
Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2012 RFAC Meeting

Area 2

Date Prepared: November 2012

Antigonish, Guysborough & Pictou Counties

The RFAC meeting for Area 2 was held on November 7, 2012 at the N.S Museum of Industry in Stellarton, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 28 people in attendance. Al McNeill, Manager of Resource Management, Inland Fisheries Division chaired the meeting. Biologists John MacMillan and Jason LeBlanc, Sportfish Development Officer, Tara Marshall, technicians Cathy Munro and Reg Madden, Manager of Fisheries Enhancement, Darryl Murrant, Director of Inland Fisheries Division, Don MacLean, and Coastal Resources Coordinator, Ralph Heighton from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture attended. Fishery Officers Craig MacDonald, Duncan English, and Peter Jowett from Conservation and Protection, Fisheries and Oceans were also present. The meeting began at 6:30 pm with a brief introduction of those present, and a review of the agenda by the Chair.

2012 Regulation Changes and Proposed Changes for 2013

Al reviewed the 2012 regulation changes from page 3 in the Angler's Handbook. Al also reviewed the Proposed changes for 2013 on page 5. Al noted that the first proposed change – a review of spawning season restrictions for smallmouth bass would be covered in Jason LeBlanc's presentation.

Al reviewed the two proposed changes for 2013 for RFA 2. An artificial fly only restriction has been proposed for the East Branch, St. Mary's River from the Highway 347 bridge at Aspen downstream to Silvers Pool including Glenelg Lake from April 1 to September 30. The Eastern Sportfish Association are in favor of the proposed gear restrictions for the East Branch and Glenelg Lake.

There was also a proposal to reduce the bag limit for speckled and brown trout to two per day downstream from the 104 highway bridge in Southside Antigonish Harbour. The Antigonish Rivers Association members spoke in support of reducing the bag limit for trout on the South River estuary; no gear restrictions but perhaps a bag limit similar to that in place on River Denys.

Licencing Update / 2010 Sportfish Survey Results

Al provided licence sales data for 2011 and past years. Total general fishing licence sales in 2011 were 62,997 which was a small decline from 2010, but still over 20% of 2005 sales. Salmon licences were up slightly in 2011 at 2,575. Salmon licence sales have been very consistent between 2,200 and 2,500 since 1998, reflecting the popularity of this fishery in spite of the fact that many rivers are currently closed to angling.

Al 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 and other groups. These included regulation changes to reduce 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 in the same waters. Al said the problem still exists but the Department and DFO are trying to find solutions to trouble spots without closing the entire season. Discussions have taken place with DFO during the spring ZMAC meetings to consider the impact of closing certain salmon

pools to all angling during the summer months on selected rivers where problems are occurring. DFO has consulted on these closures with anglers on the St. Marys, LaHave and Medway and come up with a list of pools which were closed in mid-June.

Al provided a brief overview 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. Although this has been delayed, currently, the Province has hired a consulting company to review the existing Business Case and data collected and propose a solution to provide the capability for online purchasing and reporting for hunting, fishing and trapping licences. This will not be implemented in time for the 2013 angling season, but the Department is hopeful it will be ready for 2014.

Other licencing issues were difficulties in purchasing a licence from a vendor late in the season, and under-reporting of catch and effort (poor returns for General and salmon licence stubs). To resolve these problems, since 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. In 2011, six prizes were awarded to randomly selected anglers who submitted their licence stub (report card) to the NSDFA by the end of December for both general and salmon licences. We hope this incentive will increase the number of licence stub returns and will continue it this year.

Al reviewed several requests the Department has received about new types of licences. Two groups have requested a catch and release licence be made available for Atlantic salmon. A request was also received to provide a reduced rate for seniors for Atlantic salmon licences similar to the general fishing licence. Requests to consider a new concept of a "family licence" as well as increasing the minimum age to require a licence from 16 to 18 were also received. Al also explained that the Province is working with DFO to try to find a way to licence anglers who fish in saltwater for trout. Currently, the Province does not have the authority to require anglers to have a licence while fishing in tidal waters for trout as long as there is a season open. Unlicensed anglers in tidal waters are not contributing to the Sportfish Habitat Fund, fisheries management or the stocking program. There was general agreement among those present that, regarding licencing for species currently managed by the Province of Nova Scotia in freshwater, an extension of Provincial jurisdiction to include saltwater would be a positive move.

Al provided a few selected results from the 2010 survey of Sportfishing in Canada for Nova Scotia anglers. He indicated that a draft report has been received by the Department and will be finalised and published in the new year.

The Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund received a budget of \$311,024 in 2012, based on 2011 licence revenues. Twenty-five community groups were involved in 2011. Total funds to Adopt-a-Stream were \$290,000 in addition to \$100,000 in funding from the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission. Three other projects received funding in 2012, the West River Sheet Harbour Lime doser project, and two barrier-free projects designed to increase accessibility to handicapped anglers. Al reminded those present that the Sportfish Habitat Fund provides money to projects that improve angler access to the resource such as boat ramps and fishing piers, and encouraged anglers to review the on-line application and consider submitting projects before the March 1, 2013 deadline.

Al also provided the names of the nine groups which qualified for the 2012 Atlantic Salmon Conservation Fund for Nova Scotia. The call for proposals for 2012 closes on Dec 14, 2012. Interested groups can visit the website: www.salmonconservation.ca for details and to find out which projects were funded in 2012 and earlier.

Hatchery Report / Trout & Salmon Enhancement

Darryl Murrant, Manager of Fisheries Enhancement, gave a brief overview of the provincial fisheries enhancement programs. The Dept of Fisheries & Aquaculture operates three hatcheries, Fraser's Mills Hatchery in Antigonish Co., McGowan Lake Hatchery in Queens Co., and Margaree Hatchery in Inverness Co. He distributed the Spring and Fall stocking lists and noted they are both on the Departmental web site, <http://www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing/>.

Spring Trout Stocking

In an effort to sustain the very popular recreational trout fishery, each spring the hatcheries stock approximately 200 lakes across Nova Scotia. Most of these are stocked with brook trout; additionally, over 20 lakes are provided with rainbow trout from the Fraser's Mills Hatchery. In recent years much of this stocking activity has been directed to lakes in populated centers, providing recreational angling opportunities to an increasingly urban population and helping to maintain an important sportfishing industry. There are now over 25 wheelchair accessible, barrier-free facilities in Nova Scotia. Most are located on sites that receive trout from the hatcheries. Last year trout were made available to support over 40 of the Department's Learn to Fish projects. As well, approximately 50 trout fishing derbies sponsored by volunteer organizations received trout from the hatcheries.

Fall Trout Stocking

Trout stocking with finger-sized juvenile trout is carried out in October and November. Lakes stocked in the fall are typically more remote than the spring-stocked lakes, but still have significant fishing pressure. These fish are presumed to grow for a season before becoming large enough to contribute to the creel. Approximately 175 lakes receive brook trout in the fall. Most brown trout stocking takes place at this time of year. The majority of brown trout stocking takes place in rivers where the fingerlings have access to estuaries where they can grow quickly.

Winter Rainbow Trout Stocking

Winter is long and cold. Nova Scotians are encouraged to remain active all year and many do so by getting out and enjoying time ice fishing for rainbow trout. Twenty lakes, including the Bras d'Or Lakes, are stocked in November and December in anticipation of the winter season.

Atlantic Salmon Enhancement Program

2012 was the sixth year that the Department of Fisheries & Aquaculture has been working to support the Atlantic salmon and enhance the fishery. Last year, fall parr were provided for the Waughs River, Colchester Co., St. Francis Harbour River, Guysborough Co., Margaree River, Inverness Co., Baddeck and Middle Rivers, Victoria Co. It is unlikely that the fall salmon season on the Baddeck and Middle Rivers would have been permissible without the stocking program.

Record rainfall in September and October made broodstock collection very difficult. Successful collections took place on Waughs' River, Middle River and Margaree River; although the target numbers weren't reached on the Margaree. Broodstock were not able to be collected from the Baddeck River or St. Francis Harbour River.

In addition to providing brook trout for local watersheds and selected sites on Cape Breton Island, the Margaree hatchery typically supplies 130,000-160,000 parr each fall and 30,00-40,000 Atlantic salmon

smolt in the spring, for the Margaree River. The value of the Atlantic salmon fishery to the Margaree community is estimated to exceed \$4,000,000.00 per year.

The N.S Dept. of Fisheries & Aquaculture has been working with DFO, for the past few years, to find ways to expand the number of rivers where Atlantic salmon populations can be enhanced from the Margaree hatchery. It is hoped that this issue will be resolved over the next few months.

Community Based Enhancement Facilities

A number of community- based fishery organizations operate small scale hatcheries or incubation boxes. Trout and, in some cases, salmon eggs are delivered to these in late winter. The fry hatch in early spring and when they have developed to the point where they are able to begin feeding on their own, they are released. This usually takes place in early to mid-May. Over the last few years there were operations in New Waterford, Port Morien, Coxheath, Isle Madame, Mulgrave and Tatamagouche.

Fish Friends

Fish Friends is an excellent educational program, sponsored by the Nova Scotia Salmon Association and maintained through the hard work of many dedicated volunteer organizations. Aquarium units are set up in participating school class rooms and teachers are provided with educational material about the salmonid life cycle. Children get to watch the eggs hatch, and the fry develop. They feed them for a few weeks and then release them into a local stream. Last year the hatcheries were able to provide eggs to approximately 60 Fish Friend projects.

Review of 2012 Field Activities

Coldwater Species Management and Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative

John MacMillan provided an update of the salmonid (cold water) species program and the projects that were funded under the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative (FFRC). John presented data on the striped bass in the Gulf Region that was provided by Scott Douglas, DFO Biologist.

Striped bass in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence have been designated as threatened under the Species At Risk Act (SARA). As a result, the fishery has been closed. The only known spawning population in the Gulf is located in a small section of Miramichi Harbour. A recovery target of 31 thousand spawners has been used as a benchmark to gage the population status in the Gulf. The recovery target has been exceeded in three of the five years from 2006 to 2010. Preliminary data from the 2011 assessment indicated that the population has once again exceeded the recovery target. The status of striped bass in the Gulf will be reviewed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and based on the new information a change in status may occur. If the status for striped bass in the Gulf is changed a recreational fishery may be a future consideration. Anglers have expressed interest in an opportunity to catch stripers in the Gulf of St Lawrence.

The Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative (FFRC) was established five years ago to facilitate applied research with universities and government agencies. This initiative was set up to address fisheries management questions and the interests of anglers and the Inland Fisheries Division. In 2011, a total cash investment of 30k dollars was made toward FFRC projects and a total inkind was 136k dollars. Inkind contributions were associated with labour, supervisory, and equipment from partners. In 2012, the following six FFRC partnerships received funding : 1) Freshwater Fish parasite distribution, Dr. David Cone, St Mary's University, 2) Evaluation of stream restoration, Kris Hunter, St FX University,

3) Impacts of Invasive species on fish populations, Danielle Quinn, Acadia University, 4) Revising FINS database, Dr. Trevor Avery, Acadia University, 5) Striped Bass tracking, Colin Buhariwalla and Dr. Mike Dadswell, Acadia University, and 6) Cornwallis Trout assessment, Dr. Ian Spooner, Acadia University.

Aaron Spares, PHD Candidate, from Dalhousie University, has conducted research on sea trout in the Antigonish region. This project was funded through the FFRC previously. Forty trout have been measured and tagged with temperature/depth acoustic tags. Receivers that are used to detect a tagged trout were placed throughout the harbour and inflowing West and South Rivers. Some of the tagged trout show an extensive use of the harbour waters on both sides of the border of the West River Special Trout Management Area. Anglers from the Antigonish Rivers Association recommended that a reduction in daily bag limit to two sea trout for the South River side of the harbor. John indicated that a change in bag limit from five trout to two trout may reduce harvest by reducing fishing activity.

Kris Hunter, Saint Xavier University, is undertaking a long-term study on the impacts of commonly used in-stream restoration initiatives to improve habitat for trout and salmon. Kris presented some of the preliminary data from this past years field work including water quality data, habitat assessments and electrofishing data. For the first five years the eight sites will be monitored on an annual basis to assess habitat and fish populations. In year five, four of the eight sites will be restored and monitoring will continue for another five years post-restoration. Long term studies are needed to evaluate annual natural fluctuations in order to obtain a true picture of the impacts of restoration.

Danielle Quinn, Acadia University, is using information of fish species distributions to evaluate the potential impact of invasive smallmouth bass and chain pickerel on native sportfish populations. Dr. Trevor Avery, Acadia University, is working on updating our current lake survey database that contains habitat and fish species information on 1200 lakes. Eventually the lake survey data will be available to anglers and researchers via a web-based portal.

Dr. Ian Spooner, Acadia University, provided supervisory support and office space for a student at Acadia University to assess sea run speckled trout and brown trout populations in the Cornwallis River. Fyke netting, angling, and electrofishing were used to capture trout.

Colin Buhariwalla and Dr. Mike Dadswell are undertaking a striped bass tracking project in Cape Breton. Very little is known about the origin of stripers that frequent waters of Bras d'Or Lakes and in Cape Breton rivers and estuaries. Some may be long distance migrants from USA and use waters of Cape Breton as a feeding area. There also may be a small spawning population in Cape Breton. With the help of many volunteer anglers, bass were caught and measured and an acoustic tag was inserted in the body cavity. Acoustic tags put out signals (sounds) that are detected by receivers that are in place in the Bras d'Or Lakes, Maritimes and along the Eastern Seaboard. The receivers collect information on a wide variety of fish species as a part of the larger Ocean Tracking Network initiative. The 2013 field season will be the 2nd year of this project.

Dr. David Cone, St Mary's University is collecting information on common trout parasites that inhabit lakes and rivers throughout Nova Scotia. Two brochures on the black spot and the gill maggot parasite have been developed. Another on internal parasites is planned for this year. Brochures are used to inform and facilitate the collected of information from anglers on the distribution of common parasites.

The new lake Inventory Program is an updated version of our Lake Survey Program. New Geographic Information Systems (GIS) equipment has been used by Reginald Madden, Fisheries Technician, to

collect high quality data and produce bathymetric maps of lakes in Nova Scotia. Sampling methodologies have been improved to increase efficiency. The plan is to sample five to ten lakes each year and add to the current database of lakes in Nova Scotia.

Smallmouth Bass and Invasive Species Management

Jason LeBlanc provided a review of the current smallmouth bass angling regulations for RFA 2. This RFA is closed to angling for smallmouth bass except Lansdowne Lake and Middle Reservoir which are open from April 1 to October 31. The bag limit for smallmouth bass in these two lakes is 25 fish/day as part of our aquatic invasive species management program.

An Inland Fisheries Working Group, made up of the Nova Scotia Salmon Association, the Canadian Association of Smallmouth Anglers, the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the Responsible Bass Anglers of Nova Scotia has been meeting to develop workable solutions for aquatic invasive species issues in Nova Scotia. Specifically, the purpose of the WG is to provide a forum for the exchange of aquatic invasive species (AIS) information and enhanced planning, cooperation and coordination of existing and future AIS activities in Nova Scotia as they relate to the recreational sport fishery. The Working Group has been able to maximize the combined efforts of provincially based sportfishing organizations and has recommended to the Department that developing and implementing an AIS Management Plan for the sportfishing sector in Nova Scotia should be a priority for 2013.

Amendments to the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act in November 2010 enabled the development of regulations to better address AIS in Nova Scotia. The regulation will prohibit the “possession of live fish” in starting in 2013. Some exemptions will apply whereby current activities already licenced or permitted will be able to continue. This regulation is necessary to address the long standing issue of illegal introductions of invasive species in Nova Scotia by providing an enforceable regulatory tool. Some anglers raised concerns that they would no longer be permitted to use live bait. Jason responded by saying that mis-use of live bait by anglers is an important pathway for introductions of aquatic invasive species in many areas but that the primary pathway in Nova Scotia continues to be illegal releases. Consequently, at this time no changes are being considered for the use of live bait in Nova Scotia. Several species are already not allowed as bait in Nova Scotia, as per the Maritime Provinces Fishing Regulations, including smallmouth bass, chain pickerel, brown bullheads, white and yellow perch, goldfish or any fish not captured in Nova Scotia waters. Anglers are encouraged to check their bait carefully to ensure they do not possess any of these prohibited species.

Jason LeBlanc also summarized Departmental priorities for 2012 – 2017 for aquatic invasive species management which include: (1) implementing Live Fish Possession Regulations, (2) continue to monitor and document the expanding distribution of smallmouth and chain pickerel in NS, (3) conduct and support research focused on assessing the impacts of aquatic invasive species introductions on native species, (3) develop early detection and rapid response plans, (4) continue to be leaders on aquatic invasive species Issues in the region, and, (5) develop an aquatic invasive species management plan for the sportfishing sector.

It is important to maintain and/or expand a sustainable, quality smallmouth bass fishery within the framework of aquatic invasive species issues. Several initiatives for smallmouth bass management will continue and include: (1) a review spawning regulations and further develop Special Management Areas, (2) an assessment of the importance of spawning success and young of the year survival to recruitment to the fishery, (3) gaining a better understanding of how Nova Scotia lakes water

chemistry (pH, Aluminum, productivity, etc) relates to bass production, (4) examining other limiting factors (eg. forage, competition, genetics or parasites) may impact fisheries, and (5) developing a smallmouth bass management plan for NS.

Education / Extension Programs

Tara Marshall reviewed the education and extension programs that were completed in 2012. Tara explained the L2F (learn to fish) program and gave an overview of the participation rates since 2006. Tara reported on the number of 2012 L2F programs in the province and gave a breakdown for each Recreational Fishing Area by county. She explained that the program is booked for 2013. Tara highlighted the participating schools in specific Recreational Fishing Areas and talked about the Scouts and Girl Guide groups in the area taking advantage of the L2F program.

Tara reviewed the number and location of summer Fisheries Science Recreation Day Camps that took place throughout the province and mentioned that all summer camps were interested in the L2F program.

Tara reviewed the educational partnerships and programs with Department of Natural Resources throughout the province. Family L2F events were held at Shubenacadie Wildlife Park to celebrate National Wildlife Week. The L2F program was delivered in Lower Sackville to celebrate Kids in the Forest Day. Tara explained the Fishing Tackle program and the participating parks where it is available. She gave an overview of the Fishing Workshops delivered by Department of Natural Resources Education Officers as part of the Parks Education program. Tara also mentioned that she delivered a family L2F program at Smiley's provincial park.

Tara also explained the L2F programs delivered with IWK Children's Hospital, Mental Health Division and First Nations. Tara reviewed the Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program. She explained the classes she instructed at the New Brunswick BOW workshop, the Nova Scotia BOW workshop and provided some data presented at the International BOW Coordinator's Conference. Tara also spoke about a survey that the BOW Board of Directors is working on to get some feedback from participants regarding fishing, hunting and outdoor recreation pursuits.

Tara also reviewed the Family Fishing Adventures Contests for youth and talked about the upcoming Free Winter Sportfishing Weekend. Tara thanked all the volunteer instructors and sponsors for the L2F program.

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

Craig MacDonald, DFO Fisheries Officer, Pictou, N.S, spoke briefly regarding the recent reductions in staffing in smaller offices such as Wallace, Port Hood and Canso.

He stated that while DFO's major concern is the commercial fishery, officers do spend time on the recreational sportfishery, particularly in the early spring and during the fall salmon season. Last year they conducted 950 checks on trout anglers and 235 on salmon fishers. These checks resulted in 17 charges for fishing in closed areas, 3 for using barbed hooks during October, (several warnings were also issued for this infraction) , 3 for fishing salmon in the spring (\$1000.00 fines for each of these), 2 charges related to striped bass fishing.

He stated that in relation to the new live fish possession regulations, DFO issues permits for the transport of live fish and inspect fish transport vehicles especially near the New Brunswick - Nova Scotia border.

He was asked to pass on that DNR officers were not able to attend this meeting because they are busy with the hunting season.

He thanked the public for their support and commented that, in general, it seemed that last year saw fewer violations despite having an increased number of checks.

The question was raised as to what would be done to assist various groups involved with habitat restoration now that DFO was becoming less involved due to changes in the Fisheries Act. Al McNeil responded that, as it has in the past, Inland Fisheries Division would help out as best it could but Provincial Government departments are not expected to fill any void left by DFO.

The Antigonish Rivers Association members spoke favorably as to some of the proposed licensing changes such as electronic licenses, senior's license for salmon, catch and release license for salmon. Requests for extended brown trout seasons for Salmon River Guysborough and River Inhabitants were put forth. The Special Trout Management Area on Milford Haven River was discussed. Issues of concern were: whether an increase in the size limit for brown trout might be beneficial; and extending the current boundary from the "three bridges" upstream to the next bridge. It was suggested that something has to be done to address the incidental catch of Atlantic salmon on the lower portion of Barney's River. They also confirmed that for the 5th year they would be sponsoring a Family Fishing Day at Gillis Lake, on the winter Free Fishing week-end, February 16.

Pictou County River's Association members indicated that they would be sponsoring a similar event on Gairloch Lake.

The **Eastern Sportfish Association** requested their opposition to the pool closures on the St. Mary's River be noted.