

Area 1 Inverness, Cape Breton, Richmond and Victoria Counties

Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2011 Fall RFAC Meeting

The RFAC meeting for Area 1 was held on November 17, 2011 at the Alexander Graham Bell Museum in Baddeck, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 36 people in attendance. Darryl Murrant, Hatchery Manager at Frasers Mills Fish Hatchery chaired the meeting, while Fisheries Biologists, Jason LeBlanc and John MacMillan, Fisheries Technician Cathy Munro, Sportfish Manager, Al McNeill, Coastal Resource Coordinators Eugene Samson and Nicole Sampson, Margaree Fish Hatchery Manager, Sean Neary and Director of Inland Fisheries, Don MacLean were also present. John Mombourquette, Director of Enforcement was in attendance, joined by and Enforcement Officers Richard McCurdy and Curtis VanDenHeuval from the Department of Natural Resources along with Pat Young, Sebastian Beauchamp and Phillipe Chiasson, Fisheries Officers, with Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Gordon Delaney, Parks Canada 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.

Changes to the RFAC Schedule

Al McNeill reviewed the suggestions for changing the RFAC meeting format that the Department received from the Spring meetings. Suggestions included starting earlier or meeting on week-ends, spend less time talking about our programs, more time for discussion of issues from the floor, focus on regional, not Provincial projects or projects from other RFA's. Several people suggested advertising the meetings more. All preferred the current format, rather than "Town Hall", or "Open House" style meetings.

Al outlined the changes the Department has made including moving the start time to 6:30, placing regulation changes and other topical items at the beginning of the agenda, keeping the focus regional as much as possible, limiting presentation time from staff and having printed reports available for those who would like more detail. A press release and advertising budget was approved to buy radio and print advertising. We will also keep the current meeting format. One change the Department has decided to make is to reduce the frequency of RFAC meetings to once per year in the fall. Al explained the reason for this change as a Department decision to better utilise staff and financial resources. Preparing reports and presentations for meetings, travelling, attending meetings and working on action items from meetings is time consuming for staff at a time of year which is very demanding for hatchery and management staff.

Each spring, Inland Fisheries staff attend and present at four major provincial angling association AGM's, speak with thousands of anglers at the Sport and RV Show, and meet anglers on the river during spring creel surveys, all of which provide an excellent

opportunity to get feedback from anglers on a variety of issues and concerns. The Department will re-allocate money saved from staff travel to Spring RFAC meetings for fall meeting advertising. We will also maintain a rotation of meeting locations for the fall RFAC meetings similar to past rotations.

Proposed Regulation Changes for 2012

Al McNeill reviewed the 2011 regulation changes from page 3 in the Angler's Handbook. Al also reviewed the proposed changes for 2012. Gary Gibson suggested that no angling should be permitted until all of the "slink" salmon have moved out of the rivers. Al indicated that the opening date for the trout season on many rivers has been delayed into May to reduce incidental captures of Atlantic salmon during early season trout fisheries.

Licencing

Al McNeill discussed progress the Department has made on a number of licencing issues that have been raised in past RFAC meetings. These included regulation changes to reduce anglers who fish 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. Discussions took place with DFO after the ZMAC meetings in May to consider the impact of closing certain salmon pools to all angling during the summer months on selected rivers where problems are occurring. As a result, many pools were closed on the Medway, LaHave, and St. Marys Rivers to protect early run salmon.

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. James Langley added that many vendors, although late, had licences but did not have Angler Handbooks to pass out with them. To resolve these problems, in 2011, all Department of Natural Resources field offices will ensure general fishing licences are available until the end of the general fishing season in September. At the end of the 2011 angling season, prizes will be offered to selected anglers who submit their licence stub (report card) to the NSDFA by the end of December for both general and salmon licences. Three names will be drawn at random from the returned licence stub report cards for both salmon and general licences and awarded prizes. We hope this incentive will increase the number of licence stub returns.

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. Unfortunately, this goal will not be reached in 2012, The Departments are still exploring alternative funding sources to finance the new system. Al also reported that the mail-out for the 2010 survey of Sportfishing in Canada took place in January with 2788 questionnaires mailed out. The return rate was 53% which was the highest return rate in Canada. A report on the Survey results will be published in 2012.

Hatchery Report: Fall Stocking

Darryl Murrant provided a brief overview of the Department's fish hatchery programs and the activities of the three hatcheries; Fraser's Mills, McGowan Lake and Margaree. He reviewed the sites stocked this fall in RFA1 and noted that eight lakes outside the Margaree River watershed, were stocked with speckled trout from the Margaree hatchery. This represents a positive first step towards utilizing this facility in different capacities than has been the case in recent years. Darryl added that #20 Dam pond in Glace Bay would be stocked in the near future with rainbow trout. In the Bras D'or lakes 50% of the rainbow trout stocked this past season were sterile triploids and have their adipose fins clipped for easy identification by anglers. The other 7,500 are all-female stock that do not have their adipose fins clipped.

Harry Vickers asked if we have measured the success of the fall fingerling program. Darryl indicated that it is difficult to put an exact number of what contribution the fall fingerling program makes to recruitment to anglers total catch.

James Langley asked if inspections are completed on aquaculture pens in the St. Peters area. Darryl noted that Federal Fish Health Regulations require aquaculture sites be tested and that approvals are required prior to moving any fish between private hatcheries and sea-cage sites. This process is monitored through the regional Introductions and Transfers Committee.

Another angler raised concerns about cormorant predation after stocking events.

Kevin Dolhanty asked if any brown trout were stocked in the Bras d'or lakes because there were many 1.0-1.5 lb brown trout being angled recently in the Whycocomagh Bay. Dave Hardy said the situation was similar in the Barrachois area. Darryl indicated that the Department has not stocked brown trout in either of these areas although brown trout fry and fall parr are released in some streams around Soldiers Cove, which run into the Bras d'Or Lakes. Leonard Forsythe added that he has caught several in various size categories (small - up to 3 lbs) and suggested they are reproducing naturally. He also suggested that the Department electrofish the Humes and other rivers draining into the Bras d'or lakes for juvenile brown trout. Harry Vickers commented that he has never seen any brown trout in the Skye River.

Review of 2011 Field Activities

Cold Water Species Management

John reviewed projects undertaken through the cold water species section that included the Adopt-A-Stream water temperature monitoring project and the results of a electrofishing project that was conducted as a part of a long term study to assess the impacts of restoration initiatives. A project to assess the population number and status in two trout lakes was also presented. This project compared a trout lake under catch and release regulations with one that remained under general regulations. Summary reports for the three projects were available at the meeting.

At recent RFAC meetings concerns from anglers were expressed about the susceptibility of newly stocked rainbow trout to high harvest. John presented length data on rainbow trout that were caught by anglers. These data were collected by Gordie MacKinnon. The length of rainbows stocked into the Bras D'or Lakes are usually between 25 - 30 cm. A minimum length limit of 35cm would protect newly stocked rainbow trout and allow them to acclimatize to their new environment prior to being removed by anglers. A size limit of 35cm may also increase the size of the catch by adding protection to fast growing individuals. This proposal received general support from those attending the meeting.

Recently five lakes that are located within the CB Highlands Special Trout Management Area were opened for winter angling opportunities for brook trout. The trout resource is abundant in the Cape Breton Highlands. Overcrowding in many lakes in reducing growth and the size of the catch is often small. Lakes in this area could support additional winter fishing opportunities since exploitation does not seem to be an important factor influencing these populations.

John thanked the many volunteers for their assistance in River Denys. Several anglers recommended that the angling season open prior to 15 May on River Denys. However, exploitation on the sea trout population of River Denys is a concern. As a result, additional regulatory measures will be implemented to coincide with the extension of the angling season to 1 May. At the last RFAC 1 meeting a number of anglers wanted to know how proposed regulations would impact their catch. The impact of two regulatory options were presented. The two options were to reduce the bag limit to three trout and allow one fish with a length longer than 30cm or 35cm. The catch information that was collected from creels in 2008 and 2010 indicated that about 12 percent of the anglers who fish River Denys would be impacted by a change in bag limit to three trout. A maximum length limit of 30 cm (one trout longer) would impact 14% of anglers and a maximum length limit of 35 cm (one trout longer) would impact about 5% of the anglers. Kevin Dolhanty recommended that if only 5% of anglers are affected a change is not warranted but supported changing the opening date to May 1. A decision will be made before next season in regards to regulatory options for River Denys. Dave Harding and Peter Hill added that if trout abundance is low that no changes be made that potentially increase harvest. James Langley would support an eventual change back to an April 1 opening date and bag limit of five trout. Gary Gibson suggested that the area above the sawmill should be closed to protect spawning trout.

Nova Scotia Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative (NSFFRC)

The objective of the FFRC is to augment current initiatives designed to assess and improve Nova Scotia's sport fishery by forming partnerships with universities, government agencies, and other organizations. In 2011, six projects received support from the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture through the FFRC. These included: 1) Brook trout population parameters in seventeen lakes in Nova Scotia, 2) Sea trout migration patterns and habitat preference with acoustic tagging and tracking, 3) Trout parasite prevalence and distribution, 4) Impact of habitat improvement structures on fish populations, 5) Invasive species impacts on native fish communities, and 6) Annual changes in stream densities of salmon.

and trout. Partners for these projects included: Dalhousie University, Saint Mary's University; Acadia University, Saint Francis Xavier University, Fisheries and Oceans, Nova Scotia Adopt A Stream, and Nova Scotia Salmon Association.

Invasive Species Initiatives

Jason LeBlanc provided an overview of aquatic invasive species (AIS) issues in Nova Scotia and summarized the regulation changes made in 2011 to help address illegal introductions of species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel. A primary pathway for illegal movements of AIS is transfer by anglers from one water body to another to attempt to create fisheries for those species. It is illegal to introduce fish into fish habitat, regardless of the species, without a permit. Despite this, new populations of invasive species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel continue to threaten native fish populations, particularly speckled trout. The open season for smallmouth bass was closed in 2011 in RFAs 1, 2, 6 and the eastern portions of RFA 3 to attempt to remove any incentive anglers may have for continuing illegal introductions to these areas. This approach will be re-assessed in the coming years as to its effectiveness, however for now, no new lakes for smallmouth bass will be open to angling in these areas unless they fit into a broader management plan for AIS.

Leonard Forsythe asked why we have bag limits for invasive species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel. Jason indicated that both species are a real concern for native fish species but where populations are established, it is virtually impossible to impact their numbers by angling. The bag limit of 25 was chosen because it both provides an adequate number of fish to anglers and coincides with bag limits for other species such as white and yellow perch. Having a single bag limit for multiple species simplifies regulations for anglers. Jason added, however that when new occurrences of invasive species are found early enough, removals by angling or other means may be effective in short term control, reducing impacts on native species and delaying establishment. In rare cases establishment may be stopped and we would be willing to look at these types of options where feasible.

Unauthorized introductions of live fish is considered the key pathway for the spread of AIS in Nova Scotia. However, to a lesser degree the inappropriate use of live bait, mis-use of unwanted aquarium trade fish (eg. goldfish) and water diversions (eg. intentional or natural due to spring snow melt and rain events) also contribute to the problem. Jason indicated that an *Aquatic Invasive Strategy* for Nova Scotia will be developed to address many of these pathways. The Strategy will focus on: (1) legislation, regulation and compliance; (2) risk management; (3) science; and (4) engaging stakeholders. Some initiatives have already begun on better understanding the role of live bait, developing early detection and rapid response frameworks and engaging stakeholders. An AIS Working Group has been formed which is made up of the major sportfishing organizations of the Province. The NS Salmon Association, Canadian Association of Smallmouth Bass Anglers, Trout Unlimited, Trout NS, the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the Responsible Bass Anglers of NS have representatives on the Working Group. The Working Group's mandate provides for exchange of AIS information and enhanced planning, cooperation and coordination of AIS activities.

Jason also provided a progress report on the draft live fish possession regulations that are intended to address the ongoing problem of unauthorized introductions of live fish. The draft regulations allow for a general prohibition of the possession of live fish in Nova Scotia. The intent provides Nova Scotia with an enforceable regulation specifically designed to address the vector or pathway for illegal introductions and allow for interception of live fish before they are illegally released. Exemptions to the general prohibition were discussed that allow for legitimate activities that require the possession of live fish to continue and/or are permitted under other authorities. When enacted, fish caught, regardless of the species, must be returned back to water as quickly as possible and with the least amount of harm or killed immediately and counted towards the daily bag limit. Jason indicated that when this regulatory approach is implemented, practices such as high grading and utilizing holding devices for live fish will no longer be permitted (eg. live wells or coolers, stringers, holding boxes, buckets, etc). Jason added that the Department understands that many anglers and angling practices will be affected by a prohibition of the possession of live fish and that anglers will have to adjust but contends it is a necessary change to minimize the potential for further illegal introductions and maintain a sustainable sport fishery for native fish species. AIS are believed to be the second largest threat to native fish communities after habitat loss.

Richard McCurdy asked if the Department would be putting any money into communications on the new regulations when they are implemented. Jason indicated that a communications plan would be developed.

John Hart inquired about what the fine structure would be like under these new regulations. Jason indicated that we are still working that out but that for serious infractions we will be suggesting substantial fines. The maximum fine available under the Fisheries and Coastal resources Act is 90 days in jail or \$100,000 and range down to a SOT (summary offence ticket).

Extension

Atlantic Salmon Enhancement

Al McNeill gave a report of the salmon stocking and broodstock collection activities from 2011. Approximately 38,000 smolt, 41,000 fry/eggs, and 140,000 salmon parr were stocked in spring and fall, 2011 into five rivers - the Waughs, St. Francis Harbour, Margaree, Middle and Baddeck rivers. Al also summarized the selection criteria for the program. The Department will be evaluating the program over the winter.

The Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund received an allocation for \$311,024 in 2011, based on 2010 revenues from fishing licence sales. Amy Weston provided Al with some slides from the Adopt-a-Stream program from 2010. Twenty-eight community groups were involved in 2010. In 2011, Adopt-a-Stream received \$280,000 from the Sportfish Habitat Fund as well as an additional \$100,000 from the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission. Amy organised the third annual Adopt-a-Stream Workshop in Truro in April which allowed many groups from around the province to network and share ideas. Three projects other than Adopt a stream were funded by the Sportfish Habitat Fund in 2011: the West River Liming project, the Barrier-free fishing pier at Trenton Park, and the Murphy Lake board walk restoration.

AI also provided the names of the seven groups which qualified for the 2011 Atlantic Salmon Conservation Fund for Nova Scotia. AI reminded people that the call for proposals for 2012 closes on Dec 17, 2011. The NS Advisory Committee will meet in February, 2012 to review the proposals for next year. Interested groups can visit the website: www.salmonconservation.ca for details on how to apply and to find out which organisations were successful in 2011.

Promotion and Development

AI McNeill presented a review of the Departments promotion and development activities in 2011 on behalf of Tara Marshall. The Learn to Fish (L2F) program was delivered 39 times across the province and 11 events were held in HRM. L2F events usually start mid April and finish up at the end of June. There were many new schools participating this past spring and over 1600 youth took part in the introductory fishing program across the Province. Tara would like to thank all the volunteer L2F instructors, Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters, and the sponsors (Shakespeare, Lucky Strike, Berkley, Shimano).

One new group of youth participating in L2F is the mental health division of the IWK Children's Hospital. The mental health unit approached our department explaining that many of the youth at their facility would like to go fishing. Our first event with the hospital was well received and they approached us to have a long term fishing program in place with their patients. We have committed to two L2F's per season with the IWK, mental health division. We would like to thank Tony Rodgers and the Federation of Anglers and Hunter for their support with the youth fishing initiative for youth at the IWK.

We followed through with our initiatives with Department of Natural Resources, partnering on youth fishing program collaboration. We delivered an L2F family event at Shubenacadie Wildlife Park, to celebrate National Wildlife Week. We delivered two L2F sessions along Beaverbank Lake to help celebrate Kids in the Forest Day. Five schools from HRM participated, encompassing 285 students. We provided a fisheries training workshop to DNR Education Officers who, in turn delivered three fishing workshops at Laurie, Dollar and Porter's Lake Provincial Parks. Additionally, three camping parks (Mira River, Dollar and Ellenwood) participated in the Tackle Share Program. This program was modeled after the one put on by Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Fishing rods, tackle, safety gear, an a how-to booklet are on loan free of charge to park visitors. Each participating park also sells fishing licences. The Tackle Share Program was well received and will be expanding this spring/summer. We will be continuing to partner with DNR on all of the youth fishing initiatives. We would like to thank the Halifax Wildlife Association and the Canadian Association of Smallmouth Anglers for the help with our youth fishing initiatives.

We had an amazing fall BOW (Becoming an Outdoors Woman) program. We delivered two trout fishing classes, two fly fishing classes, one tasty fish class and one fly tying evening session. New this fall was the "Taste of the Wild" showcase. We cooked moose, bear, deer, elk, partridge, white perch, smallmouth bass, speckled trout and salmon. This event helped us with our BOW Cookbook sales and we tasted about 14 recipes for game from our cookbook. We would like to thank the Nova Scotia Salmon Association for their support in the BOW scholarship program. Their contribution helped send 2 participants to the Fall workshop.

Winter BOW is scheduled for February 17-19, 2012 at the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts & Crafts, St. Ann's, Cape Breton. We will be teaching two ice fishing classes, learning to build smelt rigs and do a fly tying session in the evening. Additionally, we will have a "Taste of the Wild" showcase to help sell our BOW cookbooks. Also, February 18-19, 2012 is our free Winter Sportfishing Weekend. A few sportfishing associations across the province hold winter fishing events for families on the free weekend.

Just a reminder about our Photo Contest, and Kids Art Contest, we are taking entries until the end of December. The photo contest has 5 categories, general, scenic, species, family and young angler. The Best of Show prize is a fishing licence for a lifetime, so some really nice prizes and winners will be featured in the Anglers Handbook.

We are providing some incentives to anglers who return the General and Salmon Fishing Report Card. Prizes in the General fishing licence category include an Okuma spinning reel, Emery med/light action spinning rod, Berkley fireline, and four Mepps trout lures (first prize), Grohmann knife (2nd prize), and 3rd prize is a BOW cookbook, Fish Nova Scotia ball cap and pewter pin. In the Salmon licence category, 1st prize is an Okuma fly reel, floating fly line, and a box of 12 Atlantic Salmon flies, 2nd prize is a Grohmann knife, and third prize is a BOW cookbook, Fish Nova Scotia ball cap and pewter pin. Prizes will be drawn in January, 2012, and winners will be notified by mail.

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

Kirk MacNeil proposed a catch and release, fly fishing only, regulation for brown trout on the Salmon River, Cape Breton County from October 1 to October 31.

Gordon Delaney, Parks Canada provided an update on activities within the Cape Breton Highland National Park. He indicated that Park staff are still dealing with the unauthorized introduction of spiny cheek crayfish into Freshwater Lake and are attempting to capture and remove as many as possible. The lake is closed to angling. Gordon added that salmon seasons on both the Clyburn and the portion of the Aspy River that is in the Park are closed to angling due to low returns.

Leonard Forsythe inquired about an access issue at the boat launch at Little Narrows Ferry, noting that it has a cable across it. You used to be allowed to launch your boat when the ferry was not there.

Dave Harding suggested that many people consider brown trout to be invasive in Nova Scotia and that the Department should therefore have a year round season with a bag limit of one or two fish per day, similar to rainbow trout.

Lenny DeCoste requested that the following be passed along to Fisheries and Oceans regarding salmon angling: (1) that DFO enforcement presence on the Margaree River was appreciated, (2) that all salmon rivers that are currently closed be open to catch and release angling to allow for a legal angling presence on these rivers that will reduce poaching and take some angling pressure off the Margaree River, (3) that pinched barbs

be required for the entire salmon season, and (4) salmon tags be changed to the type used in NL as the NS tags can be placed in hot water to soften the plastic, removed and reused relatively easily.

Gary Gibson asked about the proposed regulations for the West River, Antigonish, that there should not be a “black salmon” fishery permitted for First Nations. Gary also discussed concerns he has regarding exploratory drilling for oil and gas at Lake Ainslie.

Another angler suggested that we consider Lake Ainslie for winter angling opportunities for white perch.

James Langley asked about the status of striped bass populations. John MacMillan indicated that Fisheries and Oceans conducts assessments on striped bass in the region and that the data is being reviewed by both DFO and COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada).

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm