

Rat River Working Group (RRWG)

Public Meeting Minutes

Fort McPherson, NT

Date: June 15, 2011

Attendees:

Amy Thompson - GRRB	Ida Stewart – Ft McPherson - Elder
Kris Maier - GRRB	Helen Wilson – Ft McPherson
Terry Stein – DFO Inuvik	Edna Nerysoo – Ft McPherson
John Peterson – Tetlit RRC	Liz Wright - MLA
Abe Wilson – Ft McPherson	Georgina Neyando – Tetlit RRC
Peter Kaye – Tetlit RRC	Neil Colin – Ft McPherson
Abe Stewart – Ft McPherson	Richard Wilson – Tetlit RRC
Stanley Bonnetplume – Ft McPherson	Johnny Charlie – Tetlit RRC
Steven Tetlich – Ft McPherson	

1. Call to order, opening prayer, introductions

- Call to order at 12:55pm.
- Opening prayer.
- Opening Remarks by Amy Thompson

2. Overview of the RRWG, its purpose & duties.

3. Overview of the population status and 2010 reported harvest

Abe Stewart: Why is there no reported harvest for Ft McPherson?

Kris Maier: Haven't been able to track down that data. We know there was some char harvesting that took place, but the numbers weren't recorded by the community monitor and since there's currently no DFO Fisheries Management Biologist, it wasn't followed up on.

Neil Colin: Is the char population getting better or worse?

Kris Maier: It's actually declining right now, so it's getting worse. But we're hopeful that it will increase again based on some of the biological data and what that indicates. But for this year, the population is low.

Neil Colin: Why is it getting worse? Is everybody involved? Who is talking about it?

Kris Maier: The decline is mostly because of the one large year class of fish that are dying out right now, and poor habitat conditions. There were a couple low water years which impacted the available habitat of the population. There will be another meeting like this one in Aklavik so yes, everyone is being informed.

Johnny Charlie: I was at Shingle Point one year and one person killed a lot of char, 70 in one day. There's a lot of unreported harvesting happening out there.

Kris Maier: Yes, we're aware of the under reporting, which is why when we look at the reported harvest number of 410 char, we know in reality we were probably pretty close to the allocation of 600 for 2010. Additionally, we hope to get a better handle on that this year, as there will be a DFO researcher at Shingle for part of the summer, and a community monitor.

Neil Colin: Good that there will be a monitor at Shingle this year. There should be a letter of concern from the RRC about how many char are harvested at Shingle.

Kris Maier: We're planning to do a lot of education and communication this year with regards to Shingle Point and making sure people fishing out there know that the fish they are catching are from the Rat River char stock.

4. Review of the Rat River Char Monitoring program

- Why the program exists
- What information is collected
- Why this information is important to char management

John Peterson: Are the char healthy?

Kris Maier: Yes, they are in good shape. The kidney disease samples that were sent away showed no sign of disease.

Abe Stewart: Do you know which route they take from the ocean? Why don't you catch them there to count them?

Kris Maier: They are counted in the fish holes because they're easy to catch there, and the whole population will be there in late September so you get a representative sample of what's in the population. It would be very hard to catch them in the ocean because they're spread out all over.

Abe Stewart: Do you have a map of where they go in the ocean? Do they go all the way to Alaska?

Kris Maier: I think there have been one or two tags from Rat River fish that were caught in Alaska but in general, they won't migrate that far. This is because they leave the Fish Holes in late May or June and have to return by early September, so they don't migrate too far into the ocean because it would be too far.

5. Overview of the fall population assessment program.

- How the population estimate is determined
- Tagging information

Unrecorded: So the genetic work is to help find out what river's fish are being caught in the ocean?

Amy Thompson: Yes. We will know more about this in a couple of years once the data is analyzed properly and all the stocks have been assessed.

Kris Maier: There's two ways they do this. One is with genetics, and matching each fish to the genetic markers from that river's stock. The other is using otoliths and identifying which river a fish is from by matching the chemical signatures on the otolith to the water chemistry from the river it came from. Both ways help us to figure out which fish are being caught at which locations.

Neil Colin: Is that fish hole up Rat River the same place as always? There used to be a big long pool there with char in it.

Kris Maier: Yes, it's exactly the same place. There are actually quite a few pools in a long stretch of the creek where char will spawn and overwinter.

Neil Colin: Used to be lots of grizzly up there, they probably eat a lot of char.

Kris Maier: I don't think any have been seen in the last few years but DFO takes natural mortality into account when making their recommendation.

PJ Kaye: Need to inform Tuk HTC about this, there are guys from Tuk who fish at Shingle Point too.

Kris Maier: Noted, we will send a letter to the Tuk HTC so that they inform their members about this issue.

Neil Colin: Char only go as far out as Shingle?

Kris Maier: Generally, they spend the summer in that area, and in Shallow Bay, probably as far up the coast as Ptarmigan Bay, but we're not really 100% sure. We know they get caught fairly often at Shingle because of the tag returns.

Steven Tetlich: The Rat River char caught by monitors are supposed to come back to the community to be distributed to elders. Instead the monitors are selling char and making money off them. Those monitors are already being paid by DFO for doing that work, they shouldn't be allowed to sell char. They should be giving them to elders.

Amy Thompson: We were not aware of this issue; however, it is legal for Gwich'in participants to sell to other participants. If this is something the RRC is concerned about, we can look at defining commercial use but that will be a long process and everyone will have to agree to define what commercial is. This concern will have to be addressed by the RRC.

Terry Stein: DFO can look into the monitor contracts to see if they are contractually required to distribute char caught in the monitor fishery to elders. If so, and they are not meeting this part of the contract, they may be in violation of the contract. This is the first time I've heard of anyone selling char.

Liz Wright: People shouldn't come to these meetings to make negative comments and accuse people with no proof.

Steven Tetlich: Another thing is people down by Aklavik are setting nets right across the river and people have been hitting them with boats.

Terry Stein: If that is happening, please report it when you see the net in the river, we can go out to investigate those types of things right away. This is a very simple rule that everyone must obey. You must leave at least 1/3 of the river open for fish passage.

6. Research plans for 2011

- July sampling
- Fall seine
- Vittrekwa River assessment

7. Overview of safe harvest levels & Rat River Working Group Recommendations

Abe Stewart: The 75 char, is that per person, or per community?

Kris Maier: It's per community.

Unrecorded: So if the population is less than 5000 char, is it time to start looking at doing something like James Firth talked about with Species at Risk?

Kris Maier: Yes, the population is low, but we've seen it come back from drops like this in the past.

Amy Thompson: The char population has already gone through the COSEWIC process and is up for listing by Species at Risk.

Steven Tetlich: Some of us want to start an outfitting business, if we want to take people to fish for Rat River char, is that a problem?

Kris Maier: The Fish Hole Creek is legislatively closed to all fishing year round, including sports fishing, so nobody can fish there at all. The rest of the migration route (Rat River, Husky Channel & Peel Channel) are closed to sports fishing from August 7th to Sept 15th to protect the char, and the catch quota for Dolly Varden char in the GSA is zero. So a sports fishing business for Dolly Varden char would not be likely as there is no legal way to fish for them.

Abe Stewart: What happens after the char spawn?

Kris Maier: They spawn in mid September, and after that they spend the winter at the fish holes in Fish Creek. They stay there until breakup and then migrate out to the ocean again.

Unrecorded: There should be a study on otters or they should start a carcass reward program like they have for wolves.

Amy Thompson: How do the numbers look to everyone? Is the allocation of 75 char OK?

Abe Stewart: Looks OK to me. Hardly anyone goes fishing then now anyways.

Abe Wilson: The number is good. We have to do something when there's less char around. Don't want to wipe them out.

Johnny Charlie: Need enforcement to go check all the monitors. Need more transparency. DFO only goes to Big Eddy, need to go further up and check everyone.

Terry Stein: That's part of the problem we face as there are only two enforcement officers in the whole NWT, and we both work out of the Inuvik office. We have to take care of a lot of area.

8. Overview of FJMC Concerns & follow up to conference call.

9. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 2:45pm.