

*Area 3 Halifax and Lunenburg 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 3 was held on April 20, 2011 at the Days Inn & Convention Centre in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. In addition to Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture staff, there were 24 people in attendance. John MacMillan, Inland Fisheries Division chaired the meeting while biologists, Jason LeBlanc, Tara Marshall, and fish hatchery manager, Mike McNeil and director Don MacLean, coastal resource coordinator, Joe Hanrahan from the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture were also present. Paul Stedman and Jim O'Melia from Department of Natural Resources and Greg Stevens, with Department of 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**

John MacMillan reviewed the 2011 regulation changes from page 3 in the Angler's Handbook. John also reviewed the Proposed changes for 2012. John noted that Jason LeBlanc will discuss 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 later in the meeting.

### **Licencing**

John MacMillan 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. John 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.

John 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. John 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 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.

Tim Hiltz added that goldfish are becoming as issue in Despres Lake and a nearby stream in the LaHave River watershed.

## **Extension**

### **Atlantic Salmon Enhancement**

Tara 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 Waughs, 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 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.

A question was asked of Amy regarding any documented benefits of the West River liming project. Amy indicated that the results suggest that the liming is effective and the target pH for the river has been reached. Improved trout condition is also being noticed in the watershed. Additionally, salmon parr are being seen in areas that they were not in the past and the invertebrate community seems to be doing better in some areas as well.

Tara 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.

Ken Nickerson asked of the broodstock collected were released back to the same river. Tara indicated that there are. Ken added that most of the salmon work is conducted in the eastern part of the province and would like to see it expanded to other areas such as the Gold River, Lunenburg County.

## **Sportfish Development**

Tara Marshall 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 Université 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 Traber 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**

Mike McNeil gave a brief overview of the provinces hatchery programs and reviewed the spring stocking program for RFA 3. 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**

John MacMillan 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**

There was mention of people not knowing about the RFAC.

There was discussion around the possibility of small gold fish or carp in Church Lake.

There was discussion around extending the current STMA on the LaHave to include a reduction in bag limit, 5 to 3, and length limit of 35 cm or 13.8 inches.

Additionally, there was mention of how closures of some salmon fisheries may or may not effect legitimate trout anglers.