

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

FISHERIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

MARCH 27, 2024

PRESENT: Mark Robbins, Chair; Mark Braet, Vice Chair; Christina Callegari; Akhil Davis
Demiesha Dennis; Cosette Deraps; Merrill Elliott; Jim Kelly
Tammy Mathieson-Harbaugh; Rick Moore; Dan Polsky; Brian Round; Peter Sword
Erin Stewart; Neil Wiens

ABSENT: Chris Geberdt; Grayson Goodman; Dr. Bruce Tufts

STAFF: Adam Weir, Liaison; Chris Robinson; Mark Ryckman

GUEST: Dave Mendler, Zone J

The OFAH Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC) met via Zoom on March 27, 2024.

1. Introductions

The committee was thanked for their support in the development of the FAC Membership Profiles document: a living reference document that will help new members familiarize themselves with the FAC and its strengths. The profiles document is intended to help everyone understand the context for individual member's comments/input while allowing members to seek out expertise in the group.

The committee was then introduced to two new committee members, Demiesha Dennis and Brian Round.

Demiesha Dennis is the founder and Director of Brown Girl Outdoor World (BGOW). Where she spearheads a movement to challenge the status quo and create a more inclusive, equitable, and safe outdoor environment for historically excluded communities.

Demiesha is an avid angler, adventurer, and community builder, her passion for the outdoors shines through in various endeavors including serving as a member on the Board of Directors for The Friends of Algonquin Park and the Advisory Council on Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystem Management Plan for Algonquin Provincial Park. Demiesha inspires and empowers others to embrace nature while advocating for greater representation in outdoor spaces.

Brian Round spent 12 years as a Fishery Officer with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, his primary role being the protection of fish habitat. This work ranged from educating individuals and achieving voluntary restoration of damaged habitat, to cases that took many years and many court appearances in the pursuit of habitat restoration accompanied by large fines.

Following that he spent more than a decade teaching in the Fish and Wildlife program at Fleming College before retiring in 2023. The highlight of these years were the Fall Field Season camps, starting with a lake-based trap-netting, followed by a cold-water trout streams field school.

Action items from the previous meeting (October 24, 2023) were reviewed.

Action item - A. Weir: To reach out to MNRF about a presentation on small- and large-bodied forms of Lake Opeongo Lake Whitefish and other unique forms of fish in Algonquin Provincial Park; *Update* - *Will be reaching out to Dr. Chris Wilson about coming to present to the FAC at the upcoming summer meeting.*

Action item - A. Weir, M. Robbins: A template will be developed to ensure that all drafts are complete with regard to supporting background materials, links to the original posting site, relevant legislation, applicable OFAH policy, etc. - Weir and Robbins developed a draft template. *Update - On review and further consideration, decided that it served little useful purpose. We will endeavor to be more thorough when drafting materials for committee review.*

Action item - M. Robbins: OFAH fisheries policy review should be an on-going agenda item to ensure policies are current and useful. *Update - OFAH Code of Conduct is on the agenda of this meeting and policy review will continue at each meeting thereafter.*

Action item - A. Weir: Ensure that all committee members have up-to-date OFAH fisheries policy materials; *Update - A. Weir reported that documents had been sent to all. Jim Kelly, Dan Polsky, Neil Wiens, and Tammy Mathieson-Harbaugh reported not receiving them.*

Action item (follow-up) - A. Weir: to resend the Fisheries Policy document to those missed. Completed on March 27. Adam re-sent the fisheries policies to the group.

Lifejacket/PFD next steps and decision - A. Weir: To defer further discussion until A. Weir attends the next Transport Canada, RBAC meeting in January 2024; *Update - see agenda item 6 below.*

Action item - A. Weir, M. Ryckman: To discuss with OOD communications staff the idea of publishing an educational item promoting the wearing of lifejackets and PFDs (including a message from the OPP) and to further explore with a survey on the topic of lifejacket/PFD wear. *Update - OFAH survey distributed to the FAC for review/input. HO staff will finalize the survey, send to comms people, and use Survey Monkey (or similar platform) to distribute the survey (when appropriate).*

Action item - A. Weir: To approach MNRF to attend FAC meeting to discuss the current status of FMZ advisory councils and the management of the commercial fishery on the Great Lakes. *Update - these are two separate things: 1) FMZ advisory councils; and 2) commercial fishing in the GLs. Need to narrow down exactly what we're asking the MNRF and what we would like them to present on.*

Action item (follow-up) - A. Weir: To send email to committee to solicit members questions and specific themes they wish to have addressed by MNRF on both FMZ advisory councils and the Great Lakes commercial fishery.

Action item - A. Weir: To circulate material that will provide all FAC members with a basic understanding of the FMZ advisory councils; *Update - deferred until summer FAC meeting.*

Action item (follow-up) - A. Weir: to complete this action item for next meeting.

2. OFAH Brand Identity - overview - Adam Weir

The OFAH has had a loon logo for about 36 years.

Origins of loon for OFAH:

- Our original crest looked too much like the Ontario Coat of Arms.
- Loon was selected because it was recognizable in black and white and colour, iconic, and a loon in the wild causes people to look and pay attention - represents the voice of the wild/outdoors.
- Environmentally sensitive species, shows angler and hunter appreciation for non-game species.

Why a loon in 2024?

- Members have a connection to it.
- Remains a symbol of nature and wilderness, sustainability, and conservation.

Why change the loon? Modern re-envisioning helps with:

- A more stylized look to match contemporary logos.
- Modern application in digital and print formats.
- Brings new meaning with more iconic loon position, upright, confident, forward movement to position organization towards future.

3. Committee Guidelines – Mark Robbins

Goal: To develop a set of committee guidelines that will support the effective and efficient operation of the committee, with the end result of better support for the board of directors as it considers proposals and submissions.

Guideline commitments to date:

- Committee review and input period for draft submissions - 2 weeks whenever possible
- Respond and feedback to draft submissions - all members are encouraged to respond to every draft; all members are encouraged to use “reply to all” when responding

OFAH Code of Conduct Discussion

Each member of every committee was required to acknowledge having read, and agreeing to abide by, the OFAH Code of Conduct.

Under the heading “General Description of Obligations” is the responsibility and duty of every member to: *Act with integrity and perform their duties in a manner that would preserve, maintain, and enhance the reputation of the Federation.*

The OFAH is a member founded, and a member driven, organization. Its members come from all walks of life and all parts of society. The OFAH is actively trying to increase that representation in all parts of the organization - it truly wants to be the “voice of all anglers and hunters.”

In order to properly represent all anglers and hunters, all anglers and hunters need to feel they can join in the work of the OFAH and participate in the business of the organization at all levels. This means the culture of the OFAH must be a welcoming one.

By being a member of the OFAH, and having a seat on this committee, each person represents the OFAH whenever, and wherever, they talk about hunting, fishing, and conservation initiatives. How a member shows respect also includes how they behave (and respond) when listening to others talk about hunting, fishing, and conservation initiatives. How do we create a welcoming environment? By being respectful, at all times, and in all situations.

The Ontario Human Rights Code provides some good guidance about being respectful. If we conduct our committee business without expressing disrespect for people based on the protected grounds of the OHRC we will be going a long way to “preserve, maintain, and enhance the reputation” of the OFAH and create a respectful and welcoming environment.

The Ontario Human Rights Code protected grounds include: Age; Ancestry, colour, race; Citizenship; Ethnic origin; Place of origin; Creed; Disability; Family status; Marital status (including single status); Gender identity, gender expression; Sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding); Sexual orientation.

Discussion - related to recruiting more diverse membership and included developing French language communications products, and accessing membership data to determine where geographically and demographically OFAH has opportunity to grow.

Action item - Mark Ryckman: To discuss feasibility of producing French language communications products, perhaps with an initial focus on on-line communications.

4. Including Indigenous Knowledges – FAC member Cosette Deraps

Cosette (Coco) Deraps, is a Mi'kmaq grad student at Carleton University where she is focusing on her graduate studies in biology, creating a transdisciplinary project with the community of Kinngait, Nunavut that bridges Indigenous Knowledges into natural resource management approaches.

Based on a recent presentation she made to the World Fisheries Congress (March 2024 - Seattle, Washington), Coco presented an introduction to the origins, concepts, goals and values (and broader social benefits) of including Indigenous knowledges in fisheries research and resource management decision making processes.

Discussion - The presentation was well received and resulted in broad discussion, and the invitation to further explore how Indigenous knowledges fit into the OFAH approach to fisheries advocacy efforts as well as to explore opportunities to develop positive relationships and trust.

5. Baitfish Regulation Change – Mark Robbins

A brief overview of OFAH involvement in bait regulation discussion was provided as well as recognition of the role played by FAC in advocating for the change, and the recent regulation amendment (January 1, 2024) related to the movement of preserved bait across Bait Management Zone boundaries.

Input from committee members was sought on how this regulation change has been received and implemented by anglers (i.e., are there misunderstandings or difficulties at this stage?)

Discussion - Generally the comments included personal experiences - it works for anglers; conversations with COs - they “won’t touch” the new regulations; one dealer misunderstood the rule believing that chumming using salted minnows is now permitted.

There was broad FAC support to advocate for personal bait harvest outside a person’s Bait Management Zone of primary residence.

There was discussion of what to do next to get change on the important topic of the presence and movement of invasive species in the bait pathway. There was support for more public education. There was discussion of requesting bait dealer inspection information from MNRF to be used to illustrate the continued problem.

6. Lifejacket/Personal Flotation Device Survey – status report – Adam Weir

- General updates - the draft survey was distributed to the FAC, and input received; there was no opposition from the FAC concerning distributing the survey to FMZ advisory councils (if possible).
- Latest news regarding the lifejacket/PFD proposal posting to TC website:
 - Introducing requirements for the installation and use of engine cut-off switches on pleasure craft less than 8 metres in length.

- o Potentially introducing requirements for the mandatory wear of personal flotation devices/lifejackets in certain circumstances.
- o “The proposed changes are expected to be published in the *Canada Gazette*, Part I, in late 2024 for a 60-day comment period.”

Discussion - Support for wide distribution of the survey to affiliated organizations (e.g., Canadian Wildlife Federation, National Fishing and Hunting Collaborative) to get broad response from the outdoors community.

7. House of Commons Visit – Adam Weir

- The Canada Water Agency is related to the Canada Water Act. The Act is meant to provide for the management of the water resources, including research and the planning and implementation of programs relating to the conservation, development, and utilization of water resources.
- The Canada Water Agency is meant to collaborate with interested parties (i.e., government, NGO, provinces/territories, Indigenous communities, etc.) to find the best ways to keep our water safe, clean, and well-managed.
- Focus is on freshwater and its management, addressing challenges and finding opportunities. Improve, restore, protect, manage, etc.
- The Canada Water Agency has been created within ECCC. Legislation was introduced in 2023 to establish the Canada Water Agency as a stand-alone Agency.
- The OFAH went to the House of Commons to present to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development on topics like funding, importance of recreational fisheries including fish and fish habitat, and the ongoing threat of aquatic invasive species.

8. Clean-Drain-Dry sign promotion – FAC member Mark Braet

The Clean-Drain-Dry is a new regulation under the *Invasive Species Act* for all boaters in Ontario. The OFAH has partnered with a few other groups to offer signage to be posted at boat launches and marinas. Zone J is attempting to reach out to all parties that have responsibilities for boat launches and marinas to get the signs out there, education is critical. Rob McGowan from head office is leading this program about controlling the spread of invasive species.

Discussion - Need to get other organizations involved in posting signs (e.g., Conservation Authorities); Zone F is also heavily involved; should MNR be required to establish cleaning stations?

Action item – Mark Robbins: to determine what organizations, outside the OFAH, have been informed about the signage program.

9. Commercial Fishing – Great Lakes issue – FAC member Mark Braet

In the State of Michigan, this past October, a bill was introduced by a Michigan State Representative that will allow commercial fishermen to harvest sport fish species from the Great Lakes. These include Lake Trout, panfish, Smallmouth Bass, Walleye, Yellow Perch, and other kinds of fish that have historically been banned from commercial harvest in Michigan waters.

Discussion - It was recognized that Ontario currently also permits commercial fishing on all the Great Lakes; FAC will continue to monitor this situation. Potential opportunity to reach out to the Ontario Commercial Fisheries’ Association to present at an FAC meeting.

10. Bait Presentation at Toronto Sportsman Show – Adam Weir

- OFAH sponsored the seminar stage at the TSS.
- HO staff (A. Weir) did a presentation on bait management in Ontario that included information concerning threats, anglers as a vector for AIS, Ontario's bait management strategy, issues identification (commercial, MNRF, anglers), and recommendations for the future management of bait.

11. FMZ Advisory Council Updates (circulated prior to meeting) – questions & comments

Discussion - Some further information was provided. It was recommended that the update document also be sent to OFAH/FMZ advisory council representatives for review. FAC members were reminded to review the FMZ Advisory Council Updates prior to each meeting. FAC members were reminded that the update document was to be handled as confidential information and not shared or discussed outside of the FAC.

12. American Eel Symposium, OOD Article, and consultation check-in – Adam Weir

- OFAH has been involved in American Eel conservation for close to a decade.
- Provided feedback to DFO on the listing of American Eel as threatened under schedule 1 of SARA in their 2015/2016 consultations.
- Currently, DFO has reinitiated engagement with interested parties with a consultation check-in for eel.
- OFAH HO staff drafted and circulated feedback on the eel and their listing as threatened under the Act.
- Outside these activities, the OFAH is a member and has participated on the American Eel Coalition. Working group consisting of various NGOs and Indigenous organizations.
- We attended a two-day symposium on American Eel conservation on Akwesasne Mohawk territory (on Cornwall Island) with various interested parties including government representation (DFO, MECP).
- Coalition will also be drafting a letter which we will potentially sign on to. However, we felt the need to have our own standalone letter.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Robbins
Chair