



Photograph taken along the Souris Line Road; courtesy of Janelle MacLeod

Souris & Area Watershed News

Souris and Area Branch
of the PEI Wildlife Federation

PO Box 692
Souris, PEI
COA 2B0
902-687-4115

sourisareawildlife@gmail.com
www.souriswl.com

Like our Facebook Page
Follow us on Twitter



A Successful Career Day for a Souris High School Student



Conner Ching suiting up for the day

Grade 9 student, Conner Ching, chose to spend his career day with Souris Wildlife and we could not be more grateful. He arrived dressed for the weather, with a great attitude, and ready to take on the cold weather. Field Technician, Luke Chaisson, was his mentor for the day and played a huge role in ensuring Conner was given a positive and memorable experience with our organization. Conner proved to have an excellent work ethic and maintained a positive outlook even after getting wet in the stream on an already brisk day. We absolutely loved having Conner join our staff for the day. Please see below the write-up Conner provided on his day with the Souris and Area Wildlife Branch staff.

“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work with Souris Wildlife today. My name is Conner Ching, I’m 14 and in Grade 9. Some of my favorite activities are snorkeling, soccer and powerlifting. I have a brother named Tristen and a sister named Ava. My parents are Clint and Ilse Ching. My parents like to travel without the kids.

I want to be a marine biologist, so I was excited to work in the streams today. Today was probably one of the best days of my life, other than the fact that it was so cold. I loved walking up the rivers and seeing the scenery. The best part was being able to hold and see a Brook trout. I learned that beavers are very bad because when they dam up a stream, they cause flooding. I also learned how to set a beaver trap. Luke was awesome to guide me around the whole day. He helped me when I fell in the stream and he taught me lots about what Souris Wildlife does.

If I could do this again, I would any day. I hope that I can work with you as a summer student next summer.”

Thank you again,
Conner

GOWAN BRAE WRAP UP

With fall coming to a close, so does our salt water restoration project in Gowan Brae for the year. Over the summer and in early fall our field crew has made tremendous leaps and bounds in the restoration of Souris River's salt water marsh. Operations began in early July when staff began installing more brush matting onto our ongoing project just West of the Gowan Brae box culvert. Once installed, the crew called upon Souris Wildlife's trusty invention, the "Silt Gator", to help pump sediment onto the brush matting. After a few weeks of pumping brush matting we saw a rise of up to 10 inches of new hard sediment within the 400 square foot area.



Coir fiber logs installed at Gowan Brae

Then began stage two of the project, funded by The Department of Fisheries and Ocean's Coastal Restoration Fund. We created three test areas to individually examine the effectiveness of coir fibre logs (made from recycled coconut strands), a jute oyster bag retaining wall and conventional brush matting. These three materials were all installed in 20-meter intervals along the Southeast side of the first inlet. These three unique ways of restoring salt water marshes will be studied over the next two of the four-year project and whichever way proves most successful will be implemented in the last two years of the pilot project to cover a larger portion of the first Southeast inlet. Our crews have balanced their efforts between pumping sediment behind each retaining wall with ensuring each trial is conducted in a way that gives each the best chance of success. At the end of each year we will be planting each trial area with cord grass in hopes the roots will hold the new sediment in place while simultaneously protecting the shoreline and facilitating water filtration. We would like to thank the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for funding this project and all fly/bait fishers for being very understanding and helpful as we pump some of the favourite fishing holes to ensure the sustainability of fish populations.

2018 EEL GRASS RESTORATION

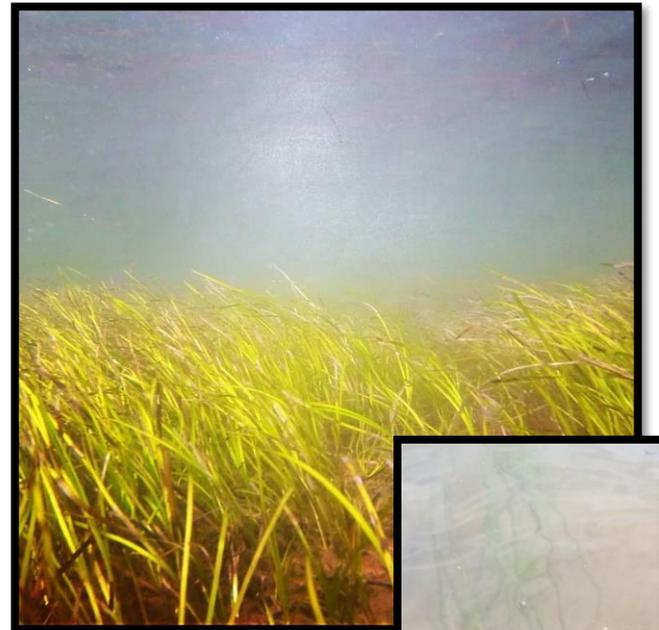
Funding from the both the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), and Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program (RFCPP) allowed Souris and Area Wildlife Branch the ability to plant three new eel grass plots this year (two in Basin Head and one at the mouth of Souris River).

The planting process begins with eel grass shoots (with roots intact) being collected from Souris beach after a bit of windy weather occurs. The staff begin by drilling two to three holes through empty oyster shells, they then thread the eel grass shoots through the holes which gives the eelgrass the advantage of having a makeshift holdfast. Why oyster shells you may ask? They help weigh down the eel grass shoots while forming roots and their concave centre collects falling sediment for the roots to form in.

Working alongside DFO research scientist, Irene Novaczek, we picked out the two best suited sites for eel grass planting in Basin Head based on already existing eel grass shoots and water depth and current. We designed the plots to cover a 10-meter x 10-meter area of bottom in the hopes of the new eel grass eventually covered a large portion of the intended plot area. We repeated this process in Souris River at a site across from Leslie's Pond where we had great success with eel grass planting in 2017.

We are always keen for projects such as these because eel grass provides habitat for marine life such as mummichogs, flounder, hermit crabs, and other fish and crustaceans. An abundance of eel grass leads to a sustainable environment as it provides both a sheltering area as well as a foraging area while simultaneously reducing erosion.

We would like to thank DFO's RFCPP fund for funding these projects and also the Colville Bay Oyster Company for graciously supplying us with the oyster shells.



We Bid Farewell to Green Crab Fishing for 2018

Watershed Coordinator, Fred Cheverie, green crab fishing at Basin Head.



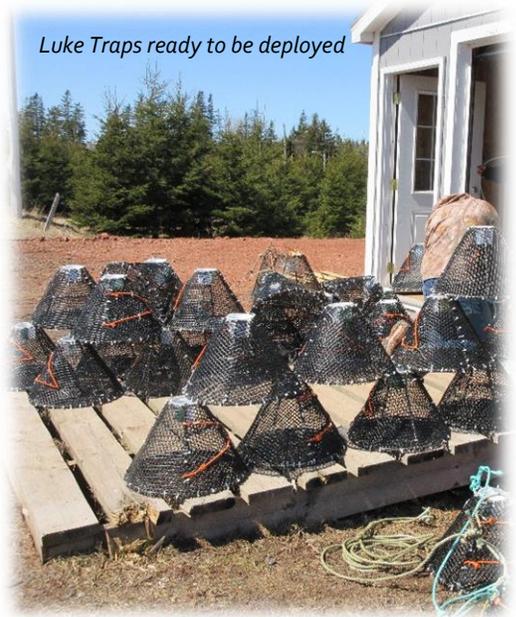
With year two of our four-year Basin Head European Green crab fishing project officially in the books we have noticed substantial changes in the basin. We initially began green crab fishing in August of 2017 giving us the advantage of seeing the changes first hand. We are seeing increasing amounts eel grass in the lagoon area and in the Northeast Arm. We believe our fishing is making a positive and direct impact due to eel grass growth. By removing the Green crab, we are diminishing the presence of the species and their ability to uproot the grass for cover and food. As a result of the increased eel grass, more waterfowl have been frequenting the basin due to a larger concentration of small fish which they predate.

With Green crab fishing itself we have made a few changes from 2017 to 2018. We came up with a new trap design, the "Luke" trap, designed with inspiration of Snow crab pots but on a much smaller scale. This design compared to the fukui trap we were using before are maintenance free and don't allow the crab to escape as easily, thus increasing catches. We have increased the number of traps we are fishing compared to last year as well, adding eight to increase coverage and assist in tracking the population distribution throughout the seasons. We have stationed two traps in the mouth of the basin this year with the hope to catch the Green crab as they move from the deep water of the ocean

to the warmer climate within the basin. However, these two traps and others stationed closest to the mouth exhibited the worst fishing of the year. This leads us to believe that large populations of green crab are burrowing underneath the marsh for the winter and coming out when the water temperature increases rather than coming in from the ocean. Currently, this is only speculation as more research is required before this can be proven.

This year we began fishing in May rather than starting in August, as we did in 2017. While spring catches were relatively low compared to average catches in summer and fall, we noticed that we caught more females, most importantly spawning females. A single Green crab can carry up to 180,000 eggs making spawning a very crucial time to fish them. We observed that crabs were most abundant once water temperatures started to increase in the latter part of the summer. Large males dominated catches during this time compared to smaller females dominating in the spring of the year. The best green crab fishing was consistently the traps closest to the bridge and contained very little by-catch, which is usually the native Rock crab. We are not exactly sure what is causing this area to be so productive, but we have created some hypotheses to explain this. Firstly, the colder water from the spring-fed stream close by is playing a part, the soft silty bottom is better for small crabs and the decrease of predation by Rock crab because of the amount of fresh water entering from the stream, and/or potentially the lower water levels. In the upcoming years we plan to experiment with new techniques in trapping green crab and testing varied types of bait in order most efficiently trap green crab. Overall, Green crab catches were similar in comparison to 2017 but we caught a larger number of females to males this year where as in 2017 there were more males than females. While in most cases, a decrease in catch is a bad thing, we welcome these results as our main goal is to decrease/eradicate the green crab population in Basin Head.

Luke Traps ready to be deployed



RING-NECKED PHEASANTS IN OUR AREA

Have you been seeing these spectacular birds showing up at your feeders lately? We believe our local Ring-necked pheasant population is once again on the rise as sightings seem to be happening more often than ever. We are getting confirmation of sightings in different areas which implies that our population is spreading in all directions as well. Many people have been wondering what they can do to help the population out and what type of seed they should purchase for them.

The Board of Directors for the Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation have chosen to continue supplying feed from their existing funds to ensure that the pheasant populations remain healthy during critical and harsh times that come along with winter. When we have high amounts of snowfall the birds can no longer access their usual food sources and it can lead them to become malnourished and as a result, vulnerable to predation.

We greatly appreciate the public for keeping us aware via emails, phone calls, and texts as to where these populations are occurring exactly. When the snow begins to build, and these birds are struggling, we will gladly drop off some feed and we certainly appreciate your efforts in assisting this rebounding species. If you're interested in viewing these magnificent birds yourself, winter is an excellent time to get out and take a look around the Souris area. Vegetation is less restrictive, crops are harvested, and the snowy background creates an excellent photo opportunity. They are not picky whether the feeder is a platform or just on the ground and they enjoy black oil sunflower seeds, hulled sunflower seeds, and cracked corn.



Pheasant chick courtesy of Wanda Bailey



Above and below photograph courtesy of Jane Hanlon



Basin Head Interpretive Park Update

As promised in our fall newsletter, we do have exciting updates about our work at Basin Head in aims of opening an Interpretive Park for the 2019 season. You may have noticed the extensive work going on at the old wharf at Basin Head if you have been up there recently. The park improvements will include:

- new shoreline defence structure of Island sandstone
- new slipway
- car park with space for a bus
- boardwalk along the shoreline
- benches and picnic tables
- a research and monitoring building
- interpretation panels

Our crew worked tirelessly during the fall constructing wooden cribs to secure the new and improved slipway that is now finished. Currently the research and monitoring building is being constructed and next to be constructed will be the boardwalk. Once the boardwalk is complete there will be interpretation panels installed that will cover Indigenous, local, and natural history of the area. The panels will also provide information on the Basin Head Marine Protected Area. The purpose of these panels is to provide valuable and interesting information for visitors to enjoy while walking along a very serene piece of Basin Head. We anticipate that the project will be completed by the end of June, so the park should be ready for locals and tourists to use and enjoy once the summer weather kicks in! The funding for this project came from Federal sources, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; Innovation PEI; Rural and Regional Development PEI; Eastern Kings Community Council and Souris Wildlife.



BEFORE

Stayed tuned for the after shot! :)



ANNUAL REDD COUNT SURVEYS

It is that time of year again when our staff head out in all weather conditions to count redds, a spawning nest that is built by Atlantic salmon and Brook trout, in all the streams within our watershed management area. The water has been remaining quite high with a strong current this year making our efforts that much more difficult. Multiple staff members have gone for a dip; something we usually prefer to do in the warm summer months, but the power of the waterbodies is adding an interesting challenge. In one particular watershed, a beaver dam created a complete blockage of the stream, leading us to believe fish would be unable to travel that system to spawn. Thus far, it appears redd numbers have dropped drastically compared to last year but we have not yet finished our surveys. Please stay tuned for our next newsletter as we will have the data compiled and presented in our spring issue.



Field Supervisor, Mike Jacklyn, explaining how to identify a salmon redd



A beaver dam above Larkin's dam in Naufrage River

HEARTFELT BEST WISHES TO TONY AND SANDRA MEADE



It is with heavy hearts we must tell you that two of our most dedicated and long-time staff are moving back home to Newfoundland. Tony and Sandra have been with Souris and Area Wildlife Branch since 2011 and we have been very fortunate because the work they did for our organization was truly outstanding, year after year. Tony and Sandra are originally from Grand Bank, Newfoundland and spent a portion of their lives in Ontario before moving to Prince Edward Island. Tony is a skilled carpenter, which is only one of his many proficient talents. Their son, Harry, is now in his second year of working with us.

Tony quickly became a mentor to the young staff and proved to be an excellent guide and teacher. He taught workers everything they could ever need to know about fishing, knot tying, felling trees, clearing streams, how to properly build any sort of structure and invaluable knowledge on salmon and trout.

Sandra was the glue that held the field crew together and was just as tough as any of the men in the crew. Being an excellent photographer, she was the one you counted on for taking pictures of the field work which office staff often need to meet report requirements in order to update funders on our process.

Aside from being tremendous and dedicated workers, both are fine individuals that possess all the traits that one would care to see instilled in every individual. We would like to wish them all the best in their future endeavours and have no doubt they will be successful in any path they choose.





2018 FUNDERS

We'd like to kindly thank the following funders, you have made our work over the past year possible! Thank you!!



Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada



Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Pêches et Océans Canada

Wildlife Conservation Fund



Agriculture and Fisheries



Souris and 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 very pleased to announce that the "Environmental Community Wildlife Sessions" organized by Souris and Area Wildlife Branch and the Eastern Kings Senior Neighbour's Club will be held again this winter at Eastern Kings Rec Center, beginning in mid- January. Schedules will be released early in the new year, so keep an eye out for posters, church bulletins, and posts on our Souris Wildlife Facebook page. If you have any ideas on some new sessions you would like to see offered feel free to contact our office at 902-687-4115.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation we would like to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous new year!

COORDINATOR'S COMMENTS: FRED CHEVERIE

We may sound like a broken record at this point, but we would like to send out a friendly reminder about the impacts of littering. Many mornings we often see coffee cups along the road side or even entire bags of garbage. This careless dumping has the potential to end up in our river systems as well as our oceans and watching the news lately, we know there is entirely too much plastic entering our waterbodies already. This leads to animals ingesting foreign objects that could potentially lead to their demise. If we work together as a community to help remind people of the effects of littering, we can keep the Souris and surrounding area's beauty intact for all to enjoy.

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 9.6% of PEI, including 27 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 7 pm and all are welcome to attend.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

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

Telephone: 1-902- 687-4115

Email: sourisareawildlife@gmail.com

Website: www.souriswl.com

Facebook: Souris & Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation

Twitter: @SourisWildlife

