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*Area 1 Inverness, Victoria, Cape Breton and Richmond Counties*

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## **Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council Minutes of the 2011 Spring RFAC Meeting**

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The RFAC meeting for Area 1 was held on April 27, 2011 at the Delta Hotel in Sydney, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 40 people in attendance. Darryl Murrant, Inland Fisheries Division chaired the meeting while biologists John MacMillan, Al McNeill, Tara Marshall, technician, Sean Neary, director Don MacLean, and coastal resource coordinator Nicole Sampson from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture were also present. Troy Mackay and Ken Timmons from Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources were present. Pat Young, and Grant Timmons from Conservation and Protection, 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 2011**

Al reviewed the 2011 regulation changes from page 3 in the Angler's Handbook. Al also reviewed the Proposed changes for 2012. Al noted the significant changes made to the smallmouth bass fishery including the removal of high harvest regulations for smallmouth bass and the increased bag limit for bass in many areas would be discussed later.

### **Licencing**

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. 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. Discussion will take 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. 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.

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. In 2011, 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 overview of the current state of electronic licensing and reporting. The Department has been working with the Departments of Natural Resources and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations to build an electronic licensing system for roll out in 2012. Al also reported that the mail-out for the 2010 survey of Sportfishing in Canada took place in January with 2788 questionnaires mailed out. Returns to date are 53% which is the highest return rate in Canada. Please respond if you receive a survey questionnaire.

### **Sportfish Management & Preview of 2011 Field Activities**

John MacMillan provided an update on the research priorities that relate to brook trout. The priorities include evaluating impacts of habitat, exploitation, parasites, Special Trout Management Areas, and invasive smallmouth bass and chain pickerel.

John reported that declines in annual catch of speckled trout since the 1980s spurred development of Special Trout Management Areas (SMA). Results of studies suggest that they are reducing harvest in targeted areas and improving the number of large trout caught. Understanding the factors that limit trout production is important when attempting to gauge how a regulatory change may impact a fishery. Angling regulations will work only when exploitation is an important factor influencing the number of large trout in a lake or river. Important factors that influence trout production including competition, density and water quality, all of which play a role in the selection of Special Trout Management Areas. John stated that the spread of invasive species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel are changing the recreational fishery and having a direct impact on native brook trout populations. Our trout populations in many lakes are in trouble because of the spread of invasive species. John summarized a project in West River, Antigonish County, funded by the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative.

John reported on the initiative to obtain data on black spot disease in trout. The small black marks in the skin at times can be so great that the trout looks like it has been covered with crushed pepper. The spots are an intermediate stage in the life cycle of the black spot parasite. The parasites mature in the intestine of fish eating birds. Adult parasites lay eggs that leave the bird with feces that enter a lake or stream. The eggs hatch and a small free swimming larva enters a snail, where it undergoes asexual reproduction to produce an infective stage which leaves the snail and swims in search of a trout. If successful the parasite burrows into the trout skin to form a black spot on the trout. The cycle continues when an infected trout is eaten by a bird of prey. A poster has been developed by Dr. David Cone, St. Mary's University, to collect information from anglers on the distribution of black spot in lakes and rivers. Interested anglers are encouraged to send information on where they have observed black spots on trout to address : david.cone@SMU.CA

There was a discussion on size limits for rainbow trout in the Bras D'or lakes. One angler said rainbows were not having a problem in Cape Breton. Another angler said no one will remember all the different size limits, if we are going to put in a size limit, make it the same as speckled trout.

John summarized the results of the River Denys assessments in 2008 and 2010. River Denys is a very popular fishery and angler effort and harvest is increasing. Most of the angler effort in May in the River Denys Basin and in June and July the angler effort shifts toward freshwater regions. The size structure of the catch remained similar between years and the majority (60%) of the trout retained were shorter than 30cm. There was discussion about the River Denys survey results. An angler asked if there were less large fish in 2010 compared to 2008? Al said not necessarily, there was much more effort in 2010. John suggested a possible change in the regulations to reduce the bag limit to three trout with only one allowed to be over 30 cm, and open the season May 1. This would maintain levels of harvest and allow anglers more time on the water. One angler wanted to change the regulations back to the way they were before the special trout management regulations were put in place.

Another angler asked how many fishermen were fishing in the Basin after the first week. John said the numbers dropped quite a bit after the first week.

There was some discussion of enforcement during the winter fishery. Leonard DeCoste said to make a difference, the bag limit should be reduced to two instead of three. James Langley asked if DFO were going to ask commercial fishermen to change the leaders on eel traps to reduce the by-catch of trout. James also said he would like to eliminate catch and release in September to protect trout on the spawning grounds.

Al McNeill on behalf of Jason LeBlanc discussed the significant changes made to the smallmouth bass fishery including the removal of high harvest regulations for smallmouth bass and the increased bag limit for bass in many areas. To better address illegal introductions several areas of the province (RFAs 1,2,6 and part of 3) would be closed to smallmouth bass angling. Within these areas, in an effort to remove the incentive for further illegal introductions, only existing lakes containing smallmouth bass would be open to angling. The lakes which remain open will also have the bag limit increased to 25 bass/day except Special Management Areas (eg. Shortts Lake and Panuke Lake). Al indicated that additional lakes could be open for invasive species management but that he hopes the closures will eliminate or at least reduce further introductions. Al also discussed several key pathways for the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) and that unauthorized introductions, recreational and commercial boating, potentially the use of live bait and canals and water diversions are all important contributors to the issue in Nova Scotia. Other initiatives that the Department is leading to better address aquatic invasive species in Nova Scotia include the development of an Aquatic Invasive Species Working Group, education and outreach, developing an AIS Strategy for NS, regulation changes and development and rapid response plans. AIS issues are extremely complex and often must be considered from biological, ecological, social and economic perspectives. Al reported on recent amendments to the Fisheries and Coastal Resources Act that will allow Nova Scotia to develop new regulations to better address these issues. He indicated that an update would be provided at the fall meetings.

## **Extension**

### **Atlantic Salmon Enhancement**

AI 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 Waughes, St. Francis Harbour, Margaree, Middle and Baddeck rivers.

The Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund received allocations for \$305,888 in 2011, based on 2010 revenues. Amy Weston provided AI with some slides from the Adopt-a-Stream program from 2010. Twenty-eight community groups were involved in 2010. Total funds were \$291,600 which included \$100,000 in funding 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.

AI also provided the names of the six groups which qualified for the 2010 Atlantic Salmon Conservation Fund for Nova Scotia. The call for proposals for 2011 closed on Dec 17, 2010. The NS Advisory Committee met on January 28 to review 10 proposals. Interested groups can visit the website: [www.salmonconservation.ca](http://www.salmonconservation.ca) for details and to find out which organisations were successful in 2011.

### **Sportfish Development**

#### **Tara Marshall**

Tara explained that there are 36 L2F events scheduled for the spring of 2011. Tara reviewed the L2F Program. L2F consists of a classroom component and a fishing component. The L2F classroom instruction is 1.5 hours and focuses on sportfish id, fisheries habitat, fishing rod and tackle assembly, healthy living, angling ethics and leave no trace principles. The L2F fishing component is 2 hours and focuses on safety-based casting with open/closed faced reels, tackle options/bait, setting the hook, retention & catch-and-release techniques, and cleaning your catch. Tara mentioned that the L2F program typically runs from April until June.

Eleven of the 36 L2F events will be delivered by volunteers. The three trained volunteer groups are Hants West Wildlife Association, Mark Weare's group, Richmond County Wildlife Association and staff at Universite St. Anne's.

Tara explained the new initiatives around fisheries education. We are working towards translation of L2F into French. There is a partnership with DNR (Education Center) to train their staff to deliver fishing workshops in the parks/campgrounds as part of the Parks Education Program. We have developed another partnership with DNR Parks Division called the Tackle Share Program where fishing equipment and licences will be available at selected parks for visitors to use. We will work with Tourism to have more updated Sportfishing informative available at the 10 Visitor Information Centres. We will be updating our general Sportfishing brochure and providing these to all provincial tourist centres and begin to get information out to the municipal areas.

Three Fishing Workshops will be delivered by DNR Education Officers at Ellenwood Provincial Park, Laurie and Dollar Lake. The Tackle Share Program will be available at Mira River Provincial Park, Ellenwood and Dollar Lake. We will be partnering with DNR to celebrate National Wildlife Week and delivering the L2F Program at Shubenacadie Wildlife Park. Additionally, we will be partnering with DNR to celebrate Kids in the Forest Week and will deliver a fishing workshop at Beavercreek Lake.

L2F will be delivered at two summer recreation camps, one in Halifax and the other in Truro. Fall BOW (Becoming an Outdoors Woman) Program is scheduled for September 9-11, 2011 at Mount Traver Camp in Cooks Brook.

We are running the Kids Art Contest and Photo Contest again this year. There are more details on both contests and photos/artwork from the winners on our website. [www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing](http://www.gov.ns.ca/fish/sportfishing).

### **Hatchery Report: Spring Stocking**

Darryl Murrant gave a brief overview of the provinces hatchery programs and reviewed the spring stocking program for RFA 1. He also noted that in 2011 rainbow trout stocking will include sterile triploid fish which have the potential to grow larger and faster than is normally the case. All rainbow trout currently distributed are all-female stock. Darryl said we are presently evaluating the triploid rainbow program. Gordie MacKinnon noted that the triploid seemed to disperse quickly when stocked.

Brent Baker expressed his concerns the by catch of trout during the smelt fishery in MacDougals Cove in the Mira River. He has called DFO and DNR on this issue. There was a claim that one angler caught 90 trout. Pat Young, DFO Supervisor, said he and his officers made several visits to the area.

### **2010 Enforcement Report**

AI reviewed angler compliance statistics from 1996 through 2010. Each year since 1996, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture has provided the Department of Natural Resources funding to staff seasonal Conservation Officers for an additional six weeks in the spring to supplement the enforcement effort for inland fisheries. DNR provide statistics from this effort each year which include the number of field days, anglers contacted, warnings and charges. Some trends over the past 15 years are apparent and suggest the enforcement effort is having a positive effect. Angler compliance has increased from 94% in 1996 to 99% in 2010. Approximately 45% of non-compliant anglers were charged, while 55% were warned. Troy MacKay also presented a summary of enforcement activities carried out by conservation and protection officers in the area.

## **Discussion/Agenda Items from the Floor**

Darryl Murrant announced the Department is reviewing the RFAC process and looking for suggestions on how to improve it. One angler wished there were more DFO officials present. One suggested starting the meetings at 6:30 as they often run late.

Darryl read two resolutions from the Nova Scotia Salmon Association and one from the Margaree Salmon Association on barbless hooks. All these resolutions were passed to the chair.

Darryl asked if anyone had any suggestions to open additional lakes for the winter fishery. Kirk MacNeil suggested Loon Lake in the Broughton area for white perch, and Cantley Pond for speckled trout.

Gary Gibson handed in a written resolution on behalf of the Sporting Mountain Action Committee requesting the protection of local drinking water from pollution related industries.

The meeting ended at 9:25.