



## Where Have all the Salmon Gone?



SMRA director Allan MacDonald and DFO biologist Peter Amiro tending the smolt wheel on the east branch of the St. Mary's River in May of 2003.

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This spring you may have noticed some unfamiliar devices floating in the St. Mary's River. They are called "smolt wheels", which are used to gather assessment information to aid in management of the St. Mary's Atlantic salmon.

DFO has partnered with the St. Mary's River Association in this, the first year of what is hoped to be a five-year project. DFO provided the smolt wheels, biological and technical support and the Association gave volunteer labour to maintain the equipment and record daily assessment reports.

Stora Enso Port Hawkesbury Ltd. and The McLean Foundation are helping the Association fund this important work.

Atlantic salmon depend on both river and ocean habitat to survive. For several years we have collected assessment data with regards to both juvenile populations in the river and adult salmon, which have returned to St. Mary's from the ocean. The purpose of the smolt wheel project is to

augment this data with population sizes of salmon in the smolt stage in both the west and east branches of the St. Mary's.

Each spring smolts are migrating downstream to begin their life at sea, so this data will provide valuable information about river and marine survival. This, in turn, will indicate why we see a serious decline in salmon numbers and the degree to which river habitat improvement might aid in recovery of salmon stocks.

Association volunteers checked the contents of the wheels daily. Captured smolts were measured, marked and released a mile or so upstream of the wheels. Recapture data (number of marked smolts recaptured) is then used to estimate the total size of smolt runs.

We hope to continue this project in 2004. Volunteers who would like to help the association with the project can reach us at the St. Mary's River Association Education and Interpretive Centre in Sherbrooke, phone (902) 522-2099.

# 2003 St. Mary's Wood Turtle Study Results

Where has the summer gone! I'm sure St. Francis Xavier University students Jody MacEachern and Lauren Allen know. This past summer these two students along with Department of Natural Resources Biologist Mark Pulsifer have been combing the banks of the St. Mary's River, Guysborough County looking for Wood Turtles. The St. Mary's River Wood Turtle population is the largest in Nova Scotia. They are susceptible to a number of threats and have been designated as a "species at risk". Over the next four years, summer students will gather data regarding various aspects of turtle ecology.

In Sherbrooke, on Wednesday, September 17th evening, the St. Mary's River Association hosted a presentation at their Education and Interpretive Centre where Mark and Jody presented a summary of their findings to date. They stated the objectives of the study were to describe the demographic characteristics of the Wood Turtle population on the St. Mary's River; to find, measure and mark as many turtles as possible; increase the levels of community awareness and to identify major threats to populations.

The study involved a lot of walking, searching, measuring, weighing and marking. They also assessed any damage to the turtles. Mark has purchased four VHF transmitters to be placed on the turtles so that they can be tracked to see where they are nesting and where they spend winters. This information is essential so that we can protect critical habitat for the wood turtle. These transmitters are expensive, so Mark is actively seeking funding partners for this project and anyone who would like to contribute may do so by contacting the St. Mary's River Association at 522-2099.

Mark and Jody also described threats to the turtle population. They include vehicle mortality (Mark hopes to be able to get road signs depicting turtle crossings); stream bank erosion; land use practices; translocation and raccoons. Ef-

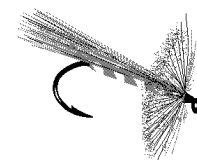
orts to protect nests from raccoons were successful. Predator excluders were placed over ten nests to prevent predators from digging up the eggs. So far 25 hatchling turtles were marked and released.

Mark sees increased community awareness and education as an important measure to protect wood turtles. The St. Mary's River Association Education and Interpretive Centre has received funding from the Animal Welfare Foundation of Canada for this purpose. This display will highlight threats and educate visitors on what they can do to prevent the continued decline of this species. 70% of the turtles found showed evidence of injuries.

Just in case you were wondering, Lauren, Jody and Mark found 143 turtles. And that's only the beginning of the study. Mark was quick to point out that the success of this project would not have been possible without the tremendous community support they received and thanked everyone who helped in any way.

It is great to see such important work being carried out right in our backyards. Everyone who attended the presentation was impressed with the caliber of work done and the results. We look forward to an exciting and productive summer next year.

- Joanne Mailman



# Magic on the River

On August 13, the St. Mary's River Association Education and Interpretive Centre, Sherbrooke, welcomed eight children to a special morning filled with activities to excite their imagination on the wonders of the river. Their counselors from the Sherbrooke Recreation Department, Devan Archibald, Angie MacGrath and Jennifer Strongman joined them.

The morning began with a tour of the Education and Interpretive Centre. The boys asked lots of questions, fed the trout, and learned a bit about salmon angling on the St. Mary's River. They were very interested in our large array of fly fishing rods.

Upon completion of the tour, they went outside for a lesson in fly-casting. The instructor for the morning was Donnie Barnes. Donnie is a member of the St. Mary's River Association and volunteered his time on Wednesday morning.

Using the Magic on the River curriculum, an outreach program developed by the Atlantic Salmon Federation, Donnie gave the boys a basic lesson in salmon angling.

They practiced with the Joan and Lee Wulff Fly-O rods, and the rods that we made here at the Centre from spare rod tips. There was a noticeable improvement in many of the children by the end of the session, and they all enjoyed the activity. They had lots of fun learning with small fly rods.

After concentrating all that energy into learning to cast a fly, the boys were glad for a snack. Then they headed across the road to the Provincial Park for a discussion of wood turtles. Jody MacEachern is a biology student from St. Francis Xavier University who spent the summer working with the Department of Natural Resources on a wood turtle study. Jody gave an interesting talk on the turtles and brought along a shell for the children to examine.

Glen Terris and Justin Smith are from the Department of Natural Resources in Stillwater. They gave a presentation to the group on outdoor survival. The children were very interested in learning what to do if they ever became lost in the woods. After a short talk, everyone went to Stonewall Leisure Park to learn how to make a shelter from the materials of the forest. Thanks to all the kids who came out for this event, we hope to have more like it in the future.

I would like to thank Lewis Hinks for his encouragement in trying the Magic on the Rivers program. Thank you as well to Debbie Perry, who gave me a couple of great suggestions on how to proceed with the program.

- Joanne Mailman

## Special Funds

The St. Mary's River Association has two memorial funds which have been established to help the Association do special work in memory of two very special members of the Association.

One is the Al Pick Education Fund and the other is the Lockie Weir River Stewardship Fund.

Both have helped the Association do work that would not otherwise have been possible, and have given friends and family a very special way to remember their loved ones by helping to conserve and protect the St. Mary's River.

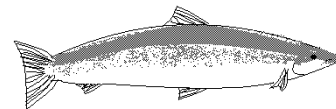
The Al Pick fund currently has \$4,881 and the Lockie Weir fund has \$1,145 plus a \$12,404 GIC. If you would like to contribute to either of these funds, the Association will gratefully accept your kindness and give you a tax receipt.

Also, if you would like to establish a memorial fund for someone who loved the St. Mary's, please contact the Association. We love it too.

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## Membership Information

If you know someone who would like to become a member, please give them our number 522-2099 and we can fix them up right away. We currently have 213 members and are always on the look out for new members. Also, If you are interested in becoming a board member, or know someone who might, please let us know as well.

A number of members still haven't paid this years dues. Why not update your membership now. Drop it in the mail today, please.

## ***Lottery News***

Our lottery has been an overwhelming success. Thanks to all who supported us. We are now selling tickets for the next lottery which begins

December 2003 and runs until November 2004.

Same prizes as last year. Here's how it works.

Only 100 tickets will be sold. Each ticket costs \$120.00. You can either pay the entire amount at once or use 12 post-dated cheques in the amount of \$10.00 each. Simple as that.

What you will get is 120 chances to win! There will be 10 chances to win each month for 12 months.

Each monthly draw will pay cash prizes as follows:

1st: \$150.00

2nd: \$100.00

3rd & 4th: \$50.00

5th—10th: \$25.00

That's a total pay out of \$6000.00 in cash prizes. The Association gets to keep \$6000.00.

To purchase a ticket contact any of the following people:

Joanne Mailman 522-2866

Florence Duffy 522-2014

Bill Carpan 522-2840

Tickets must be purchased by November 30, 2003.

DON'T MISS YOUR CHANCE TO WIN, CALL NOW.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
 SUPPORT!