Souris & Area Watershed News

November 2012 Issue 37

Souris & Area Wildlife Launches New Website: www.souriswl.com

The Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation is pleased to announce the launch of our new website. The website features a new, modern design with easily accessible information about important watersheds, signature projects, activities, funding partners and much more. It is important to note a minor change in our website address. The new website can be found at **www.souriswl.com**. The old website used the .ca domain.

We are also pleased to introduce a new feature titled "A View from Eastern Kings". This depicts a daily photo showcasing a natural aspect within our management area. If you would like to submit a photo, email ggregory@souriswl.com. All photos will be protected so they cannot be copied by users. Acknowledgement will be given to the photographer.

We encourage photographers, young and old, experienced and inexperienced, to contribute photos. We are very excited to move forward with our new website. Be sure to watch for updates!

Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation
PO Box 692
Souris, PEI
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Website: www.souriswl.com
Facebook: Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation

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Volunteers Needed for Atlantic Salmon Redd Surveys

Souris & Area Wildlife is looking for volunteers to assist with our annual Atlantic salmon redd surveys. Each year, our rivers are walked to assess the number of redds. A salmon redd is a depression created in the cobble by the back and forth action of the tail of the female. The female deposits her eggs which are fertilized by the male and then covered with cobble. These appear "red" as the cobble has been turned over.

Atlantic salmon redd in North Lake Creek (2011)

Atlantic salmon are an anadromous fish, meaning they have life cycle stages in both fresh and salt water habitats. Eggs are fertilized in the autumn and emerge as aelvin the following spring. Salmon go through many transformations from aelvin to fry to parr. This developmental period can last between two to six years depending upon water temperature and food availability.

In the spring, parr will lost the vertical markings, called parr marks, on their lateral surface and develop a silvery coat to become better camouflage at sea. This is called the smolt stage. Smolts are generally between 12 and 24 centimeters long. They are now ready to leave their natal streams and migrate thousands of kilometers to feeding grounds off the coast of Greenland.

After over a year at sea, smolt will travel over 4, 000 km to the freshwater streams in which they were parr to spawn. This can take place between April and November.

In our rivers we have noticed spawning activities taking place in two distinct periods. The first, nicknamed the 'Halloween Run', takes place in early November. In 2011, with the high availability of staff, we were able to walk more kilometers of stream for longer periods of time. With our walks continuing into December we noticed new redds in areas which we had already walked.

This year, with limited availability of staff we are seeking volunteers to assist with surveying. We will provide a training session and each group will have a staff or volunteer with previous redd assessment experience.

The survey involves walking in stream, identifying redds and marking their coordinates. Necessary equipment includes polarized glasses and chest waders. We can supply equipment for those who do not have their own.

If you are interested in assisting or would like more information contact us at (902) 687-4115. After completing preliminary assessments, we have decided to start our surveys on November 26th, pending weather conditions.

If you would like to learn more about Atlantic salmon consult the Atlantic Salmon Federations website at www. asf.ca or the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundations website at www.salmonconservation.ca.

Atlantic salmon parr collected from North Lake Creek

Fox at East Point
Photograph by Joanne Dunphy

Interested in Becoming a Member of Souris & Area Wildlife?

2013 Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation memberships are now available. Membership fees are $10 and were included with the purchase of a ticket to the 2011 Souris & Area Wildlife Fundraising Dinner.

There are many benefits of becoming a member:

- Participate free of charge in Souris & Area Wildlife activities
- Free catch and release fishing at Rollo Bay Pond (in season)
- Receive electronic copies or recent newsletters and regular updates
- Voting privileges on resolutions at annual meetings
- Enhance and preserve the environment in Eastern Kings through community support

Memberships can be purchased at our office at the Souris Striders Ski Club or by mailing payment to:

Souris & Area Wildlife Branch
PO Box 692
Souris, PEI
C0A 2B0

November Regular Monthly Meeting: Angling Regulations

Souris & Area Wildlife would like to invite all interested stakeholders to our regular monthly meeting on November 28th, 2012 at 7:00 pm at Souris Access PEI. The meeting will focus on recreational fishing regulations and management.

UPEI graduate student Scott Roloson will open with a presentation on his recent work with Rainbow trout. Non-native Rainbow trout have over taken many rivers on Prince Edward Island and are of concern as they are out competing native salmonids for resources such as food and spawning habitat. Roloson is attempting to better understand the movement patterns of the Rainbow trout through the use of acoustic transmitters. He is also investigating the relationship between the coexistence of Rainbow trout and other salmonids in PEI rivers.

The second half of the meeting will focus on angling regulations in our management area, with emphasis on Souris River. From this meeting, we will submit recommendations to the PEI Fish & Wildlife Division for the 2013 Angling Summary. Fish & Wildlife will be hosting a meeting in December for watershed groups to share their recommendations.

We are interested in hearing from all interested stakeholders and encourage all to attend with your ideas. Current angling regulations can be found in the 2012 angling summary. This can be accessed through the "Publications" section on our website.

Annual Wildlife Dinner Cancelled

The Board of Directors of the Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation have made the tough decision to cancel our annual ``Wildlife Fundraising Dinner.`` For the past 31 years, Souris & Area Wildlife has treated 200 guests to a hot roast Buffalo and Atlantic salmon dinner. All monies raised from this event were used to assist the branch in wildlife management efforts.

With the pending sale of the Buffalo ranch and its herd, it was impossible to secure meat for this year's dinner within the necessary time frame. We needed confirmation of the acquisition of the buffalo by mid-October to ensure adequate preparations could be made in order to hold our dinner in November. Other sources of acquiring buffalo were contacted with no success.

The Souris & Area Branch has decided to host a lobster supper in July as an alternative. The format will remain similar with the exact date and location to be determined. All memberships will be honored until the date of the dinner. Souris & Area Wildlife would like to thank all those who have attended the dinner each year along with the businesses and individuals who supported us through volunteer hours, and monetary and prize donations.

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Atlantic Salmon Relocated to Hay River

Hay River has been without annual runs of Atlantic salmon since 2002. Their disappearance can be attributed to beaver blockages. Heavy beaver activity in this watershed has caused many problems. Firstly, beaver dams impede fish passage which hinders migratory and developmental cycles. They also halt water flow which increases water temperature, decreases dissolved oxygen concentrations and causes siltation in spawning habitat.

Over the past few years, in particular, remedial work has been done to restore Hay River to its full capacity to sustain Atlantic salmon populations. With the assistance of local trappers, as well as our certified staff trapper, nuisance beavers have been removed In 2011, nine beaver dams were removed and five beavers live trapped. In 2012, neither beavers nor dams were encountered, although it is quite possible there is beaver activity higher in the watershed. We are confident we have the beaver population to manageable levels in Hay River. Many kilometers of stream have been enhanced including areas which have never been opened before. There is unimpeded access from freshwater to tidal to facilitate the anadromous life cycle of Atlantic salmon.

Resulting from the restoration work, Hay River possesses qualities which are favorable for Atlantic salmon to flourish. There is sufficient riffle and pool habitat with exposed cobble bottom promoting spawning and development phases. The watershed is approximately 84% forested with little agricultural influence.

On October 30th, with the assistance of PEI Freshwater Fish Biologist Rosie MacFarlane and Biologist Daryl Guignion, 435 Atlantic salmon parr were extracted from North Lake Creek. Three separate areas within the North Lake watershed were electrofished to collect the fish.

The parr were later released in Hay River. All fish were fin clipped for identification purposes. We anticipate returns in a few years as these parr will continue to develop and eventually smoltify and leave for the sea.

Since Atlantic salmon are considered a species at risk, we feel it is important to increase their geographic range to aid in their recovery. This was the first of this type of transfer on PEI. In 2013, we plan to transfer parr to Cow River, pending permitting. It had annual runs of Atlantic salmon until 2002. This work would not have been possible without the aid of funding partners such as the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation.

Director Brian MacDonald releasing Atlantic salmon parr in Hay River

SRHS Grade 8 Students Partake in Tree Planting Day in Gowan Brae

The Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation was pleased to host Gary Schneider and his staff from the MacPhail Woods Ecological Forestry Project, along with the Souris Regional High School Grade 8 classes, for an afternoon of tree planting.

With support from Environment Canada's EcoAction Community Funding Program and the provincial Greening Spaces Program, this planting is part of a series that will take place across Prince Edward Island in 20 different watersheds. The planting took place in the Souris River watershed on the north side of the Gowan Brae causeway.

A total of 156 trees, shrubs and ferns were planted. The most abundant species planted included Eastern Larch, Sugar Maple, Willow, Eastern Hemlock and Hairy Sweet Cicely, among others.

The students were taught proper planting techniques. The plants we used were container stock which requires a simple planting technique Generally; these can be successfully planted at any time throughout the growing season. The first step is to dig a hole approximately the same depth as the container and 2-3 times as wide to allow for expansion of the roots. Refill the hole so the plant is at the same soil height as it was in the container. Ensure the soil is level with the ground and no mounds exist. Plants can then be mulched using leaves or wood chips.

A huge thank you to the MacPhail Woods Ecological Forestry Project staff, the students, and their teachers Danielle Arsneault & Kathryn Rajamanie for their tremendous efforts in helping to strengthen the riparian zone. This was a great opportunity for the students to engage in a hands on learning experience beyond the confines of a classroom.

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Watershed Evaluations of Beneficial Management Practices (WEBs) Project Ending in 2013

The Watershed Evaluation of Beneficial Management Practices, or WEBs, project will be completed on March 31st. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of nitrate levels in ground water in spring and fall ploughed fields accounting for the associated economic costs of both timings.

There is potential for the continuation of a similar program pending available funding. Planning is underway for a seminar in Souris for all interested producers where project researchers will be present the results of their work. Some preliminary results have been compiled by Yefang Jiang, Senior Hydrogeologist with the Science and Technology Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The following preliminary results have been released:

- Nitrate leaching from the sides of fall plowing of forage crops (mix of red clover and timothy or rye) appeared to be higher than from the sides of spring plowing at both sites within the Souris River watershed in the 2010/2011 season
- Increased nitrate leaching appeared to be associated with herbicidal treatment rather than solely from fall plowing alone
- Nitrate leaching from fall plowing sides could be as much as 60-70% higher than from the spring plowing sides (Note: This extent only applies to the forage phase within the rotation rotation cycle)

Rollo Bay Holdings planting their field in Souris River (WEBs Site II)

- Nitrate leaching at Site I (Former MacIsaac Site in Bear River) was higher than at Site II (Rollo Bay Holdings Site in Souris River) in 2010/2011 season, which was likely due to better quality of the forage crop at Site I

These preliminary results were based on data from one growing season and are subject to many uncertainties. It is uncertain if the contrasting nitrate levels were exclusively due to the different plowing practices. Data from multiple cycles of potato rotation and in depth modeling exercises will be required to perform improved assessments on the environmental benefits of delayed plowing of forage crops with respect to nitrate leaching. We hope this program will continue past 2013 as we continue to work with our producers to improve practices to better our environment.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada   Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada

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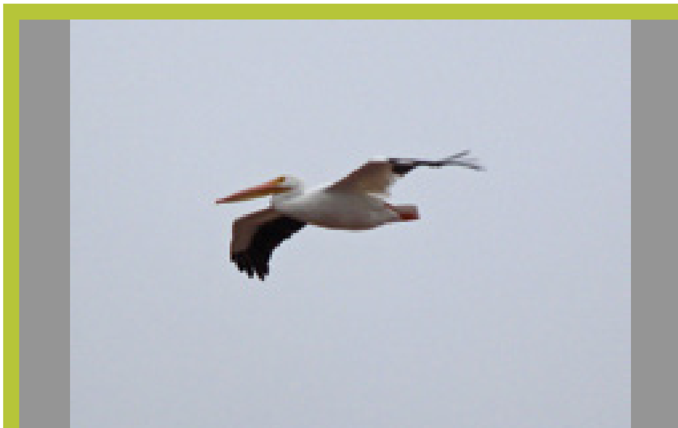
American White Pelican at Diligent Pond

On Thursday, November 8, East Point resident Joe MacDonald spotted an unusual bird at Diligent Pond. Souris & Area Wildlife were contacted and staff further investigated. We speculated it was potentially an American White Pelican.

Birders from the Island Natural History Society arrived on Friday morning to identify the bird. They officially confirmed it was an American White Pelican. Speculation would suggest this bird was driven off course by Hurricane Sandy as it is a rare occurrence in this area. There was also one reported off the coast of Maine the week before. Attempts are being made to determine if this is the same bird.

Their distribution is mainly on the interior of North America stretching as far North as Northwest Territories to Texas in the southern United States. Generally, they prefer warm water, both fresh and brackish, as habitat. Their diet consists mainly of fish with each bird eating up to four pounds of fish per day. Typically, they migrate South in September and October.

The bird has since moved and was last spotted about 150 meters offshore on the south side of East Point Lighthouse. It should only be a matter of time before the bird is back on the right course and moving South.



All photographs by Dwaine Oakley

Natural History Society of PEI

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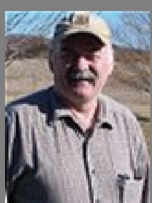
Coordinator's Comments

Souris & Area Wildlife staff has, been actively involved in delivering presentations in schools this fall. The three SRHS Grade 8 classes learned about watersheds, erosion and local issues relating to both. The Agri-Science class at SRHS learned about environmental farming practices and agricultural research taking place in our management area. The Grade 12 Geography class at Morell Regional High School learned about GPS and GIS and their practical applications in watershed management.

In all cases we found the classes very enthusiastic, respectful and generally very interested in our presentations. Gary Schneider from MacPhail Woodlot was very impressed with the enthusiasm and work ethic presented by the students on a recent field trip to plant trees at Gowan Brae.

I have received calls from students interested in volunteering for a day to count Atlantic salmon redds. It is wonderful to see the involvement of students which leads to an optimistic future for the environment in our area.

My assistant, Jill MacPhee has taken the lead in the preparation and delivery of these presentations and she has become a very valuable asset of the Souris & Area Wildlife Branch.



Fred Cheverie

Watershed Coordinator of the Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation

President's Comments

The American White Pelican attracted plenty of attention. East Point Road was busy as any day during the tourist season. This was only the third historical recorded visitation of this bird on PEI. It was a big bird with a wing span of 8-10 feet and weighed between 20-30 pounds.

Bird watching has become one of our fastest growing recreational activities in North America. PEI is an exceptionally good area to observe birds with approximately 333 various species.

East Point is considered one of the "hot spots" in the world to observe birds, as many on their migratory routes pass through this area. We have a buffer zone on the eastern tip of PEI, east of the windmills, which serves as a place for birds to rest and orientate themselves for their next phase of their migration.

Joe MacDonald – President of the Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation

Interested in making a donation to the Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation?

Simply fill out this form and mail it to us:

Name: ______________________________

Address: ______________________________

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City/Province: ______________________________

Postal Code: ______________________________

Telephone: ______________________________

Email: ______________________________

Amount Enclosed: $____________

Cheques may be made payable to the Prince Edward Island Wildlife Federation. This is important for charitable tax purposes.