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*Area 2 Guysborough, Pictou, and Antigonish 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 2 was held on April 14, 2011 at the Museum of Industry in Stellerton, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 29 people in attendance. The meeting chair was Jason LeBlanc, who was accompanied by John MacMillan, Al McNeill, and Don MacLean, from the Inland Fisheries Division and Coastal Resource Supervisor, Ralph Heighton, from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture. Conservation Officer, Eric Sandlack, Director, John Mombourquette, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, as well as, Conservation Officer, Nicholas Corkum and Chris Daye, 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 McNeill 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 will 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 gave a presentation on tracking sea-run brook trout in Antigonish Harbour. Support from the Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative was provided to Aaron Spares, PhD Candidate, Dalhousie University, to track the movements of acoustically tagged brook trout in the harbour to see how trout move between the freshwater environment of West River, the harbour, the South River and outside Antigonish Harbour. Aaron tagged 22 brook trout with ultrasonic tags and deployed acoustic receivers at several places in the harbor and surrounding area. Most trout stayed in the West River estuary with very few moving to the South River side and almost none ventured outside the Harbour. Detections from the receivers indicated 15 fish migrated up the West River, three went up the Wrights River and three stayed in the West River side of the Harbor. Aaron will complete the study this winter and have a final report as a part of his PhD thesis.

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](mailto:david.cone@SMU.CA)

**Nova Scotia Freshwater Fisheries Research Cooperative (NSFFRC)**

The objective is to support initiatives with other government departments and universities to assist in the collection of data that is relevant to our management objectives. In 2010-11, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture provided 28k toward five projects that had a total value of approximately 146k. NS FFRC provided 19% of total project costs. Research projects will be designed to address concerns related to management of fisheries and the Recreational Fishing Advisory Councils. 2011 project proposals include: Migration and Survival of sea trout : Aaron Spares and Ed Halfyard, Dalhousie University; Freshwater Fish Parasites distribution: Dr. David Cone, Saint Marys University; Evaluation of Adopt A Stream Projects: Amy Weston and Bob Rutherford, Adopt-A-Stream; Impacts of Invasive chain pickerel on native fish populations: Sean Mitchell, St. Francis Xavier University; and Factors limiting trout production in Nova Scotia Lakes, Amy Ryan, Dalhousie University.

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). Jason 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. Jason 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. Jason 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 he would report on their progress at the fall meetings.

Larry Shortt asked if there is a spawning closure on Middle River Lake. Jason replied there was no spawning closure. Bob Ferguson asked if the bag limit for bass is 25 in Middle River. Jason indicated that no, it is just the reservoir downstream from a point 200 metres below the highway 4 bridge, but we may look at the whole watershed in the future. Regarding the possession of live fish, someone asked do we consider farmed fish invasive? Jason replied no, they are not supposed to be present in the wild. Someone else asked if Nova Scotia has didymo yet. Jason replied not to our knowledge.

## **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 Waugh's, 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 gave a brief overview of the provinces hatchery programs and reviewed the spring stocking program for RFA 2. 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.

### **2010 Enforcement Report**

Al 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.

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

Larry Short asked if black spot disease can hurt trout. John responded that it is possible in severe cases and usually healthy trout populations will support healthy parasite populations. Some evidence suggests that black spot disease can increase mortality associated with predation.

Bob Ferguson stated that clear cutting is having a serious impact on trout habitat and trout populations.

Chris Marchand reported that there appears to be a decline in the number of large trout in the West River of Antigonish (Special Trout Management Area).

Chris Marchand provided an update of the successful restoration initiatives that his groups have been involved with on the South River of Antigonish.

Bob Ferguson expressed concern about the silverside fishery in Antigonish Harbour and that this fishery may reduce important forage for sea trout, striped bass, and salmon. Bob was not aware of any assessment on silversides prior to a license being issued. Ralph Heighton reported that this is a commercial fishery and that the catch of silversides is probably being used as lobster bait.

Bill Carpin asked if there was any new legislation being drafted for Aquaculture development.

Carl Purcell presented a proposal from the Nova Scotia Salmon Association regarding the intentional targeting of salmon while trout fishing which offered several options. This proposal has already been presented to DFO. The options ranged from keeping rivers open for catch and release salmon angling, more enforcement presence on the rivers, closing some traditional salmon pools to closing the entire river system. Carl indicated the last option is not preferred, but that something has to be done to protect salmon. There was much discussion about this resolution. David Clark and Bill Carpin expressed concern that any further closures would have a negative economic impact on Sherebrooke and surrounding areas. Bob MacDonald was also concerned about closing the trout fishery to protect salmon.

The St. Mary's River Association submitted a resolution for the entire angling season that would restrict angling gear type to fly fishing with barbless hooks from Highway 347 to Silvers Pool.

Al McNeill thanked all participants for their comments, and noted that although there were differences of opinion, all individuals concerned had a long track record of volunteer conservation work and their passion for the fishery was evident. Al indicated the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries does not close legitimate fisheries without careful consideration of balancing the benefit to conservation of one species against the impact on other anglers engaged in the legitimate fishery of another species. The Province will consult with DFO and the affected sportfish organizations if in-season closures of salmon pools on the St. Marys or other rivers is considered.