Development

Al McNeill summarized the Learn To Fish (L2F) program on behalf of Tara Marshall.

Thirty-eight L2F's were delivered province-wide from staff and volunteer instructors which included projects in RFA 1 such as those supported by Port Morien Wildlife at Donkin and Richmond Wildlife at Maughers Pond. Al explained the fisheries education programs completed in the past summer with recreation camps and summer science camps (Shelburne / Whycomomagh). He also provided an update of the Fall BOW (Becoming an Outdoors Woman) program. Fall BOW was held at Mount Traber Camp, in Cooks Brook, Halifax County. Fisheries classes consisted of a fly tying workshop, 2 fly fishing classes, 2 trout fishing classes and a tasty fish class. Al thanked the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, Trout Nova Scotia and Canadian Association of Smallmouth Anglers for contributing to the Fall BOW scholarship foundation. Al provided an update on the FUN (Families United with Nature) program. One event was held in 2010 with seniors and their families at Murphy Lake, Mount Uniacke. He also indicated that 2010 was another successful year for the Becoming An Outdoor Woman Program (BOW). Al explained a variety of new initiatives for sportfishing development. They are as follows: two more groups trained for delivery L2F in their area, translation of L2F into French, partnership with DNR (Education Centre) to deliver fishing workshops in the parks/campgrounds as part of the Parks Education Program, partnership with DNR (Parks Division) to have fishing equipment and licenses available for visitors, and a partnership with Tourism to have more updated sportfishing information at the 10 Visitor Information Centres (VIC's) across the province.

Philip Chaisson (DFO) asked where he could send fishing equipment that has been confiscated by enforcement staff. Al McNeill indicated that one example is the Fishing Poles for Kids Program sponsored by the Conservation Officers Association of NS.

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

John Hart mentioned that there are issues at vendors who are selling licences as many are confusing the definition of non-resident angler.

John Boudreau announced that members of the Richmond Wildlife Association sponsor a fly tying program with youth from the area and encouraged other clubs and the Department to do the same.

Gary Gibson presented the following recommendations to the Department:

- (1) that due to the increase on angler activity the bag limit on River Denys be five but only one trout be greater than 37.75 cm (15 in);
- (2) that due to how dangerous rainbow trout are, the season for rainbow trout in Richmond and Antigonish counties be extended to December 31 and be fly fishing only with extra fees applied;
- (3) that the area of River Denys upstream from the bridge at the store be fly fishing only or single hook lure; and
- (4) due to the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada that First Nations has the right to Atlantic Salmon for their food fisheries and ceremonial needs, that DFO not be involved in the rivers of Nova Scotia above the high water level and that First Nations in cooperation with user groups and the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture manage the resource.

Hubert Doyle, on behalf of the Richmond Wildlife Association, proposed that the province implement a \$10 enhancement stamp on the general fishing licence suggesting that these monies go towards the re-stocking program.

Richmond Wildlife Association also proposed that all fishing on the Margaree River open on June 1 and that because of the low number of returns all salmon angling in the province be catch and release only with barbless hook.

John Hart raised concerns about invasive didymo and that some jurisdictions have banned the use of felt sole waders which are thought to be one vector for dispersal from one watershed to another. He requested a general advisory for Nova Scotia that could be placed in the Anglers Handbook.

Gary Gibson asked what caused the algae bloom in Lake Ainslie and wondered if it could be related to a mining exploration that he heard was going on. Jason LeBlanc indicated that he has worked on that project in collaboration with the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and that although the exact cause was not determined there seems to be a correlation with elevated water temperatures in late August. He added that there are other factors that often lead to algal blooms such as faulty septic systems, run-off from agriculture and nutrient loading from other sources. He added that the algae bloom in Lake Ainslie was widespread and was not likely caused by a point source impact and persisted well into the fall. To his knowledge now of the algal cells tested positive for toxins and encouraged users to consult with information provided by the Nova Scotia Department of Environment.

There was some discussion regarding the stocking of brown trout in the Salmon River (Mira) and whether it was advisable considering the salmon population on that system. Darryl stated that it was the Departments policy to only enhance existing brown trout populations and not to introduce them to new watersheds and noted that there is currently a season for night fishing for Brown trout on the Salmon River. The Richmond Wildlife Association stated that they would support an additional fee on the general fishing licence, similar to the surcharge for the Sportfish Habitat Fund, that would provide funds for additional hatchery programs.

John Hart suggested that military personnel should receive their angling licence free of charge.

Lenny DeCoste suggested opening the Margaree River earlier to stop the illegal targeting of salmon in the spring.

Adjourned: 10:05 pm
Minutes: Jason LeBlanc