

**Rat River Working Group (RRWG)
Annual Harvest Meeting
Minutes**

Location: Mackenzie Hotel, Inuvik, NT

Date: March 16, 2012

Attendees:

Eugene Pascal - GRRB Interim Chair	Fanny Greenland - Ehdiitat RRC	Jordan McLeod - WSWG Chair
Amy Thompson - GRRB	Jeremy Mosher - Ehdiitat RRC	John Norbert - Gwichya Gwich'in RRC
Kris Maier - GRRB	Eddy McLeod - Ehdiitat RRC	Carolyn Lennie - Gwichya Gwich'in RRC
Billy Archie - FJMC	Peter Kaye - Tetlit RRC	Allen Firth - Nihtat RRC
Michael Papst - FJMC	James Andre - Tetlit RRC	Colin Gallagher - DFO Winnipeg
James Malone - WSWG secretariat	Jeffrey Robert - Tetlit RRC	Neil Mochnacz - DFO Winnipeg
Amanda Joynt - DFO Inuvik	Danny C Gordon - Aklavik HTC	Rob Bajno - DFO Winnipeg
Ellen Lea - DFO Inuvik	Michelle Gruben - Aklavik HTC	Tracey Loewen - UoM / DFO Winnipeg
Billy Wilson - Char monitor	Wilson Malegana - Aklavik HTC	Sam Stephenson - DFO Winnipeg

1. Meeting Introduction

1.1 Call to order at 9:15am by Eugene Pascal.

1.2 Opening prayer by John Norbert.

1.3 Round table of introductions.

2. Meeting Administration

2.1 Adoption of Agenda.

- All parties in favour of agenda. No changes.

2.2 Introduction presentation:

- Kris gave a presentation which included a background on char fisheries and management in the GSA & ISR, COSEWIC, traditional knowledge, the Dolly Varden IFMP and the roles of the Working Groups in co-management.

Comment: The West Side Working Group includes Yukon Territorial Parks (Herschel Island).

Comment: We used to include Paulatuk because they catch char over there, why don't we include them anymore?

Response: We now know that the two species of char are different and they don't get caught in the same fisheries.

2.3 Terms of Reference:

- Kris provided an update on the progress of the ToR. The most recent draft has not been distributed for review yet but Kris will forward it to the communities for review at the April meetings.
- Amy commented on her review and the emphasis that should be placed on defining the meetings and their purpose/process.

Comment: You should come to the communities and walk the councils through it.

Response: We can plan for that in May or June, that way in April the councils can review it.

Action Item #1: Kris will provide draft ToR to RRWG members in April.

Action Item #2: Amy & Kris will attend May RRC/HTC meetings to discuss the ToR.

3. Guiding presentations

3.1 2011 Harvest Reporting:

- Kris provided an update on the 2011 harvest report. The agreed to allocation was 300. Total reported harvest was 380. There was very good reporting in 2011.

Comment: The Shingle Point number is a result of the genetics presentation we will see later in the agenda.

Question: With the allocation agreed to last year, the 50-50-50, was that supposed to include the Shingle Point harvest?

Response: We have been operating under the assumption that it is included and I believe that it should be included. The problem here is that we've been assuming that 50% of the Shingle Point catch is from the Rat stock. As a result, including the Shingle Point harvest in the allocation total has resulted in apparent 'overharvest' in nearly every year. As a result of what we now know, that only 10% of the char caught at Shingle Point are from the Rat stock (in 2011), we can more safely include this number in the total harvest allocation.

Response: We will be more confident in this number once the Shingle Point monitoring program is complete in a few years.

Question: So what is the difference between the rivers, how do we tell which char are which, are they a different species?

Response: They are the same species but they differ genetically so we can use their genes to tell them apart.

Question: In the minutes from the McPherson public meeting, did Terry Stein follow up on the char being sold?

Response: Since we're dealing with harvest reporting now, we'd like to defer this issue to later in the agenda when we plan talk about actions and minutes from previous meetings.

Editors note: This question was not followed up on as Terry Stein was absent from the afternoon sessions.

Comment: The AHTC and ERRC have not checked with each other for double reporting. We will try and meet to go over our numbers.

Action Item #3: The AHTC and ERRC will re-check their harvest numbers to make sure there was no double-counting of harvests in Aklavik.

Comment: So we need to determine how to deal with the Shingle Point harvest.

Response: We know we will never have real-time harvest numbers for specific stocks, which is why the FJMC is funding a multi-year study. Best course of action is to be conservative, which is what the RRWG usually does.

Response: We should be including the Shingle Point harvest in the allocation.

Response: The AHTC will try and work more closely with the Shingle Point char monitor and the RRCs to keep track of the harvest in-season.

Action Item #4: The AHTC will work more closely with the Shingle Point char monitor and the ERRC to distribute weekly harvest updates. When 75% of the quota is reached, radio announcements will go out to inform harvesters.

Question: So how do we want to try and include the Shingle Point harvest in the allocation?

Response: We should defer allocation discussion until later in the agenda.

Comment: Next time these numbers are presented there should be a footnote to indicate how the coastal harvest was determined.

Action Item #5: Kris to update harvest table to include information on how the data is calculated

3.2 Char monitor observations:

- Unfortunately none of the char monitors were available for the morning session. Kris provided feedback from John Carmichael from a short survey the GRRB sent to each monitor. John's comments stated that there was a good run of char in 2011 with many spawners, more males, the char were healthy and he saw no otters near his camp.

<Break 10:15-10:30am>

3.3 Shingle Point Mixed Stock Fishery

- Rob Bajno provided an update on the genetic analyses of Dolly Varden char captured at Shingle Point and other locations along the coast. Results show that in 2011, char caught at Shingle Point were from the Babbage (69%), Big Fish (13%), Rat (10%), Firth (7%) and Vittrekwa (1%).

Question: Are there char in the Blow River?

Response: Not that anyone is aware of.

Question: Is there any way we can find out where the char spend the summer? Catches at Shingle Point could vary a lot based on where the char migrate to/from and when fishing happens.

Response: This was only the first year of the sampling. We plan to continue this analysis as long as we can get samples but the study itself will go on for another 2 years. Now that we have the database built we can put in whatever samples we get and have a fairly fast turnaround (3-4 months).

Where they spend their summer is harder to determine. Radio tagging is one option.

Question: Is it possible to use the otolith chemistry to find that out?

Response: It is possible but very difficult to do that. Fish can move through different environments very quickly and the chemical signals are not that strong. It can be done but we're not there yet.

- Tracey Loewen provided an update on her otolith microchemistry analysis and the summer activities at Shingle Point. Her research is nearing completion. At this point she is able to determine between Rat, Big Fish and Babbage River char stocks. Tracey also assisted with all the Shingle Point sampling that happened in 2011 and will be at Shingle Point again in 2012.

3.4 Big Fish River & WSWG Update

- Jordan McLeod and Billy Archie provided an update on the WSWG meeting and the 2012 harvest recommendation for the big Fish River char stock. They stated that a safe harvest level of 150 char had been identified and that the fishery would take place on the lower Big Fish River under a scientific collection license. There will be a monitor assigned to sample the fish as well as community member participation. The WSWG also supports another two years of the Shingle Point Monitoring Program. The WSWG also decided that they do not oppose the listing of northern form Dolly Varden Char as 'Special Concern' by SARA. The WSWG also proposed a communications strategy for better in-season harvest reporting between the groups.

Question: When is the next Steering Committee call going to be?

Response: Likely sometime in April, possibly May. It will be before the public meetings in June.

Question: Will the FJMC be responding to the designation of Dolly Varden as a species of 'Special Concern'?

Response: Yes, the FJMC has been waiting to see what the decision of the WSWG would be before making that decision.

Question: Is there any chance that char caught in the Big Fish River fishery could be from the Rat River stock?

Response: It is unlikely that could happen as the Big Fish River fishery will occur in the lower river and we wouldn't expect Rat River char to be in that river. It is a possibility that a few may stray into that system. Samples from all the fish caught in that fishery will be analyzed though, so we will know if there were any caught there.

3.5 Rat River Population Estimate

- Colin Gallagher went through a presentation which highlighted the results from the summer monitoring program and the fall seine recapture.
- Notable points from the monitor fishery included:
 - Higher CPUE in 2011 than in 2010.
 - Higher proportion of older fish in 2011 than in 2010.
 - Good numbers of juvenile fish present.
 - More male spawners.
 - Higher proportion of spawners in 2011 than in 2010.
- Notable points from the fall seine recapture included:
 - More male spawners than in past years.
 - Fewer silvers than in past years.
 - Less incidence of injury than in 2010.
- **Population estimate from the monitor fishery: 9332 +/- 4107 (5225 - 12439).**
- **Population estimate from the fall seine recapture: 5759 +/- 3290 (2469 - 9049).**

<Lunch 11:55am-1:10pm>

3.6 Population Indicators

- Kris provided a presentation on his interpretation of the DFO Science report with respect to how the RRWG could use indicators to predict population trends and sustainable harvest levels in the absence of population estimates. Highlights included:
 - CPUE - Indicating a population increase

- Length & Age - Indicating a stable population at low risk of decline
- Sex & Maturity - Indicating a stable and possibly increasing population at low risk of decline.

Comment: The green books (char fishing diaries) have space for recording things like net size, fishing conditions and other observations. Please remember to fill these out. More people need to be using these books so we get more data.

Response: We will be getting more green books out to the communities this year. Any comments on changes to the format of the green books can be forwarded to Ellen Lea, James Malone or Kris Maier.

Action Item #6: DFO to distribute more green books to RRCs & AHTC prior to fishing season.

Action Item #7: RRCs & AHTC to distribute green books to harvesters prior to fishing season.

Comment: Using CPUE as an indicator seems wrong to me. We know the monitors aren't always fishing with ideal conditions, so how accurate can it be?

Response: Well, ideally, we want CPUE to be measured under a variety of conditions that represent the actual fishing conditions because if you only fish during good conditions, CPUE will reflect the fishing conditions more than the population size. Examples:

- We would have low confidence in a high number of fish caught in good conditions.
- We would have high confidence in a high number of fish caught in poor conditions.

Char Monitor: The fishing conditions in 2011 were not as good as in 2010. There was lots of high water all summer last year.

Response: If that is the case, then we would have even more confidence that CPUE is indicating a higher population because if the conditions were poor but catches were still high, it should mean that even more fish were around than what the numbers are showing.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Voluntary Safe Harvest Level for 2012

- Applying the 5% safe harvest level designated in the IFMP to the average of the two DFO population estimates, the safe harvest level for 2012 would be 377 char.
- Kris advised that, based on the population estimates and indicators, a maximum safe harvest level for 2012 would be 400 char.

Comment: Well one breakdown could be 150 to the monitoring program like last year and 225 to the communities (75 each).

Response: Ideally, the monitoring program would be increased to 200 fish. We have more confidence in the indicators when there are more fish in the sample size.

Comment: If the monitoring program was increased to 200, the community allocation could be 180, or 60-60-60. It is important that the monitoring program have a sufficient sample size.

Comment: Need to think of the people out there that are using this resource. They are already sacrificing their numbers.

Char Monitor: Last two years were the most char I've ever seen. Usually about 40 days from when they leave Rat River to when they start coming back. Last year was the longest run of spawners ever, about 3 weeks. Monitors shouldn't be taking tagged char. We should just mark the number down then release them. We do that all the time.

ERRC Comment: ERRC supports 150 char for the monitors and 75 for each community group. In October, the ERRC passed a motion suggesting that 50% of the char caught by the monitors be distributed to the community through the RRC.

Char Monitor: I'm fine with that. Just need to figure out who will take them and how to get them back to the community.

Action Item #8: Char monitors will work with RRCs to distribute 50% of their char to the communities.

AHTC Comment: We agree with the 375 char and we will make sure to include Shingle Point.

TRRC Comment: We also support the 375 char allocation.

GRRC Comment: We have to manage what we have and be careful. So we agree with what has been said.

GRRB Comment: We support this recommendation. It is always good when we can come to an agreement on a conservative amount.

DFO Comment: We also support this recommendation.

Final Voluntary Harvest Recommendation for 2012:

- **Monitoring Program: 150 char**
 - John Carmichael: 50 char
 - Billy Wilson: 50 char
 - Selwyn Kay: 50 char
- **Community Harvesters: 225 char**
 - Ft McPherson RRC: 75 char
 - Aklavik RRC: 75 char
 - Aklavik HTC: 75 char

4.2 Research for 2012

- Colin provided a presentation on the background of each research/monitoring project. Highlights included:
 - Rat River monitoring program.
 - Rat River fall seine data collection (no tagging in 2012).
 - Rat River grayling dead sample for 2012 (up to 100).
 - Shingle Point monitoring program and the mixed-stock fishery analyses (ongoing until 2013).
- **The TRRC, ERRC and AHTC all support the above 2012 research activities.**
- Tracey Loewen provided an update on the request by Jim Reist for more tissues samples for mercury analysis. The request is to obtain samples from existing Dolly Varden monitoring programs or from willing community harvesters during the 2012 fishing season. A 1cm² of tissue (or whole head if not used) is required for mercury analysis.

Char monitor: We can take samples for them, no problem with that. The last few years, we have seen more worms in the char, would like to see more research on that.

Response: If there are worms in the fish, freeze the whole fish (if possible) and bring it in to DFO in Inuvik so we can look at it.

Comment: I sent about 20 char to Marlene Evans around 2003, do we know what happened to those samples?

Response: We're not sure but we can follow up on that.

Action Item #9: DFO to follow up on char sent to Marlene Evans for mercury analysis.

TRRC Comment: We support this mercury research, it is important to know this information.

ERRC Comment: We support this at the meeting, but we will go back to the full council and talk about it.

AHTC Comment: The AHTC supports this research at the meeting but will also talk about this with the full council.

Comment: It sounds like we have support from the RRWG at the table but some councils may reply separately.

4.3 Communication Plan

- Amanda and Ellen presented the draft poster of how in-season harvest reporting would happen for 2012. This was drafted at the WSWG meeting the previous day. Main points included:
 - Char monitor to notify AHTC when char start running at Shingle Point

- AHTC to notify families via facebook, radio, bingo, trappers radio, word of mouth, etc.
 - Once 75% of the voluntary Rat River harvest allocation is reached, the AHTC would notify people that they were nearing their voluntary allocation. This would include radio announcements, DFO visits and word of mouth.
 - Once 100% of the voluntary allocation was reached the AHTC would inform people it had been reached and would request people to stop fishing for char.
- Kris spoke to how it would be beneficial to use the MoU signed by the councils the previous year merged with the Rat River Fishing Plan and update it on a yearly basis to include information on: the voluntary allocation, where to report your harvest, appropriate fishing gear for char, what to do with tagged char, etc. This could be produced as a booklet on a yearly basis to keep fishermen informed.
 - Pre-season preparation would include:
 - Determining appropriate contacts
 - Determining the voluntary harvest allocation
 - Determining fishing locations
 - Radio announcements
 - Poster preparation
 - Public meetings
 - Facebook postings
 - Distribution of green books

The number of char caught on a weekly basis should be shared between:

Shingle Point Monitor → Michelle Gruben (Aklavik HTC)

Aklavik HTC Monitor → Michelle Gruben

Michelle Gruben → Jeremy Mosher (Aklavik RRC) & Gina Neyando (Ft McPherson RRC)

Aklavik RRC Monitor → Jeremy Mosher

Jeremy Mosher → Michelle Gruben & Gina Neyando

Ft McPherson RRC Monitor → Gina Neyando

Gina Neyando → Jeremy Mosher & Michelle Gruben

Michelle, Jeremy and Gina should all make it a priority to distribute weekly harvest information to the public, DFO, GRRB and FJMC.

Action Item #10: GRRB to go to May meetings (RRCs & HTC) to distribute updated communications plan.

Question: What dates would be best for public meetings in June?

Response: The best dates for public meetings would be in late June. Councils will advise at a later time what dates work best for public meetings

Action Item #11: Councils to consult with their members to determine the best dates for the June public meetings.

<Break 3:15-3:30pm>

5. Other Updates

5.1 Species at Risk

- This item was moved up in the agenda because it is a decision item.
- Sam Stephenson provided an update on the proposed listing of Dolly Varden char under the Species at Risk Act (SARA). Highlights of this presentation included:
 - Purpose of SARA
 - The COSEWIC assessment process
 - Reasons for the COSEWIC designation of 'Special Concern'
 - Implications of listing Dolly Varden char as 'Special Concern'
 - Timelines for response.

Question: Will there be duplication of the management plan process and will SARA adopt our current IFMP to act as the SARA management plan?

Response: That has never been done before, but the Act allows for it and we would prefer if they did so. By the time the current Dolly Varden Integrated Fisheries Management Plan is ready for review, SARA (should they list Dolly Varden) would be ready to complete their management plan, so it is reasonable that the current Dolly Varden IFMP could be adapted to 'fit' the SARA requirements so that there would be no duplication. In its current form, the IFMP does not meet all of the SARA requirements.

Comment: If listed, there would potentially be more funding available for research and co-management through SARA funding. Some of the research already being conducted is being done with COSEWIC funding that became available through the initial COSEWIC assessment.

Comment: If listed, our current IFMP would still apply. If we (GRRB & FJMC) do not agree with edits or a 'new' SARA management plan, we can always say 'no' to their management plan (because the GRRB and FJMC have constitutional power to approve management plans) and continue to operate under the current IFMP.

Comment: I have a concern with this. We have the existing plan that we already put a lot of work into, why do we have to go through this process?

Question: How do you get a species off SARA?

Response: Once there is enough information available to prove that the reasons for designation have been dealt with. For Dolly Varden char, the biggest concern is habitat.

Question: If listed, will there be added management?

Response: We would continue to manage the way we have been using the Working Groups.

RRWG Decision: No decision on the SARA listing of Dolly Varden char at this time.

Action Item #12: GRRB & DFO to come to communities to talk to the RRCs about the SARA process in more detail. Individual councils may respond independently.

5.2 Actions from 2011 RRWG Meeting

- Kidney samples update: Early results indicate the Infectious Pancreatic Virus (IPN) virus is present in the samples but testing is in the first stage of analysis. Researchers wish to continue getting these samples.
- Otters update: No reports of otters near the Rat River Fish Hole.
- Electrofishing update: Draft document by Parks Canada but the issue has been dropped from both the Parks research projects and DFO priorities so is a non issue for now. We can provide more information if requested.
- Vittrekwa/Rat River run timing. Kris suggested that the Vittrekwa char must run much earlier than the Rat River char because there were already many adult char at the Vittrekwa Fish Hole by Aug 20th. Rob Bajno stated that they can sample the char caught by the monitors to determine which were Rat and which were Vittrekwa.

5.3 Vittrekwa River Population Assessment

- Kris gave a presentation on the summer field work at Vittrekwa River Fish Hole. Highlights included:
 - Estimated population size is less than 200 adult spawners.
 - Spawning occurs in a very limited section of the creek.
 - Habitat is extremely limiting to this population.
 - Advise not to harvest from this stock.
 - Advise re-assessment every 4-5 years as resources allow.

5.4 Habitat Research Priorities

- Neil Mochnacz gave a presentation on the habitat use and availability models that were successfully applied to the Big Fish River. Next steps with this research involve trying to

apply habitat availability estimates to fish population estimates and using habitat availability measurements to predict fish population size.

- This purpose of this presentation was to determine interest and potential support for continuing this research on the Rat River for 2013.

Comment: ERRC supports more habitat research in the future.

Comment: It is important to think about what are the habitat questions we want to answer and how we can do that. The best time to determine these questions is at these spring meetings so there is lots of time to plan field activities.

Comment: Water is so important. On the Peel River barges used to come up to McPherson and then they would go 60, 70 miles upriver. Now they can't even get a barge into the Peel, that's how much the water has dropped. It's important to keep studying the habitat and water levels.

Meeting Summary:

RRWG Voluntary Harvest Recommendation for 2012:

- **Total Allocation: 375 char**
- **Monitoring Program: 150 char**
 - John Carmichael: 50 char
 - Billy Wilson: 50 char
 - Selwyn Kay: 50 char
- **Community Harvesters: 225 char**
 - Ft McPherson RRC: 75 char
 - Aklavik RRC: 75 char
 - Aklavik HTC: 75 char

RRWG Supported Research for 2012:

- Rat River monitoring program (150 char).
- Rat River fall seine data collection (no tagging in 2012).
- Rat River grayling dead sample for 2012 (up to 100).
- Shingle Point monitoring program and the mixed-stock fishery analyses.

2012 RRWG Action Items

Items #	Action Item	Who	When
RRWG2012-01	Distribute ToR to all RRWG members for their review.	GRRB-Kris Maier	April 2012
RRWG2012-02	Present ToR at community meetings (RRC and AHTC).	GRRB-Kris & Amy	May 2012
RRWG2012-03	AHTC and ERRC will meet to review last season's harvest numbers to ensure there is no double reporting.	AHTC - Michelle ERRC - Jeremy	May 2012
RRWG2012-04	Improve communication between community monitors, AHTC & RRCs: Radio and other media announcements when 75% of harvest level is reached.	AHTC, ERRC & TRRC	During fishing season
RRWG2012-05	Add footnote describing how the numbers were calculated in any harvest reporting tables.	GRRB-Kris Maier	April 2012
RRWG2012-06	Distribute fishing diaries (green books) to RRCs, AHTC and fishermen.	DFO - Ellen Lea	June 2012
RRWG2012-07	Distribute fishing diaries to community fishermen.	RRCs & AHTC	July 2012
RRWG2012-08	RRC and HTC to work on a protocol to distribute char to community from monitor catch.	TRRC, ERRC and AHTC	June - July 2012
RRWG2012-09	Follow-up on Environment Canada samples provided by John Carmichael in fall of 2003 for mercury analysis.	Tracey Loewen	May 2012
RRWG2012-10	Presentation to ERRC, TRRC and AHTC regarding communication plan and update MOU	GRRB-Amy and Kris	May 2012
RRWG2012-11	Councils to talk with their groups to confirm best date for their community public meeting.	All members	May 2012
RRWG2012-12	GRRB to present SARA materials to communities	GRRB-Kris Maier	April 2012