



St. Mary's River Association Habitat Restoration Project

by Scott Beaver, July 2016

Hello friends of the St. Mary's River,

My previous message briefly discussed some projects of the St. Mary's River Association. This time, as promised, I will discuss one of those projects in more depth: our West River St. Mary's Habitat Restoration Project that is now in its third year.

In 2010, we conducted a study to determine what we can do to assist in the recovery of our salmon population. With the Atlantic salmon on the edge of endangered status in our region, Nova Scotia's Southern Uplands, we developed a list of tasks we can address.

You may have guessed the top two items:

- Habitat improvement
- Stock enhancement

The section of river we identified as the poorest habitat is on the West Branch. Degradation results from many years of log drives down the river and clear-cutting along the banks of the river and its tributaries. We now have a much wider, shallower, and warmer river with little refuge for adult and juvenile salmon. We also have winter river ice freezing down into the shallow gravel, destroying precious salmon eggs.

Our Association can't do much about global warming or what happens to salmon at sea, but we sure can work towards a narrower, deeper channel returning our river structure to what it was in the past. This creates refuge sites for salmon and trout helping them to find hiding places and stay cool at the same time. Salmon and trout are very sensitive to the water temperatures, with the river warming up dangerously in the summer months.

This habitat work will have the added bonus of extending the paddling season for canoers and kayakers on the river. After canoeing the West Branch of the St. Mary's this May long weekend, it is very easy to see the effects of the past. Canoe and Kayak Nova Scotia have a paddling map for this and other sections of the river that you can find on their website



<http://ckns.ca/paddling-routes/ckns-canoe-route-maps-and-descriptions/>



During the past two years we raised over \$400,000 for habitat restoration on our West Branch resulting in over four kilometers of river being restored. Our goal is quite challenging with our sights set on completing the entire project in the next 8 years; sixty kilometers of the West Branch. We have 10 river sites identified between the Caledonia Bridge and Trafalgar. In 2016 we are focusing on three of those sites and in addition some work on the important Sutherland's Brook tributary.

In monitoring project success, redd counts in the areas restored show encouraging signs of salmon returning. Redds are the little beds in the gravel salmon dig for their eggs and are usually found in riffles just before or after pools.

More information about the project is found at these links:

[Drone Video - West River St. Mary's Habitat Restoration 2016](#)

[West Branch Habitat Restoration \(MacInnis\) 2015](#)

[West Branch Habitat Restoration \(MacInnis\) 2014](#)

Signing off from the banks of the St. Mary's River,

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