



St. Mary's River Association Kelt Rejuvenation Project

by Scott Beaver, August 2016

Hello friends of the St. Mary's River.

I'll tell you this month about another project on our river, our Kelt Rejuvenation Project. When we originally drafted our plan, "Kelt Rejuvenation Project" and presented it to DFO, we were very excited when they accepted it with full support. In fact, DFO not only supported the project, they took the lead on it in our partnership. We are now in our third year of conducting a kelt project, and with each year we make improvements. We will continue to work towards the development of this project and hope it will prove to be a model for other rivers in the future.

A "kelt" is defined as a salmon that has spawned, wintered in the rivers or lakes and not yet returned to the ocean. While wintering in the rivers and lakes, a salmon does not feed, and as a result becomes thin, weak and exhausted, which is why kelt are sometimes referred to as slinks.

It is no secret that a lot of Atlantic salmon are lost at sea and do not to their river of origin. Our project's objective is to bypass the trip to sea, and give the salmon the best possible environment to survive and spawn again. How does the project work?



- We apply for a special license from Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)
- If approved, we capture kelt in the spring of the year as they are leaving the river
- They are then reconditioned over the summer in a hatchery environment; reconditioning involves salt baths to reduce the chance of infections, feeding on krill and optimal water quality
- In the fall they are then released back into the St. Mary's River system where they can spawn once again in our pristine river system.

Some keen anglers (whose names appear on the DFO license) who don't mind the high water, rain and lugging gear around commit a lot of time and effort into catching the kelt. Streamside tanks are placed strategically around the river and one master tank is placed in a central location accessible to the DFO Coldbrook Hatchery staff for transport. Fish are caught with barbless hooks, netted and temporarily placed in a streamside tank. We use a special rubber sock with water in it to transport the fish from the streamside tank to a tank in the back of a pickup truck. Then the fish is taken to the master tank and the hatchery staff is called. The fish are picked up soon after and taken back to the hatchery for the reconditioning process.

In the spring of 2016, 55 kelt were collected: 35 are required for the kelt rejuvenation project and 20 will be used for a one-time stock enhancement effort. For this one-time effort, the salmon will be spawned out at the hatchery and their offspring reared to fall fingerling size and then released in our West branch. This is to try and boost the population where we are currently doing our habitat work. All of the salmon caught in our river will be returned to our river – this has been agreed upon by all parties and is a stipulation of the projects.

The Atlantic Salmon are currently listed as a species of “Special Concern” with the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and close to an “Endangered” designation. If the Atlantic Salmon becomes listed as endangered, the Canadian government in its own legislation is required to come up with a recovery plan. Knowing this, we wanted to be the first river conservation group out of the gate for any related projects or funding which could benefit our efforts for boosting local salmon populations.



We are very excited about this project and hopefully we will see more salmon in the St. Mary's from the many volunteer hours given to the project. Thank you all who volunteer, we very much appreciate your efforts. One day we may even see anglers lined up on the currently closed pools like years ago trying to catch the elusive Atlantic salmon with on a fly!

Please visit our website stmarysriverassociation.com or our Facebook page to see some of our kelt project pictures and videos. Here's a video of kelts in our holding tank in spring 2016 awaiting the DFO hatchery truck. [SMRA Kelt video \(Gweneth Boutilier, Ralph Jack\) 2016](#)

Signing off from the river bank,

Scott Beaver
President SMRA