
**Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council
Minutes of the 2012 RFAC Meeting****Area 4**

Date Prepared: November 2012*Area 4 – Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne, and Queens Counties*

The RFAC meeting for Area 4 was held on November 14, 2012 at the Best Western in Liverpool, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 20 people in attendance. Al McNeill, Manager, Inland Fisheries Division chaired the meeting while biologists John MacMillan, Jason LeBlanc, hatchery manager Mike McNeil, and Manager of Fisheries Enhancement, Darryl Murrant from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture 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.

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. There were no proposed regulation changes for RFA 4 for 2013.

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 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. 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.

AI 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. AI 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.

AI 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. AI 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.

AI 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 County. 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 County. 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.

Dave Dagley asked if the Province had any intention of operating Mersey Hatchery. Darryl said the issue had been discussed but the answer is no.

Regarding new winter fishery Lakes, one angler suggested Victoria Lake near Western Head in Queens County would be a good candidate. There was concern that Hidden Hills Lake is hard to access in February.

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 the 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).

Bill Curry, Trout Unlimited, conducted a creel survey of Meadow Brook a tributary of the Tusket River that supports a productive trout fishery. A total of 210 trout were creeled during the survey. The gear types used by anglers who participated in the survey were fly (63%), bait (29%), and lure (8 %). The data indicated that most of the catch was in length categories that were probably 1 and 2 year old trout. The catch per angler indicated that very few fish were captured with lengths longer than 30cm. Trout Unlimited recommended that this tributary be a part of the Special Trout Management Area Program. The anglers in the audience agreed that regulations to improve the size of the catch will potentially benefit this fishery.

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.

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. 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 4. In this RFA, the season for smallmouth bass is from April 1 to October 31. The bag limit is 5 fish/day. Ten Mile, Little Ten Mile, Salmon River Lake, Mersey River, Ogden, Parr and Petes lakes are under Special Bass Management Area regulations. The primary goal of Special Bass Management Areas is to provide quality angling opportunity and a higher likelihood of catching larger fish. This is accomplished by having a reduced bag limit (3 fish/day) and maximum length limit (35 cm) to try to maintain or increase proportion of bass in the population over 35 cm (13.8 in) above 25%, and providing protection for largest bass in the population (i.e. catch and release during the spawning season).

Jason summarized a recent meeting with smallmouth bass angling organizations. Several issues were discussed including Special Bass Management Areas, invasive species issues and tournament angling. A proposal was developed to change angling regulations for smallmouth bass in 2014. The proposal included only utilizing the spawning season catch and release regulation on lakes which fall under the Special Management Area approach. Jason indicated that maintaining spawning season represents a conservative, precautionary approach, aimed at mitigating potential negative impacts of reduced

nesting success, targeted removal and/or first winter survival. Additionally, angling restrictions during spawning season may be serving a compensatory role in lakes with low productivity, limited forage and small gene pools that functions to maintain a relatively stable number of bass over 35 cm (i.e. functioning to prohibit stunting). Jason indicated that the Department would be willing to remove spawning season catch and release regulations in all areas except those lakes included in Special Management Area in starting in 2013. A catch and release regulation in place from May 1 to June 15 would provide spawning bass 23% fewer days protected but be adequate to protect the majority of spawning in most regions. New lakes being considered for inclusion in Special Management Area regulations for starting in 2014 include Raynards, Kemptback, Wentworth, Vaughn and West Horseshoe lakes.

Dave Dagely asked if the original proposal from the bass clubs was for no bass angling during spawning or no angling for any species? Jason said the proposal was for no bass angling only. He explained the Dept. does not think it is necessary to have no bass angling during spawning; catch & immediate release will accomplish the same thing. The proposed change would have catch and release angling on the approximately 20 lakes under special management during spawning season and no such restriction on the rest of the bass lakes in the province. Dave asked if anglers could keep bass caught on the Medway River during April to June? Jason said yes, it is not a special bass management area.

On angler asked if we had looked at tournament mortality on smallmouth bass? Jason said the average mortality is no more than 4 or 5 %. The angler asked about multiple tournaments on the same lake in the same year. Jason said we limit the number of tournaments allowed on any lake in a given year, and the mortality is not a concern here compared to some lakes in Ontario.

Invasive Species Initiatives

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.

David Dagley asked if smallmouth bass are confirmed in Cannon Lake? Jason said that they are confirmed there and also in Lake Rossignol. There was discussion about the Jordan River Bass and Pickerel.

Education / Extension Programs

Al McNeill reviewed the education and extension programs that were completed in 2012 on behalf of Tara Marshal. Al explained the L2F (learn to fish) program and gave an overview of the participation rates since 2006. Al reported on the number of 2012 L2F programs in the province and gave a breakdown for each Recreational Fishing Area by county. He explained that the program is booked for 2013. Al 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.

Al 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.

Al 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. Al explained the Fishing Tackle program and the participating parks where it is available. He gave an overview of the Fishing Workshops delivered by Department of Natural Resources Education Officers as part of the Parks Education program. Al also mentioned that she delivered a family L2F program at Smiley's provincial park.

Al also explained the L2F programs delivered with IWK Children's Hospital, Mental Health Division and First Nations. Al reviewed the Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program. He explained the classes Tara instructed at the New Brunswick BOW workshop, the Nova Scotia BOW workshop and provided some data presented at the International BOW Coordinator's Conference. Al 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.

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

Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor

An angler questioned what regulation we are proposing for Meadow Brook. John said he has not reviewed the data yet, but if the data suggest there is a unique population of trout there, that may warrant a regulation such as a reduced bag limit or length limit to protect the trout from over harvesting. The angler suggested catch and release or a very low length limit. John said another alternative is to implement a high minimum length limit, so that only very large fish can be harvested, which protects the most fish.

One angler asked Jason if he could use angle worms. After a moment of confusion in which it was determined angle worms were just your everyday garden variety earth worms, the answer was yes.

An angler asked they could use live minnows in the Park. Jason said to check with the National Park as they have their own regulations.

There was a request to have Molega and Ponhook Lakes left off the proposed smallmouth bass special management Lakes. As these lakes are on the Medway River, anglers concerned about salmon populations would like to be able to harvest bass caught there any time of year.

There was a request to show the progression of invasive species at all RFAC meetings to emphasize the point that this is a serious problem.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10.