

Rat River char on the rise

Team monitors increased population of Dolly Varden

by Stewart Burnett
Northern News Services

Fish biologist Sarah Lord last month told the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board the important Dolly Varden char population may be improving after years of decline.

Lord is a fish scientist with the board. Her comments were part of a population assessment delivered to members of the board and the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Council.

"The stock has declined significantly since the 1970s, but the last few years have shown some signs of improvement, which is good to see," she said.

The Dolly Varden are very important to Gwich'in and Inuvialuit people, she added.

"There are several different populations of Dolly Varden in the Mackenzie Delta, which spawn in tributaries of the Rat River, Vittrekwa River, Big Fish River and others," said Lord. "If a char is caught out in the Beaufort Sea, we can find out which stock it belongs to using a genetic 'fingerprint' technique."

The Rat River char work-

ing group, founded in 1995, will hold its annual meeting on March 8 to discuss the past season's char harvest and recommendations for the new year.

Dolly Varden of the Rat River have been the subject of concern since the '90s, when community members observed that their population was in decline.

A working group involving several organizations, including Gwich'in, Inuvialuit and federal representatives, was established to address the drop in population.

They established a monitoring program and came up with annual fishing plans.

"It's pretty cool because it's not legislated," said Amy Amos, executive director of the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board, of the fish harvest quotas.

Based on work done by the group, an integrated fisheries management plan was signed in 2010 to help document the way the region monitors Dolly Varden, so if the species were listed in the Species At Risk Act and it was assessed by the federal government, local information would already be

available, including traditional knowledge.

"We wanted to make sure there was traditional knowledge documented on paper so they could use that in their assessment," said Amos.

The working group meets every March. Based on information presented about the previous August char harvest, the group will by June have determined the appropriate allocation for the next harvest and hold public meetings to inform the community.

Amos said voluntary compliance with the group's recommendations is high.

"Even in years when the population has gone down even more and they made recommendations for no harvest, compliance was pretty high," she said.

"I look at that as a really good model for community-based monitoring and a good model where communities can come together and make recommendations on a voluntary basis where people are respecting that and complying with it and we're managing it on our own without having to go through any legislative processes."



photo courtesy of Janet Bowell

Jozef Carnogursky, left, is sworn in as a Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board board member by chair Eugene Rees while Eugene Pascal looks on at a three-day board meeting late February.



Colin Gallagher (DFO) photo

Dolly Varden from the Rat River, a type of char, have been the subject of scrutiny for decades. The population was on the decline but has seen a recent uptick.

Aboriginal Peoples Survey

Economic Participation
A survey of First Nations people living off reserve, Métis and Inuit



Enquête auprès des peuples autochtones

Participation à l'activité économique
Une enquête menée auprès des Premières Nations vivant hors réserve, des Métis et des Inuits

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Take part, complete the survey and help build a better future!

For more information, call 1-800-263-1136 or go to www.statcan.gc.ca/aps.

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Participez, remplissez le questionnaire et contribuez ainsi à bâtir un avenir meilleur!

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