



LARKIN'S POND, NAUFRAGE RIVER - TAKEN BY MARY FINCH

Souris & Area Watershed News

Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife
Federation

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ATLANTIC SALMON RESEARCH IN THE SOURIS AREA

Unique genetic strain of Atlantic Salmon in our region!

Prince Edward Island and Atlantic Salmon are not often thought of together, however, they should be as Prince Edward Island has a rich history of Atlantic Salmon with historically over 70 rivers containing the iconic species. The last comprehensive report in 2009 by Daryl Guignon identified 22 rivers with Atlantic Salmon. Atlantic Salmon populations are declining in many regions of the island due to increased sedimentation, poor water quality, lack of quality habitat (aquatic and riparian) and connectivity issues related to beaver activity and transportation infrastructure.

Declines in Atlantic Salmon are not limited to the island but are a Maritime wide problem.

The dismal 2014 return rates were the reason that the Honourable Gail Shea, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, initiated a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Atlantic Salmon. This committee is tasked with investigating conservation and enforcement measures, predation issues, advancing science and developing strategies to address international fishing pressures.

Souris and Area Branch Staff presented to this advisory committee in March during a meeting in Moncton. Our presentation was markedly different than the rest as we explained that the Atlantic Salmon populations are on the increase within our management zone. Atlantic Salmon populations within Northeast PEI have increased in the past few years and can be considered a success story. Since 2008, the number of Atlantic Salmon Rivers in our management zone have increased from 4 to 7.

Additionally, the number of redd counts (salmon nests) have increased within our rivers. Atlantic Salmon can now be found in Cow River, Hay River, Priest Pond Creek, North Lake Creek, Naufrage River, Cross River and Bear River.

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Atlantic Salmon smolt. Photo taken by Randy Angus

ATLANTIC SALMON – continued from page 1

Why are our Atlantic Salmon populations increasing despite decreases in other areas? While there are many complexities with regards to Atlantic Salmon population numbers, we feel increases in our area can be attributed to two main reasons:

- 1) SAB has invested much time and effort into improving the aquatic environment within our rivers. By removing stream blockages, installing brush mattresses and habitat structures, our group has dramatically increased Atlantic Salmon habitat providing the necessary conditions for adult spawning and juvenile survival. We have worked with local stakeholders including landowners and farmers to improve riparian buffer zones and mitigate run-off into our waterways.
- 2) Recent research by Laval University have identified that Atlantic Salmon within North Lake Creek and Cross River are a different genetic strain compared to the other populations on PEI and within the Gulf region. Our Atlantic Salmon potentially could be the "ancestral strain" of PEI Atlantic Salmon. This means that our Atlantic Salmon are best suited to our rivers and habitat conditions. Limited stocking of Atlantic Salmon occurred in our region.



SAB staff deploying the fyke net to capture smolt in North Lake Creek. Photo by Becky Petersen

Starting this spring, SAB initiated a multi-year research project aimed at finding out more about the genetics and life history parameters for the Atlantic Salmon within our region. By further understanding the biology and traits of our populations we can better manage, protect and conserve our Atlantic Salmon resources. We are working with a variety of partners including: University of Prince Edward Island (Scott Roloson, Dr. Mike van den Heuvel, Daryl Guignon), PEI Fish and Wildlife staff (Rosie MacFarlane), Atlantic Salmon Federation (Lewis Hinks), Abegweit First Nation Band (Roger Sark and field crew), Mi'kmaq Confederacy (Randy Angus) and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (Dr. David Cairns). Our work this spring involved setting a net within North Lake Creek to track the movement of smolt (2 year-old salmon) on their downstream migration to the ocean. We hope this fall to have enough resources available to install a fish weir to monitor the migration of adult Atlantic Salmon upstream. Plans for next year include

tagging salmon smolt with acoustic tags to track their migration route in the ocean. To date, most of the information on Atlantic Salmon management and biology come from the large rivers such as the Miramichi River with limited information available for small rivers such as our systems. With the suggestion that our populations are an ancestral strain, this lack of information becomes more pronounced as our salmon could have different traits compared to other populations leading to many management uncertainties. The budget for this project is large and we are thankful for the support of the PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund for their help and to the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation for their support of our restoration work. We continue to look for more sponsors, funders and partners to contribute to this worthwhile project.



Field crew waiting to check the fyke net at North Lake Creek while "Birdie" the dog keeps an eye on the river. Taken by Mary Finch

ATLANTIC SALMON DAY!

We are hosting a **free** family fun day!

Larkin's Pond. Sunday, June 14th, 2015: 2-4 pm

Learn more about the freshwater fish in our region. Learn about the amazing life-cycle of an Atlantic Salmon. Check out the aquatic bugs that are such an important food source for our fish.

Enjoy a BBQ for a small fee. Try your hand at fishing for White Perch (license is required). Fishing demonstrations! Door prizes!

Support for this event is provided through Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation, PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund and the Government of Canada's Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnership Program and Habitat Stewardship Program – Prevention Stream. For more information, please check out our website: www.souriswl.com or our Facebook page.



Youngster fishing at East Lake. Photo taken by Stephen Flynn

RING-NECKED PHEASANT / HUNGARIAN PARTRIDGE / GEESE AND DUCKS FEEDING PROGRAM 2015

With a successful feeding program in the harsh winter of 2014, we had more birds to feed in 2015. Winter didn't arrive until late January but was very intense and consistent from that time until April with record-breaking amounts of snow. Anticipating that a feeding program may be needed Souris Wildlife Staff applied to the PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund and were fortunate in their application to direct \$900 towards this feeding program that also included Hungarian Partridge, Wild Geese and Ducks.

Souris Wildlife had volunteers from Howe Bay to East Point to operate approximately 32 feeding stations. These feeding stations were imperative for the survival of these birds during the times of deep snow.

Our Hungarian Partridge population is very small and seems to be focused at East Point and North Lake. Pheasants have the greatest populations in Rollo Bay West, Lower Rollo Bay, Souris River and Souris Line Rd. Needless to say we also have them in Sheep Pond, Fortune, Howe Bay, New Zealand, St. Catherine's and Chepstow.

Directors, Billy Gillam and Jimmy MacDonald operated feeding stations for waterfowl at Gowan Brae and East of Souris.

Souris Wildlife Branch would like to thank all of these wonderful volunteers that operated feeding stations and played an important role in survival for these birds during this past winter. Hopefully we will get a good hatch this spring and our bird numbers will increase again for 2016



Hungarian Partridge, Photo taken by Judy MacDonald



CBC's Nancy Russell interviewing Bob Gajmerac and Fred Cheverie about Bob's feeding station in Rollo Bay.



Geese and duck feeding station at Gowan Brae

SOURIS & AREA WILDLIFE AGRICULTURE DAY

Souris & Area Branch has partnered with Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada many times over the last ten years. In recent years we have been operating pilot projects involving spring ploughing verses fall ploughing and their impact on water quality, on the farms of Townshend Potato Co Ltd, Rollo Bay Holdings Ltd and Arthur Mooney & Sons Ltd.

On **June 19th** from 1-3 pm we have organized a farm day that is open to the public. Yefang Jiang from Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada will give a short presentation on his scientific research on the impacts of spring ploughing verses fall ploughing on water quality. This presentation will also include his findings of yields and economics of each type of ploughing.

Amanda Malenic from the University of Guelph will also give a short presentation on the length of time nitrates remain in the water table from a research project she is studying on Arthur Mooney & Sons Farm.

Pending weather and insects, Brian Murray will give a short demonstration on instrumentation used to collect data for these projects.

The general public is also invited to take a bottle of water from their home to the Souris Striders Ski Club for the purpose of getting a **free** nitrate test (1-3 pm). This is open to everyone from within our management area and its **FREE**.

People will meet at Souris Striders Ski Club at 1:00pm from where they will travel to the North End of Souris Line Rd (Field south of MacInnis Dam) to view the farm site. After the demo-visit, presentations will be given at Souris Striders Ski Club where snacks and refreshments will be served.



Join us on June 19th for Farm Day!

ATLANTIC SALMON CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation (ASCF) is an independent, federally incorporated, non-profit organization, which was established through a one-time grant of \$30 million from the Government of Canada. The interest generated from investment of the grant is used to support activities related to the conservation of the wild Atlantic salmon and its habitat. The goal of the Foundation is to help achieve healthy and sustainable wild Atlantic salmon stocks in Atlantic Canada and Quebec through partnerships among volunteer conservation groups, Aboriginal organizations, governments, and others.

The Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation board of directors were ecstatic to have been recently awarded \$79,500 from the ASCF for the next three years subject to performance. The Souris & Area Branch has a rich history with the ASCF after receiving \$120,000 from this fund over the past six years. This fund enables us to carry on the successful work especially in our North Side rivers that have sustainable runs of salmon (North Lake, Priest Pond, Cross and Naufrage rivers). It has also allowed us to get sections of Hay, Bear and Cow rivers opened up and we observe a return of Atlantic salmon in these systems. It also allows us to explore sections of Fortune and Souris Rivers where we have observed "redds" that causes us suspicion about the possibility of salmon. We hope to have more access to electro-fishing equipment in the summer of 2015 where we hope to put forth a stronger effort to document the existence of salmon in each of these rivers if they exist. Another wonderful feature of the ASCF is that it is a "trust fund" so we are able to use this fund as "matching dollars" to lever other money from various federal agencies which is an enormous feature of attaining funds.

The PEI Liquor Control Commission has been a partner with the ASCF as an additional source of funding over the past four years. Each fall they put forward a promotion in Island Liquor outlets entitled "Island Rivers Worth Protecting." In each outlet special products are discounted with that discount going directly to the ASCF fund. In recent years this promotion has averaged approximately \$20,000 annually to the PEI sector of this fund. Souris & Area Wildlife Branch is very appreciative of this fund as it enables our organization to continue to improve salmon rivers in our area.

PEI WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FUND

The Wildlife Conservation Fund provides funding for the protection and enhancement of wildlife and wildlife habitats on Prince Edward Island. The fund is generated from the annual license fees from anglers, hunters and trappers. It also is the committee that disperses funds from the "Conservation License Plate Fund" which was introduced in 2013. Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation has a rich history securing funds from this fund and much of the in-stream work done in our management area is directly related to this fund. The concept of people adding to this fund by purchasing conservation license plates has increased this fund greatly and we very much thank the people who choose these types of license plates. Souris & Area Branch submitted two applications this spring to this fund, one to assist with our general in-stream work and a second one involving research on our "Ancestral Strain" of Atlantic salmon. We were successful in both applications and generally saw our traditional share increase by approximately 200%.

The PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund Committee which consists of 10 members:

- three representatives from the angling community;
- three representatives from the hunting community;
- one representative from the trapping community;
- one representative from community watershed groups;
- one representative of non-consumptive users such as birdwatchers and hikers;
- one bio-diversity representative and
- one representative from the Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

This committee consists of volunteers representing various geographic areas of PEI that take the time to meet regularly and disperse this fund by carefully reading and ranking the applications so the funds can be distributed honestly and fairly according to their mandate.



SRS students learning about Atlantic Salmon at North Lake Creek in Spring 2014. Photo by Jill MacPhee



SRS students touring Souris River in Fall 2014. Photo by Jill MacPhee



FRACKING MEETING UPDATE

On January 19th, 2015 at Souris Striders Ski Club the Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation hosted a meeting on Fracking. Presentations were given by a new citizens group entitled "Don't Frack PEI". This group is taking the message across the province with the purpose on convincing government to establish a permanent ban on fracking anywhere on PEI.

Andrew Lush, one of the presenters gave an overview of Fracking, or Hydraulic Fracturing, is a method of gas (or oil) extraction that poisons the air, uses vast quantities of water, blights the landscape, causes massive truck traffic, and leaves toxic chemicals in the ground which will eventually contaminate our drinking water. It is currently not allowed in many jurisdictions including all four neighbouring provinces, and we must be adamant that it shall never come to Prince Edward Island. There are sustainable alternatives, and the geology of PEI is simply not suited to this dirty and unsustainable technology.

High Volume Hydraulic Fracturing (Fracking) is a very new technology, not used before 2005, that involves drilling wells that turn through 90 degrees and can pass many kilometres underground – even under your property without your permission. Fracking wells, from industry documentation, fail during drilling 6% of the time, and 50% or more will fail within a human lifetime. Failure can (and does) cause methane and other gasses to enter the drinking water, making it undrinkable and very dangerous. Chemicals used in the fracking process can also leak from wells, and have caused serious sickness in humans and farm animals in many places across the USA. Many of these places now have their domestic water shipped in by tanker. In 2014, there were 243 cases in Pennsylvania alone in which fracking companies were found by state regulators to have contaminated private drinking water wells.

Fracking a well uses about 20 million litres of water, and this then becomes radioactive toxic waste and there is no known safe disposal method for this waste. If fracking comes to PEI, it has been estimated that there will be around 1,000 wells. Fracking is the last desperate gasp of a dying oil and gas industry, and we must be vigilant so that we don't end up letting them destroy our fishing, farming, and tourism industries – and leave us with undrinkable water. This is happening all over the USA. Our provincial government is currently keeping their options open, so we need to keep telling them that we don't want fracking on our Island. See the website www.dontfrackpei.com for more information, videos, scientific papers, and much more.



Marsh Marigold. Photo taken by Sandra Meade

ANNUAL SOURIS & AREA WILDLIFE BRANCH LOBSTER FUNDRAISING DINNER

Location: Eastern Kings Sportsplex

Date: Sunday August 9th, 2015

Serving: 4:30 - 6:30 pm

Cost: \$25.00 per person

Dinner: Traditional shelled lobster with all the fixings, capturing many local flavors. Your ticket includes lobster dinner, hors d'oeuvres, homemade chowder, dessert, tea and coffee and your annual membership to Souris & Area Wildlife Branch.

Other: Silent auction, cash bar, displays and booths. Cash Or Cheques can be made payable to: Souris & Area Branch Of PEI Wildlife Federation.

Ticket Purchases: Phone the office at 902-687-4115, email: sourisareawildlife@gmail.com or contact any of our directors: Nathan Cheverie (Souris River), Justin McKinnon (McKinnon's Point), Erica MacDonald (Little Pond), Fan MacIntyre (Souris), Jimmy MacDonald (Black Pond), Joe MacDonald (East Point), Billy Gillam (Souris), Brian MacDonald (St. Catherine's) or Fred Ward (St. Catherine's).

You may also contact our staff: Mary Finch (Chepstow) and Fred Cheverie (St. Catherine's).

Tickets can be purchased in advance, and limited quantities will be sold.



Enjoying the delicious meal at last year's lobster dinner. Photo by SAB

ECOSYSTEM MONITORING ACTIVITIES

Understanding the current health of our watersheds is important to our organization as it helps us pinpoint focus areas for stream restoration and enhancement activities as well as ensure the conservation of natural resources within our large management zone. By monitoring such things as water temperature, water quality and fish numbers we can improve our baseline knowledge on ecological health.

This spring, we are installing temperature loggers in some of our watersheds. These devices measure the water temperature every half hour and then store the information on the unit until they are collected at the end of the season. Higher water temperatures are often an indicator of poor water quality as fish species such as Brook Trout and Atlantic Salmon require cool water temperatures for their survival.

Looking at the composition of the aquatic bug community, we can measure water quality as the presence of certain bugs can indicate both good and poor water conditions. Join us at our upcoming events to learn more about aquatic bugs and why they are so important to the ecosystem. (See article on next page for more information).

Plans for this summer, include the increased electrofishing in many different watersheds to gain a better understanding of the fish abundance within our region.

We would like to thank TD Friends of the Environment for their support of our monitoring work.



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation



Top: Picture of temperature logger. Bottom: SAB staff installing temperature logger in Fortune River watershed to measure water temperatures over the spring, summer and fall seasons. Photos by Becky Petersen

ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

On April 8th, Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation hosted its annual meeting. A new executive was voted in with unanimous consent. Our President is Kevin Robertson from Souris River a long-time volunteer with our organization. Our Secretary is Erica MacDonald from Little Pond. Nathan Cheverie from Souris River is our new Treasurer. Our Vice President is Billy Gillam from Souris. Brian MacDonald from St. Catherine's will serve as our Past President. Fred Cheverie will serve as Kings County representative to the PEI Wildlife Federation. Directors include: Justin McKinnon (McKinnon's Point), Fred Ward (St. Catherine's), Joe MacDonald (East Point), Jimmy MacDonald (Black Pond) and Fan MacIntyre (Souris).

Mary Finch, Project Coordinator with Souris Wildlife Branch, gave a Power-Point Presentation on the branch

activities for 2014-2015. Our guest speaker was Scott Roloson from Belfast a PhD candidate at UPEI who gave a presentation on Rainbow Trout which is part of his research which the audience found very interesting.



Scott Roloson, hard at work along North Lake Creek with Atlantic Salmon research. Photo by Becky Petersen

IMAGES FROM THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF THE FISHING SEASON 2015



Fishing along North Lake Creek at Lakeville Bridge in April 2015. Photos by Michael Jacklyn and Mary Finch

UPCOMING EVENTS

Come learn more about our local environment while helping us complete restoration and research activities.

Mark these dates on your calendar!

Thursday, June 11th, 6 – 8 pm. Plant trees, shrubs and wildflowers. Legacy Park, Souris Line Road

Sunday, June 14th, 2-5 pm. Atlantic Salmon Day!!! Great family event! Learn all about our native fish species! Larkin’s Pond. Please see article in this newsletter for more information.

Monday, June 15th, 7 – 10am. Bird Walk with Garry Gregory, PEI Wildlife Biologist. Townshend Woodlot

Wednesday, June 17th, 6- 8 pm. Amazing aquatic bugs. Learn about the critters that the fish eat. Souris River at Gowan Brae

Friday, June 19th, 1- 3pm. Agriculture Day! Join staff from Ag Canada and Souris Wildlife to learn more about farms and watersheds. Please see article in this newsletter for more information.

Sunday, June 28th, 2-4pm. Amazing aquatic bugs. Learn about the critters that the fish eat! North Lake Creek at the Baltic.

Wednesday, July 8th, 6-8pm. In-stream workday installing brush mattresses. Get your hands dirty while helping to improve aquatic habitat. Location to be determined. Please visit our website or give us a call at 902-687-4115 for more information.

Saturday, July 11th, 9-11am. In-stream workday installing brush mattresses. Get your hands dirty while helping to improve aquatic habitat. Location to be determined. Please visit our website or give us a call at 902-687-4115 for more information.

Sunday, August 9th, 4:30- 6:30 pm. 3rd Annual Lobster Dinner at the Eastern Kings Sportplex

August 29th, Celebrate the 10th Anniversary of Basin Head Marine Protected Area. Join us at Basin Head to celebrate the designation of this sensitive area.



Join us on a Bird Walk with Garry Gregory on June 15th. Photo by Wanda Bailey



Join us on June 17th and June 28th to look at aquatic bugs. Photo by TUC

We look forward to seeing you out at these events. Please continue to check our website: www.souriswl.com and our Facebook page for updates and details.

Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation Membership & Donation Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/Province: _____

Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Payment

Please check one or both:

- Membership (\$10)
- Donations

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

(Note: An official tax receipt can only be issued for the value of the donation and will not include the \$10 membership fee)

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS: KEVIN ROBERTSON

I'm honoured to have the opportunity to serve as president of the Souris & Area Wildlife Branch. I have served for four years as treasurer and feel I have the experience to lead our branch with new ideas over the next few years. My years as a commercial fisherman and my experience with the PEI Fishermen's Association will assist me with negotiations in changes in regulations that control our anadromous fish populations.

We built an 18 ft. canoe this winter in my garage as a community school project. The material was supplied by the Souris & Area Branch and it turned out great. At our last regular wildlife meeting we have decided that the branch should keep this canoe and use it as a source of promotion for our branch. It has been already requested by the PEI Community Schools Association as the model project to be displayed at their 50th anniversary celebration. It will also be displayed at our Annual Lobster Fundraising Dinner on August 9th at Souris Sportsplex. It also has been requested to participate in the 10th Anniversary of the Basin Head Marine Protected Area Celebrations at Basin Head in August.

I would like to invite everyone to attend our Atlantic Salmon Day at Larkin's Pond on June 14th, 2015. There will be activities for the kids, a fishing derby for the largest White Perch with cash prizes. We will have extra fishing rods for kids to fish, fly casting demonstration, barbeque and a general good time. Hope to see you all there.

COORDINATOR'S COMMENTS: FRED CHEVERIE

In previous newsletters, I have indicated that with the hiring of Mary Finch that I would be taking a backseat in terms of operation of Souris & Area Wildlife Branch. Mary tricked me and became pregnant; Mary and her husband Stephen Flynn are expecting their second child in late July. Mary is going to be sadly missed during the next year and I will remain at the helm until her return.

To fill the void we have hired Becky Peterson from Roseneath a very experienced watershed person with a strong scientific background and tremendous experience within the aquatic world.

Tony and Sandra Meade will be returning with us for their fifth consecutive season. Tony is one of our chainsaw/supervisors and both have a strong passion of the environment and are tremendous workers and wonderful people. Michael Jacklyn has returned for his seventh consecutive season and he is our resident trapper and chainsaw operator. Souris Wildlife are lucky to have these seasonal employees that have a wealth of information on each of our watersheds.

This year we have employed Crystal Jarvis a summer student from Munn's Road that is attending the Environmental Studies Program at Holland College.

At the time of writing this column we still have no word on any of the provincial programs that we have applied for, if these types of programs are not sustained it will be a lean year for watershed work across the province.

ABOUT US:

The Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation is a non-profit, environmental organization dedicated to the conservation, protection and enhancement of watersheds in north eastern Kings County. Our management area accounts for approximately 62,000 hectares representing about 12% of PEI, including 24 individual watersheds.

The goals of our organization include:

1. To establish North Eastern Kings County as the "Sports Fishing Capital" of Prince Edward Island
2. The management of natural resources and enhancement of fish, wildlife and their habitat through watershed planning, protection and restoration initiatives
3. To become the model watershed group on Prince Edward Island
4. To bring unprecedented environmental awareness to our stake holders to create a more informed general public capable of eliciting progressive environmental action
5. To promote our management area as one of the most pristine natural areas in Prince Edward Island through ecotourism ventures to attract visitors to the local area

We meet the 2nd Wednesday of every month at the Souris Striders Ski Lodge. Meetings start at 7pm and are open to the public. The next meetings are scheduled for June 10th and July 8th.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Mailing Address: PO Box 692 - Souris, PEI - C0A 2B0

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Email: sourisareawildlife@gmail.com

Website: www.souriswl.com

Facebook: Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation

