

# St. Mary's River Association Spring News 2019



Photo of West Branch taken during the fall paddling event. Photo credit: Helen Reinhart



In-stream views of the new Nova Scotia Nature Trust property donated by the Sobey's. See page 12 to read more about it. Photo credit Scott Leslie

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[www.stmarysriverassociation.com](http://www.stmarysriverassociation.com).

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT - Scott Beaver

### ST. MARY'S RIVER ASSOCIATION

**The St. Mary's River Association is a charitable, non-profit organization providing leadership and engaging partners to enhance, protect and promote the St. Mary's River as a healthy ecosystem for Atlantic salmon and other native animals and plant species as well as a rich community resource.**

#### **Our vision:**

**"Health for the river, the Atlantic salmon and our community."**

**SMRA News is a publication of the St. Mary's River Association as a service to our members.**

**The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the St. Mary's River Association, the editor or the publisher.**

**Memberships, suggestions and comments are welcome.**

**Address all correspondence to:**

**St. Mary's River Association  
PO Box 179 Sherbrooke, NS  
B0J 3C0 or by e-mail at  
stmarysriver@ns.sympatico.ca**

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Welcome everyone to the St. Mary's River Association 2019 which just so happens to be the "International Year of the Salmon".

Who would have ever guessed we would be so busy in the spring of 2019! Repairing habitat, working to better the St. Mary's River water chemistry, stocking salmon and sea trout, putting up paddling signage, organizing paddling events, installing river instrumentation and updating our website all while fighting off the threat of a massive gold mine.

Holy Smokes Folks!

We sure have our work cut out for us. I will talk briefly about the mine threat in a moment but more importantly I want to discuss the work that passionately drives us forward here at the SMRA. That is Atlantic salmon recovery efforts. Let's be very clear on this front, the one major reason we are working tirelessly on salmon recovery is that one day we want to have a catch and release angling season on the great St. Mary's River once again. I believe it can happen.

We want to communicate to you all the wonderful work we have been doing on our river. Did you know that our river is the only one in Nova Scotia with an Atlantic salmon recovery plan in place and we are actively working on four of the top aspects highlighted? We have addressed habitat restoration with over \$1 million in the past 4 years invested in our West Branch Habitat Project. We have put back approximately 177,000 salmon fry in 2018 with a projected 250,000 to

be released for 2019. We have worked with the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission Adopt a Stream program on culvert issues that prevent fish from accessing spawning grounds and will continue to do so. We have applied for a 1.5 million dollar grant from the federal Coastal Restoration fund to work on water chemistry and more habitat restoration.

It's troublesome that a massive proposed mine for Cochrane Hill is threatening our organization's fantastic efforts. It's sad that the majority of our volunteer efforts are now being redirected on conducting our NOPE (No Open Pit Excavation) campaign. The proposed gold mine for Cochrane Hill shouldn't happen and we will fight it every step of the way. I would like to highlight the top three things that bother me personally.

- I am very concerned about the Cameron Lake system that is directly across the road from the proposed tailings pond. The outlet of the Cameron Lakes is McKeen's Brook and this flows into arguably the most important stretch of the St. Mary's River!
- I am also very concerned with the water draw down from the open pit and the effect it will have on the local water courses including McKeen's Brook. As the pit gets deeper, the potential for large amounts of water to drain from nearby water courses into the pit is concerning.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT ..... continued

- The third is the amount of water this mine needs to run. For start-up of operations 300,000 to 500,000 cubic meters will be taken from Archibald's Lake and an estimated 50,000 liters per day after that. The outlet of Archibald's Lake flows into the Ford Pool stretch. The Ford Pool is the area that famous baseball player Babe Ruth enjoyed angling for salmon.

Thank you all for your time and if you have not signed our petition please go to [change.org](http://change.org) highlight the magnifying glass in the top right which opens a search option. Search for "NOPE no open pit" and it will pop up.

Remember just say NOPE!



**Want a sign?** Please contact the St. Mary's River Association by emailing us at: [stmarysriver@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:stmarysriver@ns.sympatico.ca)



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### **NOTICE TO MEMBERS: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**The Annual General Meeting of the St. Mary's River Association will be held on Sunday, May 26th at 2:00 pm at the Association's Education & Interpretive Center located at 8404 Highway 7, Sherbrooke N.S.**

**Everyone is welcome.**

**All paid up members are eligible to vote at the meeting. Memberships will be available for those wishing to join or renew their membership.**

**Please see page 26 for nomination forms and additional information.**



## SMRA EDUCATION & INTERPRETIVE CENTRE NEWS

### Megan Myers, Manager

My first season as the new Education and Interpretive Centre manager has come and gone. I am so happy to be back in the Sherbrooke area and am honoured to be taking over for Joanne. She has done such an amazing job for the past 17 years. I have some big shoes to fill! Luckily she is just a phone call/email away to answer my many questions and give advice. Thank you Joanne!

Caleb Jordan and Parker MacIsaac were our student employees this summer. I put them to work painting the river punt, the shed, and building a boat for the St. Mary's River Days Cardboard Boat Regatta. Caleb took part in the race and gave it his all, but ended up in last place and had to abandon ship. There's always next year though!

Some events that took place over the summer are as follows:

- May 27– SMRA Annual General Meeting
- June 16– Acadian Forests and their Inhabitants presented by Bob Bancroft
- June 23– RBC/SMRA Tree planting
- July 1– Annual Canada Day Yard Sale
- July 19– Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Presentation given by Justin Smith
- July 25– RBC Flower Bed clean up
- August 14– Magic on the River
- October 6– Paddle the St. Mary's River
- October 20– 2018 Dinner, Auction and Fly tying Conclave

We had 12 kids attend the Magic on the River event held on August 14<sup>th</sup>. They enjoyed a tour of the museum, a scavenger hunt, made a fish craft, played a salmon survival game, and learned survival skills and built a shelter with Lands and Forestry staff. Thank you to the St. Mary's Recreation staff and Lands and Forestry Staff for helping out with

this event.

We co-hosted the Bi-Annual Dinner, Auction and Fly Tying Conclave in Antigonish with the Antigonish Rivers Association and the Nova Scotia Salmon Association. It was a sold out event and a great success. Thank you to everyone who volunteered, donated items, and supported this event.

We moved our gift shop into a new room and created space for local consignors to display their creations. If you're interested in consigning some items with us you can call, email, or drop in to the centre when we open for the season.

Forgotten Shore Farms brought in some of their delicious produce to sell and we also set up a new interactive erosion display.

2019 is the 40th anniversary of the SMRA! If you haven't been by in a while we have lots of new things to see so stop in and say hi. There may even be some cake to celebrate. Keep an eye on our Facebook page and website for updates on upcoming events. We are looking forward to a busy 2019 season and we hope to see you!



Some of the Magic on the River participants showing of their fish craft. Photo credit: Municipality Recreation Staff



## SMRA EDUCATION & INTERPRETIVE CENTRE NEWS .....continued



Above: Presentation by Bob Bancroft on Acadian Forests and their Inhabitants.



Above: Summer students Parker and Caleb painting the river punt.



Summer students working on their boat for the St. Mary's River Days Cardboard Boat Regatta



Magic on the River participants learning how to build a shelter from Lands and Forestry staff.



Tree Planting– RBC Staff & SMRA volunteers



## Risks of the Proposed Open Pit Gold Mine at Cochrane Hill, along the St Mary's River

A large, open pit gold mine is proposed along the edge of the St. Mary's River, near Sherbrooke, Guysborough County. Construction and operation of the pit would involve blasting, trucking, heavy machinery work, and the creation of permanent tailings ponds and piles, all posing a serious risk to the environment, and imposing negative impacts on the community. Many residents who live near the proposed mine site are against it, and thousands of fans of the St. Mary's River don't want to see it happen. Here's what you should know:

### About the pit

- The open pit of the mine would be 950m x 450m x 170m, or about the size of 38 Olympic-sized swimming pools.
- 43.1 million tonnes of rock would be excavated, at a rate of 22,086 tonnes per day. This will involve loud blasting 2 to 3 times per week, and 6 or more C-train truckloads of ore per day more passing through Sherbrooke to take the ore to be processed in Moose River Gold Mines.
- Partially processed ore will be left on-site, creating a tall tailings pile. Bringing ore to the surface runs the risk of creating acid rock drainage, in which runoff from the tailings pile releases sulfuric acid and heavy metals into the river.
- Massive amounts of water will be needed (50,000L/day) to operate the mine and 500,000 cubic meters for start-up which would be withdrawn from the St. Mary's River or Archibald Lake.

### About the river

- The St. Mary's River is beautiful and quiet, currently free of industrial activity. It has a long history of settlement, and currently the community is focused on economic development related to eco-tourism and recreation. The river is beloved by anglers, and has several protected forests along its shorelines.
- The river hosts a population of the endangered Atlantic Salmon, and is one of the best rivers in Eastern Nova Scotia to support species recovery. At times of the year with low water levels it cannot support an additional withdrawal – lack of water depth and the resulting high water temperature do not provide adequate conditions for fish (salmon and trout) and fish eggs to survive. The mine would also pose the risk of changing river water pH, and could introduce toxic levels of metals and other contaminants into the river.
- The river and its banks also hosts other species at risk, including Wood Turtle, and several bird species at risk. All would lose habitat when the mine is developed, and would risk injury and death with the increase in trucking in their habitat.



### Who stands to gain? Who stands to lose?

- Junior mining company Atlantic Gold Corporation is proposing this project, to make money off the gold they can extract from the ore. They suggest that the project would create local jobs, but that may not be the case – workers could come from Atlantic Gold's nearby mine site(s), or nearby cities.

## Risks of the Proposed Open Pit Gold Mine.....continued

- The site would be in operation for about 6 years, then “reclaimed.” After the reclamation work is complete, the company gets to walk away... the tailings pile and pond remain forever. If a spill or leaching from these causes contamination down the line, the company is not held responsible.
- The St. Mary’s River Association is the local community group that has poured more than \$1 million and countless hours of volunteer time into restoring salmon habitat on the river – that work would be jeopardized by the proposed mine.
- The community has been very clear about its vision for its future: the District of St Mary’s Municipal Council 10 year Strategic Plan, and St. Mary’s River Association Outdoor Recreation Development Plan for the St. Mary’s Watershed both have documented objectives for eco-tourism development, which is not compatible with this mining project.
- The proposed project would provide a short term gain for a foreign mining company, at the expense of long-term risks to river and the community.



*Touquoy mine site, where ore from Cochrane Hill we be trucked to (photo by CBC)*

### Next steps

- The proposed mining project will undergo an environmental assessment, at which point the public can comment on the technical aspect of the mine project. No part of this process incorporates the will of the community into decision making, nor does it seriously consider alternative, sustainable development options for the area.
- Decision makers, including politicians at all levels of government, need to hear from people about this proposed project.

Please consider learning more about the project from the St. Mary’s River Association, and contacting politicians to share your views.

You are invited to sign a petition against the project at [Change.org](https://www.change.org). Here are some reasons for signing, submitted by people who signed the petition:

“My children and grandchildren have been granted a long history of family who lived along the river. Please let their children be granted the ability to sit on its bank, near the family farm and share stories of this magical place.”

“Are these people insane? So much work has been done to protect the St. Mary’s River why would anyone think a mine is a good idea?”

“Water is far more important than gold.”



## Risks of the Proposed Open Put Gold Mine at Cochrane Hill.....continued

Learn more about the proposed project and the risks its poses on the SMRA's web page: <https://www.stmarysriverassociation.com/>. See below for actions you can take...

**If you are concerned about the proposed mine along the banks of the river,  
please share your concerns with the Councillors, MLAs and MP for the St. Mary's River:**

MP = Sean Fraser Phone: 902-867-2919 [sean.fraser@parl.gc.ca](mailto:sean.fraser@parl.gc.ca)

MLA = Lloyd Hines Phone: 902-533-2280 [lphines@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:lphines@ns.sympatico.ca)

District #1 - Councillor Debbie Findlay

Sherbrooke & Area

Phone (902) 522-2265

[debbie.findlay@saint-marys.ca](mailto:debbie.findlay@saint-marys.ca)

District #2 - Warden Michael Mosher

Ecum Secum & Area

Phone (902) 347-2784

[michael.mosher@saint-marys.ca](mailto:michael.mosher@saint-marys.ca)

District #3/5 - Councillor Kaytland Smith

Melrose, Glenelg, Caledonia & Area

Phone (902) 833-2039

[kaytland.smith@saint-marys.ca](mailto:kaytland.smith@saint-marys.ca)

District #4 - Councillor Beulah Malloy

Indian Harbour Lake & Sonora Area

Phone (902) 522-2184

[beulah.malloy@saint-marys.ca](mailto:beulah.malloy@saint-marys.ca)

District #6 - Councillor Jacqueline Dort

Goshen & Area

Phone (902) 783-2443

[jackie.dort@saint-marys.ca](mailto:jackie.dort@saint-marys.ca)

District #7 - Councillor Everett G. Baker

Liscomb & Area

Phone (902) 779-2255

[everett.baker@saint-marys.ca](mailto:everett.baker@saint-marys.ca)

District #8 - Councillor Peggy Kaiser-Kirk

Port Bickerton & Harpellville Area

Phone (902) 364-2574

[peggy.kaiser-kirk@saint-marys.ca](mailto:peggy.kaiser-kirk@saint-marys.ca)



### Member of the Year

St. Mary's River Association is pleased to nominate:

**Scott Beaver**

**as**

**Member of the Year**

Scott has been the president of St Mary's River Association for two terms now and is running for a third term this May. Scott has created separate committees to accommodate projects and interests. These committees have been very successful under his leadership. Scott's wife Beth and three children Cole, Sadie and Madeline all enjoy country living right beside the St. Mary's River where their passion for the river can clearly be enjoyed. In his off time he enjoys fishing trout and salmon , canoeing/kayaking and spending time with family and friends. Scott can be found on the Liscomb or St. Mary's River's and at the camp on Big Gaspereau Lake when not at work employed as an Instrumentation Technologist at the Michelin Tire Plant in Granton.

Thank you for all you do for SMRA.

Congratulations Scott!

## NSLC Adopt-A-Stream News - Amy Weston

This Spring marks the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of NSLC Adopt A Stream! The partnership between the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC) and the Nova Scotia Salmon Association has resulted in great gains and a more comprehensive program to support vital aquatic habitat restoration projects with First Nations and community groups across Nova Scotia. We have been able to leverage additional funding, increase program technical staff, support watershed planning, and develop an aquatic connectivity program to assess, prioritize, and remediate fish passage. Not only does the NSLC title sponsorship support expansion of the program to help communities make great ecological gains, it engages the wider community and raises public awareness, inspiring community action across the province.

When it comes to restoring our rivers to natural productivity, we need to take the long view. The incremental gains we achieve in our watersheds will ultimately make a large difference. The West Branch channel restoration project is a great example of this approach. Over the past five years, the SMRA has been implementing an ambitious plan to improve habitat conditions in the West Branch. Beginning towards the top end, and working downstream, instream channel structures are being installed to re-establish the meander pattern, encourage pool and bank development, and stabilize spawning habitat. The project aims to rectify wide, shallow conditions which make the river prone to icing up in the winter and reaching lethally high temperatures in the summer. To date, 12.5 kms of the river are under restoration. NSLC Adopt A Stream has been happy to contribute to this continuing success, not only with project funding, but also with technical and permitting support. The great aerial images of the project sites are the handiwork of Adopt a Stream field technician Nick MacInnis.

In 2018, we were pleased to address a longstanding fish passage barrier in the watershed. MacQuarries Brook, a tributary to the West Branch of the St. Mary's River, which flows through a wooden box culvert under Hwy 348 near Caledonia and drops about 0.75 metres – making this culvert a barrier to migration under virtually any flow conditions. With a catchment of approximately 10.5 square km upstream, it offers considerable habitat potential, and was identified as the number-one priority barrier to fish passage in the 2010 Saint Mary's River culvert survey report. This past August, AAS Fish Passage technician Will Daniels oversaw design, procurement, site prep, and

installation of a custom-made fiberglass two-chamber pool-weir fishway onto the culvert at MacQuarries Brook.

This project was one part of a larger three-year effort funded in part through the now-lapsed federal Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program, which involved, among other activities, the remediation of three fairly involved fish passage sites: re-designing and rebuilding the pool-weir fishway in the Sydney River Dam; removing an abandoned water-main and its concrete casing in the South Rights River in Antigonish; and installing the fishway at MacQuarries.

This year, the NSLC will again contribute \$100,000 in support of the program, bringing their total donation over the past 10 years to \$1,000,000. Support the NSLC Adopt A Stream program by purchasing participating products at NSLC stores (and online at [mysnslc.com](http://mysnslc.com)) from April 1 to April 28. Visit [www.adoptastream.ca](http://www.adoptastream.ca) for more information about the program, current projects, and how you can get involved.

Amy Weston, Nova Scotia Salmon Association, Program Manager NSLC Adopt A Stream



Before; wooden box culvert at MacQuarries Brook with a drop of about 0.75 metres



After; installation of a custom-made fiberglass two-chamber pool-weir fishway onto the culvert at MacQuarries Brook.

## Beyond the Shore: Getting to Know St. Mary's River by Deborah Banks

Until this past September, my experience with St. Mary's River had always been at a slight distance, either from a car or as a hiker along its shores. Over the years, I have watched the river rise and fall with the seasons and with the torrential rains or, alternately, I have witnessed the extended droughts where every outcropping of rock has been exposed and baked in the summer sun. In the spring, St. Mary's River is a torrent of water racing to the sea. In the summer months, this lazy river is a gentle meandering ribbon snaking its way through the valley. Its quiet path greets us from Cochrane Hill on Highway 7 and follows us to aptly named Stillwater, then to Sherbrooke and at last to Sonora, where it empties into the sea.

When we were children arriving for our first summer visit in 1968, our initial impression of St. Mary's River was from Aspen as we crossed over the East River St. Mary's bridge and watched the placid waters winding away to an area we had yet to know. It was the sign that we were getting closer to our destination.

Years ago, a group of us hiked with biologist Mark Pulsifer along the shoreline to track the patterns of the elusive wood turtle. More recently, through the generosity of the Sobey family, we explored the land they donated to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust. With the shore of St. Mary's as our backdrop, we admired the old growth forest and waded through giant ferns beneath the trees. To the surprise of our intrepid group, the banks of the river and the canopy of sheltering trees created its own microclimate that fostered unexpected vegetation.

Now as a retired person who lives in the area full-time, I am free to enjoy St. Mary's River through all the seasons. In the early summer, I pause along its shores on Waternish Road to wade through fields of lupines with that gentle river as a backdrop. This fall and winter, my observations have been from the vantage point of the look-offs in Stone Wall Park. After 50 years of contact, my affection for St. Mary's River continues to grow.

This past October, it was time for me to get my feet wet, so to speak, to know the river more intimately. With this in mind, my family, friends and I signed up for the paddling day trip from Foot Bridge Pool to The Bells of St. Mary's. The weather was the best we could hope for, and we numbered over 30 people with kayaks and canoes. There were children, adolescents, young couples, seniors- a spirited gang of folks

who shared the same affection for the river. We put in just above Foot Bridge Pool and that was where we encountered our first challenge. The lack of summer rains had left us with a labyrinth of exposed rocks in our wake and, unfortunately, before we had even rounded the first bend, my sisters had to pull out their canoe and admit defeat.

The rest of us carried on down the river to a chorus of warnings and strategizing as we navigated currents, avoided more exposed rocks and came upon spots where portaging was required for many. There were spills and reassurances, laughter and an overriding sense of tranquility as we pressed on. Below the brush of the paddle in the water, we could see long green reeds of grass wagging in the current, or narrowly missed rocks that the paddle pushed past.

We stopped for lunch at Tuttle's cabin on Rock Island Pool where a few more paddlers threw in the towel and stopped for the day. The rest of us continued on and moved down the river to Lead Mine, an abandoned mine tucked into the side of a hill. We stopped to admire the old growth trees and the quiet fields that stretched along the shore beside us.

We ended our day at The Bells of St. Mary's where everyone came ashore and dispersed back into their other lives. But for the hours of fellowship we shared on the water, time was suspended, the world was a gentler place, and St. Mary's River rippled past paddle and became, at last, a little more known to this paddler, a little less mysterious.

In late May, when the river is rushing with water, it will be a faster, more exuberant paddle. And more will be asked of us as navigators and adventure-seekers. The river will be alive with its own wildness, inviting us to take up the challenge. We hope to see you there.





Beyond the Shore: Getting to Know St. Mary’s River by Deborah Banks



Photo credit: Helen Reinhart

Photo credit: Helen Reinhart



Photo credit: Helen Reinhart

## Nova Scotia Nature Trust: Protecting The St. Mary's Ribbon of Green by Fiona Brooks

Greetings fellow friends of the St. Mary's River! As the Nature Trust's new Conservation Project Coordinator for the St. Mary's River, I would like to introduce myself to the Association and its supporters. I'm born, raised and educated in Nova Scotia and feel a deep connection to the natural landscape of this province. I count myself lucky to help advance the protection of Nova Scotia's most ecologically unique wild places with the Nature Trust. I look forward to learning more about the river and connecting with many of you over the coming years.

Since 2006, the Nature Trust has been working with landowners, local volunteers, and conservation partners (including the SMRA—thank you!) to preserve a “ribbon of green” – a network of protected lands—along the river. We were drawn to the area by three provincially-significant, unique, and interconnected ecological features: some of the last mature, healthy stands of Acadian floodplain forest in the province; rare old-growth forests, like those on the Hemlock Falls and Hemlock Hill Conservation Lands; and the presence of nationally endangered wildlife including Wood Turtles and forest birds. Our vision is to protect high priority conservation sites, the “ecological gems,” and then connect these core areas with a corridor of intact riparian habitat which is essential in keeping the river cool, clear and fast-flowing, and ensuring its long-term health.

In 2006, we celebrated the first major success of the Campaign—protecting the A.M. Sandy Cameron Conservation Lands – 90 acres of high-value conservation land on the main branch. With the generous support of private landowners and donors, we have now protected nine properties encompassing almost 900 acres of conservation lands.

This July, we hosted a guided nature walk on the Mitchells Pool Conservation Lands (generously donated by David and Faye Sobey), giving people a chance to experience first-hand the natural legacy being preserved. At our Annual Dinner in October, Paul and Marsha Sobey announced their intention to

donate 230 acres of spectacular land including three kilometers of rich riparian habitat. It adjoins the A.M. Sandy Cameron Conservation Lands, and is across the river from the Waternish and Mitchell's Pool Conservation Lands.

In recognition of the Sobey family's generous support, including land conservation, project support through the David and Faye Sobey Foundation, leadership and inspiration for river conservation, we presented them with our 2018 Conservation Award. We were delighted to have three generations of the Sobey family there to celebrate with us.

2019 could be another banner year for river conservation. We just succeeded in acquiring the 86 acre Crows Nest property, encompassing extensive shoreline and stunning floodplain forests. Interestingly, the site is also an excellent example of ecological resilience. Aerial imagery from the 1930s shows much of the land was converted to agricultural fields. The original Acadian forest, which once lined much of the river, is naturally regenerating, and doing remarkably well. These pockets of intact forest provide natural seed nurseries that will help restore the river's ecology.

And more good news lies ahead! We will soon finalize Paul and Marsha's land donation, and have also secured the opportunity to buy two more long-sought ‘ecological gems’ adding another 200 acres of protected lands. In all, we will have preserved 1500 acres and filled key gaps in habitat connectivity!

But first, we need to raise critical funds.





## Nova Scotia Nature Trust ..... continued

You can save the river by donating today. For every dollar donated by March 31 (2019), we can leverage another \$3 in funding! So your \$100 gift means \$400 to preserve these river gems. Please give generously --four to one leveraging of funds to protect the river is a rare and endangered thing!

You can also help by donating your time. We are looking for volunteer Property Guardians to help care for our conservation lands. It's a great way to give back to nature.

Find out more and keep up with conservation news and events by visiting our website ([www.nsnt.ca](http://www.nsnt.ca)), following us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and joining our e-list. Or feel free to reach out to me any time.

Let's keep the St. Mary's River *forever wild!*

Your partner in conservation,

Fiona Brooks  
Conservation Project Coordinator – St. Mary's River  
& 100 Wild Islands  
Nova Scotia Nature Trust  
[fiona@nsnt.ca](mailto:fiona@nsnt.ca)  
902-425-5263



Mitchells Pool Guided Hike (July 2018). Photo credit Nova Scotia Nature Trust staff



Crows Nest: Photo credit Scott Leslie



Acadian floodplain forest on new Sobeys property.  
Photo credit Nova Scotia Nature Trust staff

### NSNT Mission

To protect Nova Scotia's outstanding natural legacy through land conservation.

### NSNT Vision

We envision a future in which Nova Scotia's native species, and unique habitats and natural landscapes are protected in perpetuity, and in which this natural legacy is appreciated and actively stewarded.



## Remembering Neil Watson (1928-2011) by Don MacLean

I had the good fortune of knowing Neil and always enjoyed having a chat with him whether it was while fishing the St. Mary's, the Salmon River at Cooks' Cove or the East River in Pictou County. I was always impressed by his friendliness and his effortless casting as well as his ability to catch fish. Neil was born in Quincy Massachusetts in 1928 but moved back to Nova Scotia with his parents as a young boy, first to Musquodoboit, and then to 6 Mile Brook in Pictou County. Later he moved to Westville where he and his wife raised their family and Neil made his living as a carpenter, or as he described himself, a jack of all trades. Neil began fishing as a small boy in 6 Nile Brook and his love of the sport continued to the end of his life.

I also knew Neil as a master fly tier and I was fortunate to interview him about his favorite flies for my book on fly tying back in 2006. At that time Neil had been tying flies for over 40 years and I knew, from discussions with local anglers, that he has been instrumental in teaching fly tying to many young anglers in the local area. "I began tying flies when I was 26," Neil told me. "William MacLean was a local fly tier and I used to watch him tie flies so I picked it up mostly from watching him tie." Neil first tied trout flies, mainly British patterns such as the Cow Dung or King and Queen of the Waters. He began tying salmon flies after he started salmon fishing about 35 years ago. "I was going through so many salmon flies that I had to start tying my own." What did you tie," I asked him? "The Green Highlander, Ross Special, Cosseboom, MacIntosh, they were all popular flies at that time," he told me.

I remember asking Neil what he liked in a fly. He told me there were flies to catch fish or fishermen. "If you want to catch fish then don't dress your flies too heavily. Also you have to present it properly. If you don't put it over the fish correctly then it doesn't make any difference which pattern you use. I often have people ask me for a dozen flies that will catch salmon. I always tell them that I can tie them flies that I can catch salmon with but I can't guarantee that you will catch fish with them."

I asked Neil if he had any favorite patterns for salmon. "Oh, no question the Green Machine tied on a number 4 bronze, down eye hook. I tie it with green wool instead of deer hair since I always fish it wet anyway. I find that the colour of the butt is also im-

portant. I add the green butt first and then the orange. It is a great fly for big fish. For some reason, if I only add a green butt I mostly hook grilse." Neil was also a big fan of dry fly fishing for Atlantic salmon. "When the water warms up I fish the dry fly, I find a green bomber with a yellow or white calf tail wing and tail to be very effective. One year I had some chestnut brown deer hair that I used for some bugs and bombers. I tied it with white calftail at the tail and wing. For some reason that fly was great at locating fish. I didn't hook many on it but on but I often hooked them on another fly later."

While Neil tied flies on whatever hook people requested he usually tied his own on bronze down eye Mustad hooks. "I often open up the gape with pliers," Neil told me. "It makes it easier to hook fish." Neil was also an early advocate for pinching the barb on all his salmon flies to aid in release. "I usually give a fish slack line after a couple of jumps and many times, not always, they will release themselves." If someone requested them Neil tied salmon flies on Mustad 36890 hooks but he was not a big fan himself. "I find them too dull so I touch them up with the file before I tie with them. I also tell people to touch them up when they are fishing with them on the river, a rock will do in a pinch. You need a sharp hook, it will penetrate better."

Three of Neil's patterns, the East River Special, Watson's Green Machine and the St. Mary's River Special were featured in Paul Marriner's book-Modern Atlantic Salmon Flies. He was constantly experimenting with either new patterns or different ways of tying existing ones. "Take the Ross Special, for example," he told me, "although it is a great fall fly on its own I added a golden pheasant crest, and an orange butt, and found it out fished the original pattern." Neil also offered a tip which I thought was very clever. "When I come up with a new pattern I always tie two of them. I'll fish with one and, if I have some luck with it and happen to lose it, hopefully in a big fish, I will have another one home that I can use as a pattern instead of trying to remember how I tied it."

When I asked Neil about the state of sport fishing he expressed his disappointment in the decline in Atlantic salmon. He remembered fishing the Stewiacke River one morning in 1983 when 109 salmon were caught on the river that morning. He also

## Remembering Neil Watson (1928-2011).....continued

remembered the glory days on the St. Mary's where he caught his best fish, a 26 pounder. When asked about his thoughts on the decline he felt that it was due to a combination of factors such as poaching and habitat loss. He was also active in conservation work and was one of the founding members of the Pictou County Rivers Association. Neil was also an avid trout angler and I was interested in his favorite flies. He told me he had several favorites but, if he had to pick only one it would be a wooly worm tied with an orange body. "I've had some great luck with that fly," he told me.

When I interviewed him Neil was tying every day and, when he showed me the number of flies he tied the previous winter, it put my meager efforts to shame. Neil passed away in 2011 but he lives on through his fly patterns, as well as all the fly tiers he taught over the years. A great tribute to a real gentleman.



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## ATLANTIC SALMON FEDERATION REPORT - Lewis Hinks, Director NS and PEI Programs

### Greenland

In 2018, nothing in the Atlantic salmon world has been bigger than the agreement of ASF and NASF (North Atlantic Salmon Fund) with Greenland fisherman to have a 12-year suspension of commercial fishing in their waters. It galvanized Atlantic salmon anglers, conservationists and First Nations in a way that nothing else has in the past few years.

This will provide some critical breathing room for those multi-sea-winter salmon that are so important to our salmon runs. As most readers know, our Northumberland Strait rivers and those in Cape Breton will benefit immensely. It should encourage all of us to find ways to bring back these important salmon runs. We can build on it.

In addition, ASF has taken its first steps in tracking these large salmon from Greenland feeding grounds home to our rivers. In October of this year, ASF's lead researcher Jonathan Carr, working with a NOAA scientist, caught and satellite tagged eleven salmon. After five months, the tags will "pop off", come to the ocean's surface and transmit to satellites, information on the migration, depth and other things related to the movement of these salmon. This is the first time such satellite tagging has been undertaken from Greenland, to better understand migration and mortality on the way back to their home rivers.

### Striped Bass

ASF is maintaining a focus on striped bass, and their impact on Atlantic salmon, especially smolts, in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. We have called for new management measures by government to find a balance in the ecology of these species.

With 16 years of tracking information on Atlantic salmon, ASF has watched the smolt survival in the Miramichi drop from more than 70% to less than 25%. To provide effective input into management decisions we have published a peer-reviewed article that details the apparent rate of predation due to striped bass.

One encouraging development has been a commercial fishery for striped bass undertaken by the Eel Ground First Nation. The harvest has been successful, and the striped bass well received in its markets. In Boston, the fishmonger has been unable to keep it in stock past the first day of sale.

ASF has also been providing government with advice based on our long experience with fish tracking and mortality research around the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Fortunately, government appears to be taking seriously the striped bass issue.

### Aquaculture

In Newfoundland, ASF continues to battle the provincial government to undertake full environmental assessments of any aquaculture expansion. This has involved not only the massive Placentia Bay project of 11 salmon farms, but a proposal by Marine Harvest to develop four new sites to the west of existing salmon farms on the south coast. Any escapes from these farms could impact Nova Scotia rivers.

### European genetics

The issue of gene banking and the future of inner Bay of Fundy salmon runs came back into focus this year. DFO has acknowledged that the populations being held at Coldbrook and Mactaquac Biodiversity facilities are compromised by the presence of European genes that make these fish less able to survive in their home streams. ASF has been actively raising concern over this issue. As well, the practices of the aquaculture industry in the Bay of Fundy are being brought into question, as the source of these European genes has not been identified.

### Acid Rain

On the Eastern Shore, in the West River Sheet Harbour, a second lime doser has been installed on the Killag tributary of the West River. In addition, the work of Dr. Edmund Halfyard of NSSA, with support from ASF, has attracted other research projects that are helping us understand aspects of acid rain mitigation. These have included watershed liming by helicopter, some significant habitat restoration work, and even research on potential impact on salmon behaviour on being exposed to acidified water.

### Northern Pulp

ASF is involved with many other issues that affect the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. On the matter of Northern Pulp and its proposed new effluent treatment facility, ASF is working closely with the Nova Scotia Salmon Association (NSSA) and consulting with scientific experts in the field of pulp mill effluent in preparation to respond to the environmental assessment when released.




## ATLANTIC SALMON FEDERATION REPORT ..... continued

### Last Word

On a more personal note, after 27 years with ASF and 31 years in fish conservation in Nova Scotia, I have decided to retire. Those 31 years have given me an appreciation for both Atlantic salmon and for those who care deeply about it. Every conservation angler is an important resource for information and a champion for restoration of our Atlantic salmon runs that are so important to our heritage. Organizations such as the St. Mary's River Association are critical to the future well being of wild Atlantic salmon in Nova Scotia and I wish to congratulate you on all the work you have done and look forward to hearing about the wonderful things you will be doing. Thank you for your support and for all your great work.

Lewis Hinks



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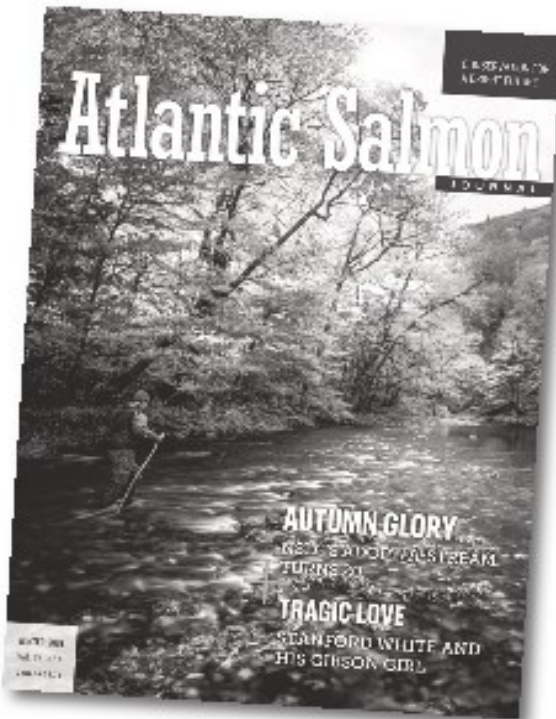
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For more info, contact:  
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## INLAND FISHERIES DIVISION REPORT - Andrew Lowles, Fish Biologist

### Barney's River Sea Run Brown Trout Project

Barney's River in Pictou County is a well known and established brown trout fishery. Sea run brown and speckled trout use the Merigomish Harbour Estuary through the spring, where they feed heavily. In the spring of 2018, 111 brown and five speckled trout were tagged from the Barney's River estuary. Fish were collected by angling with help from the local Rivers Associations and conservation minded anglers. Fish were affixed with small Carlin tags and were transported from their place of capture to be released from four locations in the Merigomish Harbour. The distance from their location of release, back to Barney's River was between 1 and 9km.



There are several outcomes we hope to achieve to achieve with the Barney's River Project: A mark and recapture study was used to estimate the sea run brown trout population, as well as aid in harvest and exploitation estimates. A creel survey on Barney's River, French River and Sutherlands River will estimate angler effort on major systems flowing into Merigomish Harbour. A follow up netting survey will provide the recapture data used in the population estimate, and will additionally provide an indication of growth, timing of upstream migration associated with temperature and flow conditions, and a general overview of the trout species composition of the system.

Following the opening day of the sportfishing season (April 15<sup>th</sup> in these systems), a random creel survey was conducted on Barney's River, French River and

Sutherland River. Three tags were recaptured, all at Barney's River, and each from different release locations. One additional tagged fish was captured and called into the Inland Division office.

As water temperatures began to rise and angler effort decreased, a fyke net was placed in the river approximately 2.5 km upstream from the head of tide to capture fish migrating up river in search of cold-water refuge. In total, 118 brown trout were captured, 7 of which brown trout were tagged. All fish were measured and released.

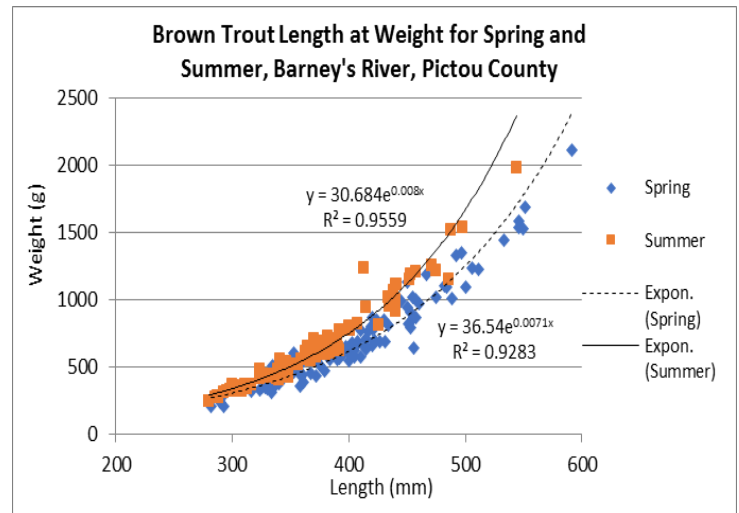


Figure 1. Length at Weight for spring and summer brown trout in Barney's River, Pictou County.

Fish growth is extremely rapid in the highly productive estuary. Body condition, measured by the ratio of fish length to weight, increases rapidly in this short period spend in the estuary (Fig. 1). The average time between marking and recapture was 115 days. Brown trout grew an average of 5.3cm during that time and representing a 13.4% increase in total body length. Body weight of these tagged fish increased from a mean tagging weight of 554g, to an average recapture weight of 1030g, an increase of 85.9%, with one fish increasing having increased in weight by 139.6% (Table 1).



**INLAND FISHERIES DIVISION REPORT ..... continued**

Tag Number	1038	1014	1003	1319	1044	1005	1030	
Capture	27-Mar-18	26-Mar-18	26-Mar-18	11-Apr-18	27-Mar-18	26-Mar-18	27-Mar-18	
Recapture	11-Jul-18	11-Jul-18	13-Jul-18	14-Jul-18	14-Jul-18	15-Jul-18	17-Jul-18	<b>Average</b>
Length .c	452	-	426	342	356	409	373	393
Length .r	513	468	466	384	398	460	452	446
Length d.	61	-	40	42	42	51	79	53
<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>13.5%</b>		<b>9.4%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>21.2%</b>	<b>13.4%</b>
Weight .c	936	588	634	326	312	638	444	554
Weight .r	1538	1188	1148	548	606	1116	1064	1030
Weight d.	602	600	514	222	294	478	620	476
<b>Percent Change</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>102.0%</b>	<b>81.1%</b>	<b>68.1%</b>	<b>94.2%</b>	<b>74.9%</b>	<b>139.6%</b>	<b>85.9%</b>


Table 1. Comparison of measurements for recaptured brown trout in Barney's River, Pictou County. .c-capture, .r-release, .d-difference


In 2019, Inland Fisheries plans to continue this study by replicating this season's activities. Angling will occur as soon as the estuary is ice free and will continue until the season opens. If you wish to participate, please contact Andrew Lowles.

We want to extend out thanks to the Pictou Country Rivers Association, the Antigonish Rivers Association and the many conservation minded volunteers who were out to assist in the first year of this project.



Andrew Lowles, Fisheries Biologist. [Andrew.lowles@novascotia.ca](mailto:Andrew.lowles@novascotia.ca)





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## **NOTICE TO MEMBERS**

### **GENERAL ANNUAL MEETING and BOARD NOMINATIONS**

The Annual General Meeting of the St. Mary's River Association will be held on **Sunday May 26, 2019 at 2 pm** at the Education & Interpretive Centre, 8404 Highway 7, Sherbrooke NS. All paid up members are eligible to vote at the meeting. Memberships will be available for those wishing to join or renew their membership.

**There are currently open director positions.** The Nominations Committee will be considering nominees for these or any other positions that become open. In accordance with the Association's by-laws, nominations from the membership at large will be received at the address below up to the 1st day of April, 2019. Any member of the Association may submit nominations for candidates for any or all of the open director positions.

Nominations are open this year for the offices of President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary as their two year terms have expired. Nominations shall be in writing signed by the nominator and the nominee using the Board of Directors Nomination and Consent Form available below or on our web site at <http://www.stmarysriverassociation.com>.

All are welcome to attend. Email [stmarysriver@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:stmarysriver@ns.sympatico.ca) or mail to St. Mary's River Association, PO Box 179, Sherbrooke, N. S. B0J 3C0

### **SMRA Board of Directors Nomination and Consent Form**

Please return this completed form as soon as possible in person, by mail or electronically. Candidates for President must reside in Nova Scotia.

Nominations will be accepted by the Secretary on or before the 1st of April 2019.

#### **Nominee for Board of Directors (Please Print)**

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position Applied for \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone      Bus (    ) \_\_\_\_\_      Res (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a Member in good standing and hereby consent to my nomination as a candidate for election to the Board of Directors of the St Mary's River Association, for a two year term of office, subject to my election. I am prepared to subscribe to the aims and objectives of the Association as stated in the St Mary's River Association Memorandum of Association.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Sponsor of Nominee (Please Print)**

As a Member in good standing of the Association I nominate the above nominee for the position of \_\_\_\_\_.

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position nominated for \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## WEST BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT UPDATE -submitted by Kenny Silver

The SMRA has completed the fifth year of the West River (St. Mary's) Habitat Restoration Project. The 2018 work built on the restoration started in 2014 and to date we have spent more than one million dollars to restore twenty kilometers of the river. If you are in the area, we would encourage everyone to take a look at the work we have done in the Cameron Settlement and Upper Caledonia area. The restoration includes a variety of structures that are aimed at creating a narrower deeper channel with more pools. The picture below shows one of the many pools created.



The narrower deeper channel increases juvenile survival during the hot dry summers and reduces winter ice production that causes spring time damage to the river.

We are seeing benefits from the work that has been completed with a five to six time increase in spawning activity. Unfortunately the extremely wet fall last year made it impossible to get accurate redd counts. However, we did observe spawning activity in the area.

This restoration work is expensive and it could not have been able to be done without the financial help of our funding partners DFO (Small Craft Harbours & Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnership Program), the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation, NSLC Adopt-A-Stream, and the Royal Bank. We are continually seeking funders and donors to continue this important work and we have plans to do more work in 2019.

Another part of this restoration effort was the release of almost 170,000 unfed fry in several sections of the river and its tributaries. These were the progeny of the Kelt captured several years ago and DFO's smolt grow-out program. The picture below shows some of the juvenile fish being released. DFO deserves a thank you for their support and work on this program.



Let's hope that 2019 will be another successful year and we will continue to secure the funding needed to continue our restoration efforts!



View of bank work at Beaver River site. Photo credit: Charles MacInnis





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## 2018 Bi-Annual Atlantic Salmon Research & Restoration Dinner and Auction

Co-chairs Gerry Doucet and Jim Lerikos and their Dinner Committee with members from the ARA, SMRA and the NSSA have closed the books on the most successful Dinner and Auction yet.

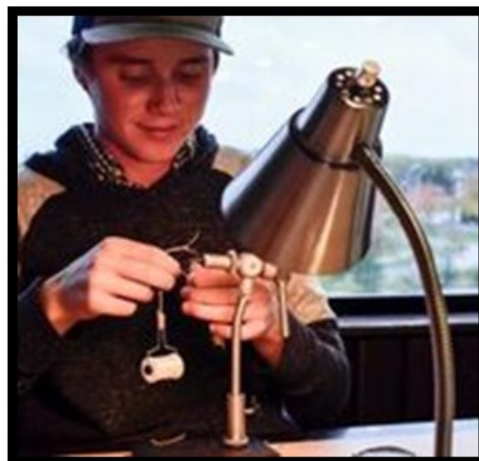
Events expanded into the afternoon with activities at the Practice Field at Columbus Field. As anglers and the curious gathered there were fishing updates, casting and Guideline products courtesy of Neil Houlding, Rob Healy and Pieroway, as well as a BBQ and a silent auction.



The afternoon featured a bus tour of some of the stream work that the ARA with our partner NSLC Adopt-A-Stream have completed in the area including Wrights River, West River and James River. Central Nova MP Sean Fraser, ASF's Martin Silverstone and Adopt A Stream's Amy Weston were among the many guests.

Special thanks goes out to Antigonish River Association President Nick MacInnis for his tour organizing and Tim Handforth for his project management skills in the tent business.

Meanwhile at the Bloomfield Centre a talent group of fly tyers was assembling for Bob MacDonald's Conclave. A steady stream of guests watched feathers, hooks and thread transform into deadly trout and salmon patterns.



Another new feature at this dinner to help celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NSLC Adopt-A-Stream was an exposition of river conservation groups from around the province who have partnered with NSLC Adopt-A-Stream to help preserve, restore and protect hundreds of kilometers of river habitat. Guests toured the fly tying Conclave featuring noted Maritime tyers while visiting the association displays.

As friends old and new took in the tying, discussed river work with the associations, watched a rod building demonstration by the Burl Shop they were treated to a smoked salmon and mackerel buffet generously sponsored by Jim Lawley. The salmon was from the land-based, closed containment facilities of Sustainable Blue.



## 2018 Bi-Annual Atlantic Salmon Research....con't

Before dinner guests perused the silent auction tables, purchased raffle tickets, eyeballed the fantastic Live Auction Table and of course talked fishing.



Host Terry Macintyre got the evening session underway.

This year's dinner was dedicated to Joanne Mailman and the late Florence Duffy who dedicated years of service and hard work for river conservation and Atlantic salmon with the SMRA. They were invaluable members of the Dinner Committee over the years and helped forge the strong bond between SMRA and the ARA. We were honoured to recognize their service with a presentation.



Dinner was served as Terry regularly fired off some Snap Auction items. Following dinner our Special

Recognition presentation was made to this year's worthy recipient; NSLC Adopt-A-Stream for their 10<sup>th</sup> year of leadership in river restoration and conservation. Ray Plourde reviewed the impressive contributions and pioneering work of the organization. Amy Weston and Beth Martin, Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation accepted the award.



The Live auction followed featuring trips, original artwork by Bruce Wood and Paul Tuttle, kayaks and Pieroway and Einnarson fishing tackle.

With our partners, St. Mary's River Association, we very much appreciate the support of our members as well as local and national businesses for their ongoing support.

The dinner auction continues to be our major source of funding and typically the funds raised are usually quadrupled in river restoration work (see the article later in this newsletter). But the dinner is also our major social event and a great chance to meet fellow salmon anglers and friends of the salmon.

*Thank you Gerry, Jim and the Dinner Committee!*

Article submitted by David MacNeil of the Antigonish River Association.

Photos by Sheri Bradbury



## SMRA Board of Directors 2018-2019

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New directors are  
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Anyone interested in  
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# INTERNATIONAL YEAR<sup>OF</sup> THE SALMON

'Salmon are at risk from environmental change and human activities across the Northern Hemisphere. The epic migrations of salmon through rivers and oceans take them across borders, languages, cultures and economies. Saving these beautiful and influential creatures requires a uniquely large-scale solution. The International Year of the Salmon sets out to protect salmon by bringing people together to share knowledge, raise public awareness and take action. We have a chance to save not just salmon, but also the communities and cultures that depend on them.'

For more information and to find events in your area visit <https://yearofthesalmon.org>

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### **FUNDING PARTNERS THANK YOU**

We are very grateful to receive funding from our generous supporters, without whose financial assistance, much of the work of the St. Mary's River Association would not be possible. Thank you to the following:

**The Elizabeth Wakeman Henderson Foundation**  
**NSLC Adopt a Stream Program**  
**Nova Scotia Salmon Association**  
**Atlantic Salmon Conservation Federation**  
**NS Student Careers Skill Development Program**  
**Canada Summer Jobs**  
**Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program**  
**Small Craft Harbours**  
**RBC Benevity Fund**  
**Municipality of the District of St. Mary's**  
**All donors and supporters of our Bi-Annual Dinner/Auction Event**  
**Anonymous Donors**

To all our volunteers, a great big thank you! Without your generous contribution, we would not be able to do this important work.

If undelivered return to:

**St. Mary's River Association**

**PO Box 179**

**Sherbrooke, Nova Scotia, Canada**

**B0J 3C0**



***St. Mary's River Association  
Education & Interpretive  
Centre***

8404 Highway #7, SHERBROOKE, NS

1-902-522-2099

[stmarysriver@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:stmarysriver@ns.sympatico.ca)

***Exhibits related to salmon angling***