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NEWS RELEASES

VOLUNTARY CLOSURE OF THE RAT RIVER CHAR FISHERY, NWT

AUGUST 3, 2007

AKLAVIK – A joint announcement was made today by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and its co-management partners the Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board (GRRB) and the Fisheries Joint Management Committee (FJMC), to support a voluntary closure of the Rat River char fishery in order to conserve and protect the local Dolly Varden char stock. The closure will remain in place from August 7, 2007 to September 15, 2007, and August 7 to September 15, 2008, and will extend from the Gwich'in Settlement Area north into the Inuvialuit Settlement Area.

Discussions leading to the decision were conducted through the Rat River Working Group, comprised of members from the Aklavik Renewable Resource Council, the Fort McPherson Renewable Resource Council, the Aklavik Hunters and Trappers Committee, Fisheries and Oceans, the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board and the Fisheries Joint Management Committee. The Working Group is chaired by Robert Charlie of the Gwich'in Renewable Resource Board.

"Through this voluntary closure, northern communities are demonstrating their deep commitment to conservation", said Hon. Minister Loyola Hearn, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, "In turn, DFO will continue to provide ongoing stock assessments and monitoring of the Rat River char to support these communities and our co-management partners in making the best management decisions for their fisheries".

Following the decision, Board chair Robert Charlie expressed his deep respect for the affected communities, "I am extremely proud of the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit communities and their resource organizations who have made the difficult decision to close the Rat River char fishery in order to conserve and protect this precious resource for our children's future".

The choice to support voluntary closure comes after DFO reported that the stock has continued to decline from the estimate of 12,000 in 2002 to 3,500 in 2006. This voluntary closure adds to the measures introduced in 2006 which temporarily closed the Rat River fishery to sport, subsistence commercial and domestic fishing during the upstream migratory run.

This current voluntary closure of the char fishery affects all types of fishing, including recreational, domestic and subsistence. The closure applies to the Rat River itself, the Peel Channel, the Husky Channel and the West Channel of the Mackenzie River north to the coast. In addition, there will be a permanent closure of the Fish Holes where char overwinter, spawn and rear their young. DFO will continue to monitor the char stock to allow the GRRB and FJMC to review progress and revise future fishing plans in consultation with local resource organizations and the communities of Fort McPherson and Aklavik.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Robert Charlie
Chair, Rat River Working Group
Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board
Tel: (867) 777-6600

Theresa Nichols
Communications Officer
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
(780) 495-3567