

Sydenham sportsmen's president says things will work out if both sides remain reasonable

FROM PAGE 1

The agreement, which took effect Feb. 25, allows commercial fishermen to set nets in Owen Sound and Colpoys bays year round as of April 26.

The Sydenham Sportsmen's Association, local provincial and federal politicians and others have been extremely critical of the agreement, saying it is a threat to the local sports fishery. The SSA runs an annual salmon derby in late summer which attracts recreational fishermen to area waters.

Among the sports fishermen's concerns is their safety if they fish where gill nets are set. The SSA has called for the agreement to be renegotiated, with input from sports fishermen.

SSA president Mike Prevost said Wednesday he hasn't heard of commercial nets being set in either local bay yet, but admitted he doesn't know much about the timing of the season to fish for whitefish.

"It's going to be a while to see what's going to happen . . . we just have to keep communicating with each other and hopefully we will be able to. And as long as, you know, both sides sort of are cautious and be rea-

sonable about things, I think we can work things out."

Prevost has met with Scott Lee, the chief of Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, but understands Lee can't make any assurances about nets staying out of the bays, since the commercial fishermen are independent.

"And from my understanding, right now they're just being cautious about it and wanting to work . . . with the sports fishing community about this sort of thing. They're not trying to be the bad guys here and force themselves in or something like this. It's just it's the right that they have and I think that they'll look at it and weigh the issues around it."

The pamphlet, "Safe Boating, Angling and Commercial Fishing in Owen Sound and Colpoys Bay," covers how commercial nets are marked and what to do when boaters encounter them.

It warns if a boater doesn't follow the advice, they risk "collision, entanglement or possibly swamping of your recreational vessel."

The pamphlet describes the required square flag on marker buoys at either end of the fishing

net, which must not be longer than 300 metres. Boaters and their gear should keep at least 25 metres — or 80 feet — away from these areas and should go around, not over, marked areas.

The pamphlet advises boaters who use downriggers for trolling to be careful not to get tangled in commercial nets and to keep wire cutters at hand as a precaution. It says navigational protocol requires other vessels to give way to commercial fishing operations.

Pamphlet diagrams show nets set above the bottom of the bay and those set above the bottom.

The pamphlet advises it's an offence under the Fisheries Act to interfere with commercial fishing gear and an offence under the Criminal Code to damage or interfere with property. Anyone who sees tampering with commercial fishing gear is asked to call the MNR or Crime Stoppers, the pamphlet says.

David Oraziotti, Ontario's minister of natural resources, has said his ministry did represent the sports fishermen's interests and that measure have been put in place to address any safety and conservation concerns. He

also has said the Saugeen Ojibway Nation didn't have to enter into any fishing agreement with the government, given its court-recognized constitutional and treaty right to fish commercially here.

Mike Morencie, director of the MNR's fish and wildlife branch, will be at the SSA's general meeting today to speak about the agreement.

Lee said on April 22 that no meeting of commercial fishermen had been held to discuss whether they would exercise their right to fish in the bays during the salmon fishing derby. That decision will be announced well in advance of the Salmon Spectacular, he said.

The fishing agreement contains a map with a line drawn across the bay, starting at Balmy Beach and continuing to the opposite shore. No commercial fishing may occur in waters inside that line. Likewise, a line drawn at the end of the bay from the road at the government dock to the southwest shore of Colpoys Bay delineates an area where commercial fishing is banned.

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