

Area 2 : Pictou, Antigonish and Guysborough Counties

**Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council
Minutes of the 2010 Fall RFAC Meeting**

The RFAC meeting for Area 2 was held on November 17, 2010 at the Claymore Inn and Conference Center, in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 19 people in attendance. Darryl Murrant, Inland Fisheries Division chaired the meeting while Alan McNeill, John MacMillan, Reg Madden, and Anthony Heggelin from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture were also present. John Mombourquette, Director of Enforcement, Dept. Of Natural Resources and Nadia MacPhee, Camille Poirier, and Adrian Vautour, 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 Anthony Heggelin 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 was support for all proposed West River regulations. No objection to decrease in bag limit for rainbow trout.

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.

Bob Ferguson reported his licence sales increased in 2010. Al indicated licence sales were up in all categories in 2010.

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.

Q: Is the fishing licence good for the winter fishery?

A: yes , it is valid from April 1 to March 31 of the following year.

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 RFA2 in detail. He noted 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 which received approximately 6,000 triploid rainbow trout and 6,000 all-female rainbow trout. The triploid fish put in the Bras d'Or Lakes 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 RFA2, Goose Harbour Lake, Guysborough County, was stocked with triploid rainbow trout while Cameron and Gillis Lakes, Antigonish County, and Gairloch Lake, Pictou County received 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 during the Winter Free Fishing Week-end, February 19-20 the Antigonish Rivers Association may be sponsoring a Rainbow trout derby (non-competitive) on Gillis Lake, while the Pictou County Rivers Association are sponsoring a similar event on Gairloch Lake.

Review of 2010 Field Activities

Coldwater Unit

John MacMillan provided an overview of research activities for 2010. River Denys is a Special Trout Management Area and the opening of the fishing season was delayed 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.

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 number of lakes included in the winter

trout season in the Cape Breton Highlands.

Important factors that influence trout production in lakes include water quality (pH), overfishing, and the presence of competitor species. Large differences among trout populations are found across Nova Scotia. For example, habitat in mainland lakes is influenced by more factors that reduce the number in the trout population compared to habitat in Cape Breton Highland lakes. In mainland lakes, the level of crowding in trout populations is low and trout growth tends to be more rapid and trout can obtain large sizes. Brook trout are poor competitors against other fish species such as perch, smallmouth bass, and chain pickerel. Where heavy competition exists, the trout population can be minimal or absent.

John provided an overview of the Nova Scotia Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative. The results of two FFRC projects are being presented tonight by Aaron Spares, PHD Candidate Dalhousie University and Dr. Sean Mitchell, St FX University. Aaron Spares has been working on evaluating sea trout migration in Antigonish Harbour and Antigonish rivers. Sean Mitchell has been assessing the impacts of chain pickerel on native populations.

Warmwater Unit

Anthony Heggelin 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. Anthony 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.

Anthony 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. Anthony 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.

Promotion and Development

Al McNeill

Al reviewed the L2F (Learn to Fish) programs on behalf of Tara Marshall. Thirty-eight L2F's were delivered province wide from staff and volunteer instructors. Al explained the fisheries education programs completed in the past summer with recreation camps and summer science camps (Shelburne/Whycocomagh). He also provided an updated 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. 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.

Sea trout tracking in Antigonish Harbour - Aaron Spares

Aaron Spares, Phd. candidate from Dalhousie University gave a presentation on tracking sea-run brook trout in Antigonish Harbour. Aaron received support from the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative among many other funding sources to track the movements of acoustically tagged brook trout in the harbour to see how trout move between the freshwater environment of West River, the harbour, the South River and outside Antigonish Harbour. Aaron tagged 22 brook trout with ultrasonic tags and deployed acoustic receivers at several places in the harbor and surrounding area. Aaron was able to provide some preliminary results. Most trout stayed in the West River estuary with very few moving to the South River side and almost none ventured outside the Harbour. Detections from the receivers indicated 15 fish migrated up the West River, three went up the Wrights River and three stayed in the West River side of the Harbor. Aaron will complete the study this winter and have a final report by the spring.

Bob Ferguson wanted to know the battery life of the tags, Aaron said it depends on the type of tag, but usually around one year.

Another angler asked if any fish left the Harbour. Aaron mentioned he has not downloaded the outer receivers yet, but there were very few detections in the outer harbour area.

Darryl Murrant asked about the water temperatures where the fish were detected. Aaron said they were mostly in the 11 - 15 degree range.

Aaron thanked all the anglers who cooperated in reporting tagged fish and especially those who released tagged fish..

Chain Pickerel in the East River Watershed - Sean Mitchell

Dr. Sean Mitchell also presented a talk entitled "Chain Pickerel Abundance and Distribution in the East River, Pictou". Seans' work was also supported by the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative with assistance from Jason LeBlanc and Anthony Heggelin. The purpose of Seans Study is to determine the distribution of chain pickerel in East River Pictou, assess the impact of pickerel on lake fish communities, and document the basic biological characteristics in two lakes in which they are known to be established. Sean found that in lakes where chain pickerel had become established, only chain pickerel and larger white suckers were found. In lakes where chain pickerel were not found, at least three or four fish species were present including trout, brown bullheads, suckers, and shiners or other minnows. Sean conclude that pickerel both simplify fish communities by eliminating other species and reduce overall fish biomass. Thus pickerel are affecting the whole lake ecosystem and not just sportfish, and any restoration efforts to repopulate lakes from which pickerel had been removed would require more than just stocking trout back to the lake.

Q: Will pickerel just follow the rivers and spread to new lakes? Sean mentioned any kind of barrier would be expensive and require maintenance. Sean found trout in the streams

close to pickerel lakes. One angler asked if they spawn in rivers. Sean said they prefer to use the vegetation around lake shores to spawn. One angler asked where pickerel came from originally. Sean indicated they are native to the Eastern United States. Bob Ferguson asked when bass were first introduced to the Province. Answer: 1942.

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

An angler asked if there will be any fishery for striped bass in the Gulf this year.

John Macmillan indicated the Province has not heard anything from DFO who are responsible for striped bass management.

The meeting ended at 21:22