

# SMRA NEWS SPRING 2020



*Volume 31*

St. Mary's River Association

## **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."

### **Website:**

<https://www.stmarysriverassociation.com>

Facebook: St. Mary's River Association

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

### **Registered Charity**

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**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.**

**Publisher, Editor, Layout and Design: Tammie Vautour**

**Printer: Bounty Print**

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

The Annual General Meeting of the St. Mary's River Association will be held on Sunday, May 31st 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.

### **Cover Photo :**

Trying to capture an image of an Atlantic salmon over a nest was like trying to photograph a ghost. We had to learn the river intimately; to the point that we memorized the particular arrangement of rocks in the river bed. If a salmon were to disturb the gravel, we would know. When we found signs of fresh digging, we would place a remote camera and wait nearby, eyes glued to a tablet that we hoped would give us a glimpse of what few people have ever seen. Day after night after day, we failed. As the sun set on our tenth and last day, we saw ripples coming downriver in the direction of our camera. I grabbed for the tablet and watched the screen. Suddenly, a large male salmon entered the frame. I managed only one decent photo in the few seconds it was there.

Nick Hawkins, Nick Hawkins Photography

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT—Scott Beaver

Dear Friends of the St. Mary's River Association,

**What a year this has been!** Nothing will bring a family, or a community together like the threat of losing something you treasure. Our Association and the residents of our area were threatened, like never before, with the potential of industrial activity that could have serious consequences for the survival of the St. Mary's River and Atlantic Salmon. For over 40 years the St. Mary's River Association has gone forward with one overriding objective—to see the river protected and Atlantic salmon stocks restored to historic levels in our treasured river. It was late summer 2018 when we were introduced to Atlantic Gold, the proponent of an open pit gold mine, in close proximity to the St. Mary's. Needless to say, we did not know a great deal about open pit gold mines or Atlantic Gold. I was contacted by representatives of the company and asked if they could make a presentation to our Board. It was at this point that we realized we were entering uncharted waters and a steep learning curve for all of us. As the Fall unfolded startling facts began to emerge and the alarm bells sounded with all our Directors. We knew from the outset that we were dealing with a group of professional promoters when we asked for a copy of their presentation and were denied.

At this time we also learned about Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) and earthen dam breaks like Mount Polly which only occurred a few years back in BC. Western Mining Action Network provided details like 1 out of every 1000 dams of this style fail world wide. One broke in Brazil while we were learning this new data with tragic results. During this time the province shut down two historic gold mine sites, Montague and Goldenville from any public use due to toxic levels of arsenic. The province's soil quality guidelines call for no more than 31 milligrams per kilogram of arsenic. But in Goldenville, the maximum level found in the tailings was 209,000 milligrams per kilogram, and the average was 19,181 milligrams per kilogram, according to a 2015 report from the Department of Natural Resources. Arsenic occurs naturally in rocks, but gold mining will disturb and mobilize it. According to an article in All Nova Scotia the Province is investing 20 million in the next year just to determine how to clean up contamination from some old gold mine sites. Not clean it up, but just figure out how to do so. Maybe in the grand scheme, it's an economic burden, just as it is an environmental burden.

We have seen community members speak out vocally, post NOPE signs in their yards and write letters to elected officials. A protest in Sherbrooke when Atlantic Gold opened an office on the main street and a second protest at the Alt Airport hotel outside Halifax when the Mining Association of Nova Scotia hosted an investor's meeting funded by the province. Seasonal residents wrote a passionate letter which stated they spend about 1 million per

year in the municipality and they are here because of the pristine beauty and lifestyle it provides. We have seen underwater footage captured for the first time in the Maritime Provinces of female salmon in the very waters where the proponent proposes to build the 70 meter earthen dam compound and let loose their effluent. Here is the link to our video on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCtkRGITH40&feature=youtu.be>. Philanthropist Paul Sobey has spoken publicly about his displeasure with the proposed project calling it "mind boggling for a gold mine plan in this pristine area". We have witnessed Ms. Belanger Atlantic Gold COO order the removal of four individuals from a public meeting who were doing nothing more than asking questions. Atlantic Gold was purchased by a much larger gold company called St. Barbara and have moved from the Toronto stock exchange to Australia. We have viewed an Economic Study funded by the municipality which certainly leaves you thinking this is not a good project for St. Mary's and we have witnessed the Province add the Archibald Lake Wilderness Area to the protected lands of Nova Scotia list. Literally cutting the gold mines proposed water supply off from the project! On August 19<sup>th</sup> 2019 we hosted a Gold Mine Information Session in Sherbrooke at the Lions Hall with four guest speakers. Here is the link on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCLGMaf2mRI>. Provincial leader of the NDP party Gary Burrill attended and says in the video folks who want to make a change email the Premier directly at [PREMIER@novascotia.ca](mailto:PREMIER@novascotia.ca) with your displeasure to the Cochrane Hill Gold mine project.

All news here at St. Mary's has not been bad. In the Spring of 2019 Federal Fisheries Minister Jonathan Wilkinson and our MP Sean Fraser came to Sherbrooke to announce a 1.2 Million dollar grant from the Federal Coastal Restoration Fund. SMRA would be given these funds for a three-year project which would see the continuation of our West Branch Habitat Restoration project and add a new liming aspect to our work. This was Fantastic news for us! This 1.2 million will add to the 1.1 million we have already spent during the years 2014 to 2018 on habitat restoration.

I can promise the people of St. Mary's, and our membership that SMRA under my leadership will do everything we can to stop this mine from moving forward while at the same time continue to work on our Atlantic salmon recovery projects.

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



## SMRA EDUCATION & INTERPRETIVE CENTRE NEWS—Tammie Vautour

Hi there!

For those of you that I have not had the opportunity to meet, I'm Tammie. I spent the past season keeping Megan's seat warm while she brought our newest conservationist into the world. What an incredible season it's was!

First let me say how fortunate I feel to have been able to stand beside such an amazing group of people. Their dedication, drive and energy was a constant inspiration. I had no idea of the scope of the efforts being made by the folks at the SMRA. I suspect that there are a few of us around here that are unaware of the countless hours being spent to continue the work they do for the Atlantic Salmon and our community as a whole.

The summer started with a bang with two amazing events. The SMRA hosted Federal Fisheries Minister John Wilkinson and local MP Sean Fraser as he announced his support of the work being done by the SMRA .



SMRA President Scott Beaver and  
Treasurer Gwen Boutilier

The SMRA also celebrated it's 40th year. Making it not only the first river association in Nova Scotia but the oldest in the province. Quite an accomplishment and certainly something to celebrate! What a more fitting way than starting the day with a paddle led by Scott Beaver and a river hike led by Karen McKendy before indulging in a BBQ at the Centre.

I was incredibly lucky to tag along with these folks for some pretty amazing adventures, always patiently answering my questions. At start of the year I was invited to join the group to release the unfed salmon fry, over 200,000 thousand fry were released last spring, a great experience even with the clouds of blackflies attacking!

Shortly after I got to head over to the smolt wheel, where I learned not only what that strange thing I the river was but I got my first ever peek at a wild Atlantic salmon.

My greatest day came in December, with the release of the kelts back into the river, where I got to get up close and personal with a big beautiful salmon.



Here you go Ralph, I used the picture. Thanks to Gwen for capturing this moment for me! Definitely a day I won't forget.

With the backdrop of the river and snow gently falling there couldn't have been a better way to end my season.

I also had the pleasure of working with our summer students, Caleb Jordon and Maddie Dort who always made the days brighter.

In addition to painting, organizing and sprucing up the IC, Caleb shone, taking on the role of revitalizing our gift shop, working with consignors and creating our inventory software. He also designed the Year of the Salmon poster hanging in the Centre.

Maddie did her fair share of painting and organizing but really did us proud, taking part in River Day's. With a brave smile she took part in the days activities and proving herself a serious contender not only in the tug of war but the pie eating contest.

There have been so many great and successful events and experiences this year, it would be impossible to list them all!

### ***Did you know?***

*Only a tiny percent of Atlantic salmon survives from egg to adulthood. If an 11 pounds female lays 8,000 eggs, on average, two will live long enough to spawn as adults*



## SMRA EDUCATION & INTERPRETIVE CENTRE NEWS—Tammie Vautour



*Minister Wilkinson's funding announcement for the support of the St. Mary's River Association*

*The St. Mary's River Association hosted a morning of construction, for the Ducks Unlimited Treasured Wetland project,*



*Above: An unexpected visitor on our 40th river hike!*

*Left: Dr Linda Campbell, Guest Speaker 2019, AGM*

## INLAND FISHERIES— Andrew Lowles

In the spring of 2019, the second year of a mark-recapture was undertaken to study sea run brown trout in Barney's River, Pictou County. With the help of volunteers from Antigonish Rivers Association and Pictou County Rivers Association, considerable effort was spent in the estuary capturing fish by angling. A variety of methods were used to capture trout including fly, bait and lures.

In total, 68 fish were captured during the 2019 spring tagging sessions. Of those, nine were already tagged from the 2018 tagging season. This is remarkable given the total number of captures. I would have expected to see one or two, but not nine. The other 59 fish were fixed with Carlin tags and released.

As in 2018, a fyke net was placed at a site above the estuary to capture upstream migrating fish. While waiting for fish to migrate, the recreational angling season opened, and fish were captured by fishermen. In the first three weeks of the season, three tagged brown trout were caught. Two of those were released and one was kept.

A creel survey was performed through the first six weeks of the fishing season. Angling pressure at Barney's River by the Sunrise Trail bridge in the estuary has been historically high but appears to be much less in recent years. I suspect that this is partially

attributed to the increasing fish quality in South Side Harbour, Antigonish resulting from changes to angling regulations.

At the beginning of July, the North Shore received substantial rainfall. This led to localized flooding and the water level at Barney's River increase by more than one meter, forcing us to pull the fyke net. I suspect that most of the large, migratory fish moved through at that high-water period. Catches of smaller trout were quite high compared to 2018, but the fewer large brown trout were caught.

We only encountered two tagged fish in our net. One fish, a brown trout, affectionately tagged 1078, hung around the lower river for a few weeks. This fish was originally tagged on March 28, 2018. It was recaptured almost exactly one year later in the exact same location. In early July, this same fish was caught at reported by fellow angler, Matt Dort, in the lower river.



Andrew Lowles

Almost two weeks later, 1078 appeared upriver a little further and on the end of my own line this time. I had been checking the net on a Sunday morning and decided to wet a line and cast a fly afterwards.



A gentle release and a kick of the tail and 1078 dove deep in the pool.

On August 1, 2019, we met 1078 for a fourth time this season when it appeared in our fyke net. She was measured and weighed, then gently released. In a bit more than a year since our first meeting, 1078 had grown by more than two pounds and a long four inches. This frequent meeting of 1078 speaks volumes about effective catch and release techniques. Gentle handling and keeping them wet goes such a long way towards post-release survival.

Andrew Lowles

[Andrew.Lowles@novascotia.ca](mailto:Andrew.Lowles@novascotia.ca)

Fisheries Biologist, Inland Fisheries

### Quick Facts

#### About Atlantic Salmon

- *Type: Fish*
  - *Diet: Carnivore*
  - *Life span: 13 years maximum*
  - *Size: 28–30 in*
  - *Weight: 8–12 lb*
  - *Habitat: Freshwater and Saltwater*
  - *Range: North America, Europe and Baltic waters*
- Scientific name:*  
*Salmo salar*



## ATLANTIC SALMON FEDERATION REPORT — Kris Hunter, Director NS and PEI Programs

Hello from the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF). For those that don't already know me I am Kris Hunter and I am the program director for ASF for NS and PEI. I took over the role from Lewis Hinks who retired after a long-distinguished career the previous spring. I come to the role after spending over a decade volunteering with numerous river and angling groups here in NS, including the St. Mary's River Association, the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation, and the Nova Scotia Salmon Association. As such I have a good knowledge of local issues and a great understanding and appreciation of what the St. Mary's Rivers Association contributes. Thank-you for all that you do and hopefully I can serve you well and represent your interests both within ASF and further afield.

The past number of months have been a very busy time for ASF and me personally as we work with our affiliates, like SMRA, with government and First Nation organizations, and with our regional council, the NSSA to deliver on our four strategic goals that we identified in 2018. For those unfamiliar you can find these goals outlined in our Blueprint for Saving Wild Atlantic Salmon on the Strategic Plan section of our website. Briefly our four goals are to ensure Sustainable Atlantic salmon fisheries & engaged fishers and anglers, to reduce the effects of open net-pen salmon aquaculture, to determine what's killing wild Atlantic Salmon at sea and offers solutions, and to remove barriers & restore healthy rivers. To achieve these lofty goals we have been engaged in numerous activities. Some of the things our research department has been working on include research on tracking Atlantic Salmon smolts and adults to and from Greenland; correlating movements with environmental variables such as currents and temperatures; and investigating predator-prey interactions especially as it pertains to Striped Bass and Atlantic Salmon in the Miramichi. Additionally, we continue to support and work with our partners to implement the landmark Greenland Agreement that protect all the salmon that overwinter in the Labrador Sea; to advocate for reform to aquaculture to stop its impacts on wild Atlantic Salmon; to facilitate large scale dam removals; to engage with First Nations organizations to our mutual benefit and to the

benefit of wild Atlantic Salmon; and to develop numerous resources such as the recovery guidebooks for affiliates and the Atlantic Salmon map that was distributed with the summer edition of the Atlantic Salmon Journal.

Closer to home some of the things I have been working on include relationship building and engagement with organizations across NS and PEI; working with our partners on gold mines proposed for Beaver Dam, 15 Mile Stream, Cochrane Hill, and Goldboro; participating in the environmental assessment on the proposed Northern Pulp effluent facility; and working with the NS Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture to respond to aquaculture applications from Snow Island, Cooke, and Cermaq. I have also attended numerous governments, first nations, and partner led meetings and engaged in public outreach and communications exercises. Going forward I am very eager to work with groups such as the SMRA and to find new and innovate ways to support the work that you do.



### ***How big are Atlantic Salmon?***

*Adults are usually 28 to 30 in (70 to 76 cm) in length, and usually weigh 8 to 12 lb (4–6 kg). The heaviest recorded Atlantic Salmon was a whopping 100 lb (45 kg)!*



## NSLC ADOPT-A-STREAM NEWS— Amy Weston

### Advancing Habitat Restoration in the 2020's

The Nova Scotia Salmon Association's Adopt A Stream program supports and celebrates the outstanding commitment of local community groups, river associations, First Nation communities and Indigenous organizations to restore and protect our waterways. At the very heart of our efforts are anglers who contribute to the Nova Scotia Sportfish Habitat Fund when they purchase recreational fishing licenses. With this support, we will continue to provide project funding and technical field advice and training to groups like the St. Mary's Rivers Association. This year we anticipate contributing to the habitat restoration work of 23 groups.

2019 was the concluding year of the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation's 10-year title sponsorship of the program. The NSLC's outstanding involvement has been a great boon to the work of the NSSA and our community partners across the province. Between 2010 and 2019 the NSLC raised more than one million dollars for Adopt A Stream. In those ten years, the program has evolved and increased its capacity, continually building our expertise in habitat assessment, restoration planning and design, fish passage assessment, and remediation techniques. On the ground, NSLC Adopt A Stream supported 226 projects that restored 1,370,430 m<sup>2</sup> of aquatic habitat, improved fish passage to 755 km of rivers and streams, planted 68,685 trees, created 849 field jobs, and benefited from 69,000 volunteer hours.

The St Mary's River is also among the eight priority watersheds in the Nova Scotia Salmon Association's newly launched Southern Uplands WATER Project for Aquatic Species at Risk. Funded in part by the Canada Nature

Fund for Aquatic Species At Risk, and with more than 20 active partners - including river associations, other conservation and indigenous organizations, academia, industry, and government agencies - the 4-year project builds on the NSSA's experience in watershed assessment and research, habitat restoration, and acid rain mitigation developed through Adopt A Stream and the West River Project.

Watershed stewardship plans will be developed, focusing a diversity of stream and river habitats, but with particular emphasis on four species at risk: Atlantic salmon, American eel, Atlantic whitefish, and Brook floater mussels - for eight priority watersheds: the Medway River, LaHave River, Petite Rivière, Annapolis River (specifically Round Hill River and Fales Brook), Musquodoboit River, West River Sheet Harbour, Moser River, and St. Mary's River. These plans will identify the current state of each watershed by: summarizing previous efforts and collating available information, including traditional and local knowledge; identifying knowledge gaps that limit our ability to restore these ecosystems; and collecting new information to fill knowledge gaps, including some novel techniques such as using drones, modeling and remote sensing, and determining where these species exist within these watersheds using environmental DNA (eDNA). The reports will then identify, detail, and rank pragmatic conservation actions for each watershed to expedite future work, including detailed costs, planning considerations, partnership opportunities and, in some cases, step-by-step instructions on high-ranking conservation projects.

The habitat stewardship plans are intended to guide future restoration work. However, implementation of identified high-priority restoration pro-

jects - such as addressing problematic barriers to fish migration or major in-stream habitat restoration, as well as continuation of work such as helicopter liming of acid-impacted streams - are key components of this project.

A further element of this project is to build restoration capacity through innovation. Restoration projects are sometimes limited not only by planning and funding, but also by the availability of methods to restore the habitat. Through this project, we intend to design, build, and test some new methods to restore fish habitat, including building a land-based lime spreading machine, a miniature lime doser, and a mobile streamside incubation trailer earmarked for Atlantic Whitefish but designed to be flexible in the future.

Over the course of the project, we will be sharing our progress and seeking direct input to the St Mary's planning documents and restoration prioritization. We are excited about the potential for this project to build on the watershed knowledge, amplify the goals and ongoing work of local partner groups including of course, the St. Mary's River Association.

For more information about the NSSA Field programs, including Adopt A Stream and the Southern Uplands initiative, and other program activities please visit [nssalmon.ca](http://nssalmon.ca) and [adoptastream.ca](http://adoptastream.ca).

Amy Weston



## NSLC ADOPT-A-STREAM NEWS— Amy Weston



**adopt**  
a stream

Photo Caption: Nova Scotia Salmon Association / Adopt A Stream offers training for watercourse alteration installer certification, habitat restoration (above), culvert assessment for fish passage and habitat suitability index assessment (below ).

### ***Did you know?***

*Atlantic salmon can smell one drop of scent in an area the equivalent of ten Olympic size pools!*



### **Member of the Year**

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

**Tim Sawlor**

**as**

**Member of the Year**

Tim is a Software Engineer who has been a member of the SMRA for many years, and has served on the Board of Directors since 2013. He has had the opportunity to participate in various projects from tree planting to fish ladders, and serves on several committees including IT, communications, habitat and is working on getting a wood turtle education and observation project started. Originally from Cow Bay NS, Tim spent many years enjoying time in the area around the Saint Mary's River with his Dad (also an SMRA Director) before finally moving permanently to the area with his family in 2008. He enjoys fishing, camping, hiking and canoeing, and cares deeply about protecting the beauty and ecology for everyone, including future generations.

Thank you for all that you do for the SMRA.

Congratulations Tim!

## DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS CANADA—Megan Wilson

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has completed another year of Atlantic salmon work in Nova Scotia's Southern Upland in 2019. This includes smolt and juvenile electrofishing assessments on the St. Mary's River and smolt, juvenile and adult assessments on the LaHave River.

### *Assessment unit*

A smolt assessment was completed in collaboration with St. Mary's River Association members between May 1 and June 6 on the East and West branches of the St. Mary's River. During this period, 326 smolts were captured at Silver's Bridge (East Branch), and 85 smolts were captured at Glenelg Bridge (West Branch). Mark-recapture data estimates production on the East Branch as 6823 smolts (with a 95% confidence interval of 3629-10018) and on the West Branch as 1763 smolts (95% confidence interval 287-3238). In 2018, 250 smolts were captured on East Branch and 152 on West Branch. No smolt production estimate was possible as a mark-recapture study was not done.

In spite of challenges posed by high water levels, an electrofishing survey of 10 sites was completed between July 15 and July 26, 2019. Six sites were sampled on the West Branch and four on the East Branch, as well as a mark-recapture survey at one East Branch site. West Branch average densities were 4.3 fry per 100m<sup>2</sup> and 2.0 parr (all ages combined) per 100m<sup>2</sup>. East Branch average densities were 14.1 fry per 100m<sup>2</sup> and 2.8 parr per 100m<sup>2</sup>. The estimated fry and parr densities in 2019 were lower than 2018 estimates, as well as the previous 5-year (2014-2018) average on the East and West Branch.

LaHave River adult Atlantic salmon counts at the Morgan Falls fish ladder – the index used for Southern Upland adult returns – consisted of 142 grilse and 11 multi-sea-winter salmon in 2019. Grilse returns were higher than the 37 counted in 2018, but multi-sea-winter salmon numbers decreased from 58 in 2018. Morgan Falls returns remain well below the conservation requirement for the LaHave River; egg deposition from 2019 returns was approximately 4% of the conservation requirement. Note that all numbers reported for 2019 should be considered preliminary.

The Southern Upland Atlantic Salmon assessment unit has undergone considerable staff changes in 2019. Early in the year, the unit lead biologist Alex Levy took a position as section manager in DFO's Fisheries Protection-Freshwater Development and was replaced by the unit biologist Dustin Raab. Jeff Reader temporarily acted as the unit biologist (April – July) and is now the lead biologist for the New Brunswick Atlantic Salmon Assessment unit (inner and outer Bay of Fundy). In October, Andrew Taylor joined the Southern Upland Atlantic Salmon Assessment unit as a biologist. Finally, Robert Beaumaster was hired as a technician to maintain and operate the Morgan Falls Fishway on the LaHave River. Megan Wilson remains the lead technician in the unit. With a full complement of staff, 2020 should be a productive year!

### *Genetics unit*

The Coldbrook Biodiversity facility team had another busy year in 2019. In the spring, as part of the Southern Upland interim captive rearing pilot, 200,000 unfed fry were released into the St. Mary's River system with support from SMRA members. In September, 288 fall parr from the West Branch (Chisholm Brook) and 131 fall parr from the East Branch (Black Brook) were collected. In November, staff at the Coldbrook Biodiversity Facility spawned 59 St. Mary's River crosses and it is estimated that there are currently 214,000 eggs in incubation. Milt was also collected from 25 males for cryopreservation, to be available for future spawning. Following the crosses, there were 25 broodstock salmon released on the mainstem St. Mary's River.

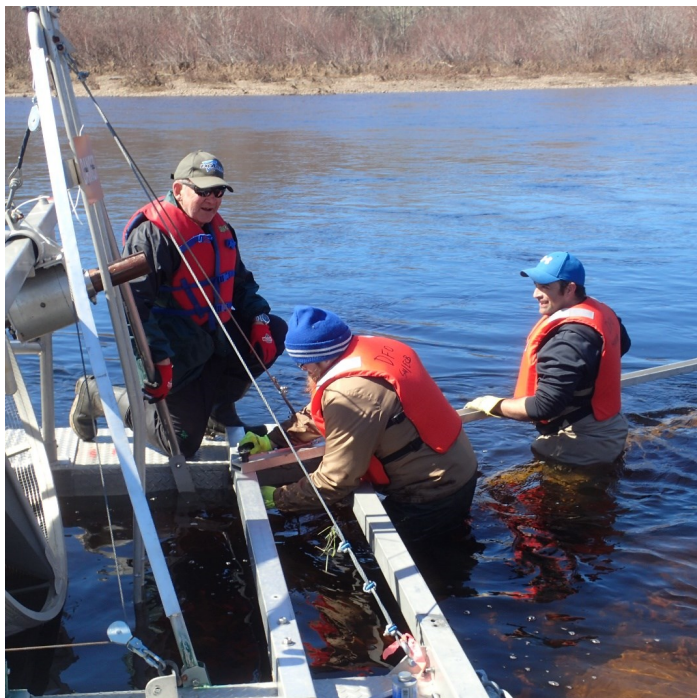
As we prepare for another year of assessment work on the St. Mary's River in 2020, we look forward to continuing our collaboration with the SMRA on assessment and monitoring activities within the watershed.

### ***Did you know?***

*Some Atlantic salmon spend a single winter at sea before returning to spawn in freshwater. These are known as grilse. Other Atlantic salmon spend 2-3 winters at sea, reaching sizes in excess of 55 pounds.*



## DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND OCEANS CANADA—Megan Wilson



Above—Winston Sawlor (SMRA), Kris Hunter (DFO) and Zachary Chaisson (DFO) installing a wing on the East Branch smolt wheel. Photo credit M. Wilson.



Below—Anna MacDonnell, Beth Lenentine, Taylor Strong, Craig Keddy, (all DFO-Coldbrook Biodiversity Facility staff) and Milton Gallant with the SMRA releasing fry at Chisholm Brook.



### ***Did you know?***

*Atlantic salmon are incredible fish that migrate thousands of miles during their lifetime. They live in both freshwater and saltwater habitats.*

Left—Jeff Reader (DFO) and Megan Wilson (DFO) collecting biological data from Atlantic Salmon smolts at Silver's Pool, St. Mary's River. Photo credit D. Raab.



## PHOTOGRAPHING THE ST. MARY'S—Edwin DeMont

### Photographing the St. Mary's River

I retired from St.F.X. in 2018 and decided to return to a long-term hobby of landscape photography to fill my newly expanded spare time. I wanted a new challenge so decided to switch from traditional 'flat' photographs, which I had been taking for about 40 years, to a new camera technology that allowed me to take 360 photographs and videos. These can be viewed in a variety of online sites, and in addition VR headsets. The technology took a while to learn, especially the post processing software, but it took much longer to learn how to compose 360 images, since the viewer can see everything in the scene.

The first landscape I decided to photograph in detail was the St. Mary's River, and I have been busy for the past year. I have been posting my flat and 360 photographs on Google Maps, and started to publish 360 videos on YouTube (Nova Scotia in 360). I am still editing more 360 videos and will be posting them this spring. I also created a VR Tour of the river. There are links to all my photographs on my YouTube Channel.

I am always looking for new beautiful areas of the river to photograph, so if you know of any please contact me [m.edwin.demont@gmail.com](mailto:m.edwin.demont@gmail.com) Thank you!



## PHOTOGRAPHING THE ST.MARY'S—Edwin DeMont



Edwin DeMont has been a familiar face at the Interpretive Centre and has led a number of projects to help bring awareness of the SMRA and the NOPE campaign to a greater audience while capturing the pristine beauty of the St. Mary's River.

Edwin's projects include:

Inaturalist, SMRA's participation in the Antigonish Festival,  
Saving the St. Mary's, Art Night



## NOVA SCOTIA NATURE TRUST— Fiona Brooks

With its towering stands of old growth Hemlock trees and rich Acadian floodplain forests, the St. Mary's River continues to inspire our work at the Nova Scotia Nature Trust. We began our conservation efforts on the river in 2006 with a goal of protecting and connecting a corridor of intact riparian habitat to help restore and sustain the long-term ecological health of this unique river and the species that depend on it for their survival. We are now closer than ever before to achieving that goal.

2019 was an historic year for conservation along the river. In all, the Nature Trust protected four new conservation sites, totaling 540 acres, along the banks of the St. Mary's. With the addition of these new properties, the Nature Trust has protected over 1,300 acres of land encompassing 21 km of river shoreline. This land assemblage effort is complemented by the roughly 7,600 acres of adjacent and nearby Crown-owned lands that have been identified for protection as part of the Province's Parks and Protected Areas Plan. Although formal designation is still pending the necessary survey work and public consultations, the Province announced in late fall last year that it will designate these lands as a Provincial Park. Together, the Nature Trust's conservation lands and the pending park lands cover almost 9,000 acres of ecologically rich land and 50 km of shoreline. Such connectivity ensures that wildlife can move safely among and between habitats and is vital to maintaining the long-term health of the river as a whole.

On May 25<sup>th</sup> last year, we co-hosted a guided nature walk on the Waternish Conservation Lands with Nature Nova Scotia. A total of 30 participants, ranging in age from 5 to 85-years-old, explored the trails along the river to learn about floodplain forests, as well as the natural and cultural values of the river. The Waternish Conservation Lands are protected with a conservation easement, which is a legal agreement developed between the landowner and the Nature Trust that permanently protects nature by restricting certain types of development and land uses that can take place on the property. We were very fortunate that day to be joined by Dr. Hardy Eshbaugh who is the property owner of the Waternish Conservation Lands, as well as long-time SMRA member and friend of the Nature Trust. Hardy shared with participants the unique history of the property and his extensive bird expertise. We were equally lucky to have Karen McKendry, a former Nature Trust employee, with us as well to help lead the hike and share her knowledge of the river with the group. Thanks to everyone who came out and walked with us!

We would like to extend special thanks to our volunteers – be they Property Guardians diligently monitoring our conservation lands, events volunteers providing information to the public, or Bird's Eye View volunteers with highly-trained ears tuned to the tree tops – thank you all for your efforts! If you would like to learn more about contributing to on-the-ground stewardship of Conservation Lands through volunteering with the Nature Trust, please get in touch ([volunteer@nsnt.ca](mailto:volunteer@nsnt.ca), or 902-425-5263).

Find out more about our work and keep up with the latest Nature Trust 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 directly to me anytime.

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

### 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.

## NOVA SCOTIA NATURE TRUST— Fiona Brooks



A gorgeous fall panorama of the Nature Trust's Harrison's Pool and Crows Nest Conservation Lands (Photo by Scott Leslie)



Wood Turtle & Floodplain Forest Guided Walk (May 2019) participants on the Nature Trust's Waternish Conservation Lands

### ***Did you know?***

*Like tree rings, Atlantic salmon scales have growth lines, which provide rich information about their life history: how many years they spent in fresh-water before heading to sea; how long they stayed in the ocean; and how many times they have spawned over their life.*



A lush tributary feeds into the St. Mary's on the Nature Trust's Hardwood Hill Conservation Land, protected in 2019

## The DNA (Development of Natural Resources) of the St. Mary's River Valley : Reflections of OOG(old old guide) & AWOC(a wise old crow)

Each Fall I make my way to one of my favourite places on the St. Mary's River, *the shallow end of Harrison's Pool*. It is a resting place for salmon as they make their way up the West Branch of the river to their spawning grounds. From the wintering waters off Iceland and Greenland, the salmon have been making this journey for thousands of years. It is truly one of the 'natural wonders' of the world! You see its at Harrison's Pool that I get perspective on life, on how nature is doing, and what is really important!

At Harrison's, there is peace and a wonderful stillness and strangely, I sense, a glimmer of hope. Facebook is replaced by a 'murmuring brook'. Twitter is there,-emanating from 'nature's house' and not the 'Whitehouse'. And there you can get 'linked in' to nature's wisdom !

I have a favourite stump that is my 'perch' when I visit Harrison's. Not far from my perch is a majestic hemlock, and home to AWOC (a wise old crow). Recently, I was sitting on my 'perch' listening to nature's symphony of songbirds, and I heard my old friend AWOC caw,"OOG, I was just musing over the words of Henry Ford: "If you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting what you always got." AWOC continued: "I hear there are plans to develop an open pit gold mine not far from here at Cochrane Hill. As a matter of fact if you look to your right, down the river valley you can see Cochrane Hill. And OOG let me tell you, Henry had it right, "if you keep doing what you have always done, you will keep getting what you always got." You see OOG a hundred and fifty years ago there was gold mining at Cochrane Hill and the area was polluted with radioactive elements, asbestos-like elements, and metallic like dust.

As you are well aware OOG, the crow family spend a lot of time listening and observing. For instance, I heard a discussion just recently between a couple of environmental scientists who were very familiar with the mining research being done by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Quoting from a MIT report they said: "Open pit mining is particularly damaging to the environment because strategic minerals are often available in small concentrations which increases the amount of ore needed to be mined. Environmental hazards are present every step of the open pit process. Hardrock mining exposes rock that has lain unexposed for geological eras. In addition to exposing the elements already described, during separation, residual rock slurries, which are mixtures of pulverized rock and liquids, are produced as tailings; toxic and radioactive elements from these liquids can leak into bedrock if not properly contained."

"So, OOG, if we keep on doing what we have always done, we will keep on getting what we always got- **pollution**. And let's face it, the pollutants are as deadly today as they were one hundred and fifty years ago. However, one thing has changed, today mining companies engage 'spin doctors' and 'lobbyists', to convey a message that everything is under control. Their message is summed up in Bobby McFerrin's song: "Don't worry be happy!" But OOG, I do worry and I'm concerned. You see I get a perspective on the environment and wildlife that eludes most because I spend most of time above the 'rush'!

OOG, our environment, our wildlife, our oceans, our rivers, indeed the air we breathe are in trouble! The explanation for this turmoil can be summed up in one word: 'greed'. Think about it OOG! A few years ago we had a thriving groundfish industry along the ocean shores of Guysborough County, employing huge numbers. Today it has all but disappeared including many of the once abundant species. Why ? Primarily because of overfishing by giant fish companies and mismanagement!



## The DNA (Development of Natural Resources) of the St. Mary's River Valley : Reflections of OOG(old old guide) & AWOC(a wise old crow)

Our forests have been decimated by giant forestry conglomerates! The victims of this abuse of nature comes very close to home. Wildlife is disappearing at an alarming rate! How do you know, you ask? OOG, I live here! Think about it, thousands were employed in the forestry industry. There were numerous saw mills and related industries. The industries are gone, along with the forests and wildlife.

Why did all this happen? One word seems to sum it up best - greed! When you destroy, and demolish pristine parcels of nature, our oceans, our rivers for the benefit of a few, it is a prescription for disaster!

However OOG, we can avoid disaster by not doing what we have always done! There are alternatives to an open pit mine which will be for the benefit of all. Did you know that most of the land designated for the open pit mine is Crown land? Most of the land between the proposed mine site and the St. Mary's River has been donated to the Nova Scotia Nature Trust. To the east of the proposed mine site there are thousands of acres of Crown land, which effectively has the St. Mary's River bordering the land on one side and Country Harbour on the other. If you don't know, Country Harbour is rated is one of the best natural and most picturesque harbours in the world. Between the river and the harbour there are numerous lakes, streams and a river. This is the perfect setting for a nature or a wilderness park.

Now OOG, that would be something to 'crow' about"

**by John Cameron**

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***Your donation will help us in our continued efforts to help the wild Atlantic salmon.***

***THANK YOU!***

This past November I undertook perhaps one of my most challenging assignments yet; filming wild Atlantic salmon spawning in Nova Scotia's St. Mary's river. Images and video of Atlantic salmon spawning in the wild is extremely rare, and to my knowledge these are the first images of wild Atlantic salmon spawning in Nova Scotia.

Tom Cheney and I spent many cold days and nights working with remote cameras to capture this intimate act. The reason? An Australian gold mining company wants to turn the headwaters of McKeen Brook, where this video was captured, into an open pit gold mine. A toxic tailings impoundment would be built above the river, destroying critical habitat and threatening one of the last remaining populations of Atlantic salmon in Nova Scotia- all for a mine with a seven year life span. With millions of dollars having been spent in the last decade to restore the St. Mary's, I can hardly think of a worse place for a gold mine.

So here I am again to make a plea for wild rivers and wild salmon. Nova Scotians: please don't sacrifice healthy rivers and ecosystems for short term profits. Don't sacrifice the health of those living along the St. Mary's river. Don't sacrifice the opportunity for families and future generations to enjoy healthy, wild rivers.

Nick Hawkins, Nick Hawkins Photography - Facebook



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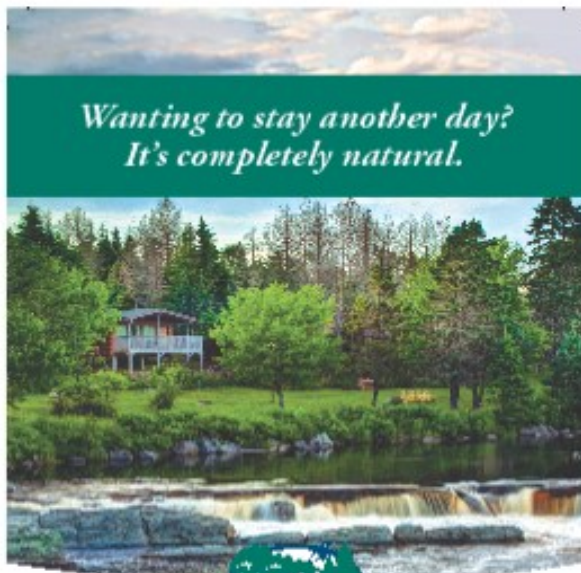
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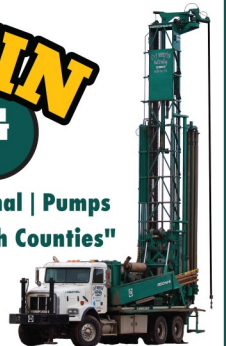
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## WEST BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT UPDATE —Kenny Silver

This past year was very busy for the St. Mary's River Association's West River restoration efforts. The exciting news was that the SMRA received \$1.2m (over three years) from the Coastal Restoration Fund to expand the work we have been doing on West Branch of the river and to explore the impact land liming could have on the productivity of the watershed. This is in addition to the funding SMRA has received each year from the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation, NSLC Adopt-A-Stream and the Royal Bank to work on the West Branch of the river.

This funding allowed us to work over several kilometers of the river at two different sites in 2019. We are reaching the end of the restoration work above Caledonia and are now also looking at strategic locations on the lower section of the West River where refuge areas can be created to assist fish traveling up to the improved spawning areas we have created. We addressed one of these sites just below Indian Man Pool and will use the Coastal Restoration Funding to address issues at other sites next summer.

This past summer is the sixth consecutive year for this restoration work and we are hoping to start to see increased spawning activity over the next few years. The progeny of the fish spawning in our first restored areas in 2014 should have matured and will/have be coming back to the river in 2019 and 2020. We were excited to do the redd counts this past fall and there was certainly more spawning activity in late October and early November than previous years. However, heavy rains that started at the end of the first week of November and carried on all month meant water levels were too high to complete these counts. We would like to think that the increase in early activity was reflective of an overall increase in spawning activity, but it may have been that it was just that the spawning started earlier this year and there might not have been any greater activity than there has been over the last several years.

During our visits to the river to complete the redd counts we noted several areas where ATVs were crossing the river. These

recreational vehicles do provide great opportunities for people to get out and enjoy the outdoors, but if they aren't used wisely they can create threats to the environment. Most of the spawning activity occurs at the tail end of pools where the water starts to shallow up and run over a gravel bar into the next pool or riffle. These shallow sections are also the locations where ATV crossings can be most easily made. While the SMRA does not want to discourage ATV use, we would ask riders to be careful and watch for any areas where the bottom appears to be disturbed by spawning salmon. Salmon redds can be identified by the lighter coloured gravel and small rocks that have been turned over by the salmon as they dig their redds (see picture below). We would ask that you avoid these areas if at all possible.

The following is from an "Online" 2018 report titled "Environmental Guidelines for Stream Crossing by All-Terrain Vehicles" prepared by the government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

"There are a number of environmental factors to consider in deciding whether to ford a watercourse or to provide a structure such as a bridge or culvert.

If a location with stable channel bed and banks has been identified, the flow is not too deep, and very infrequent use is anticipated, fording may be an acceptable alternative to the installation of a bridge or culvert. In some cases the installation of a bridge or culvert and its subsequent removal would result in greater channel disruption than preparing a fording site."

### ***Do all Atlantic Salmon behave the same?***

*Studies have shown that Atlantic Salmon have personalities all of their own!*


## WEST BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT UPDATE —Kenny Silver

The fording site must be located at a shallow section of the channel where there are low approach grades, and where the channel consists of stable non-erodible rock or cobbles or better yet, exposed bedrock. Any areas with vegetated, silty, or sandy bottoms are not considered acceptable fording sites.”

“Timbers or rocks may be placed in the stream to facilitate crossing or to minimize damage to the channel section provided the stream is not unnecessarily constricted or backed up.”

“Stream banks at fording sites that contain loose or erodible material must be adequately stabilized before crossing to minimize any siltation of the stream. This can be done by placing brush mats, rocks or timbers on the stream bank. This material must be removed after use of the fording site is completed. “


“Fording may only be carried out during periods of low flow.”



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## Habitat Restoration Update — Nicholas MacInnis

In 2019 SMRA completed instream fish habitat restoration work in two important reaches of river; near the Beaver River – West Branch confluence and above Indian Man Pool. This work was completed under the supervision of Habitat Consultant Charles MacInnis and involved the installation of rock sills, rock deflectors and groynes as well as some bank stabilization.



The Beaver River site was chosen based on the presence of cold-water refugee areas and potential spawning habitat creation. The Indian Man Pool site was significantly over-widened and shallow, creating a heat sink during the summer months. Through the construction of rock sills, deflectors and groynes the channel depths were increased, channel widths were decreased and the quality and quantity of both pool and spawning habitat were increased. Between the two sites, this year's project has successfully restored 90,000 square meters of fish habitat.

*Figure 1: Aerial lime application in the West River Sheet Harbour Watershed in the fall of 2019. Similar work will take place in Barren Brook in 2020.*

*Figure 2: Indian Man Pool looking downstream.*





Habitat Restoration Update — Nicholas MacInnis

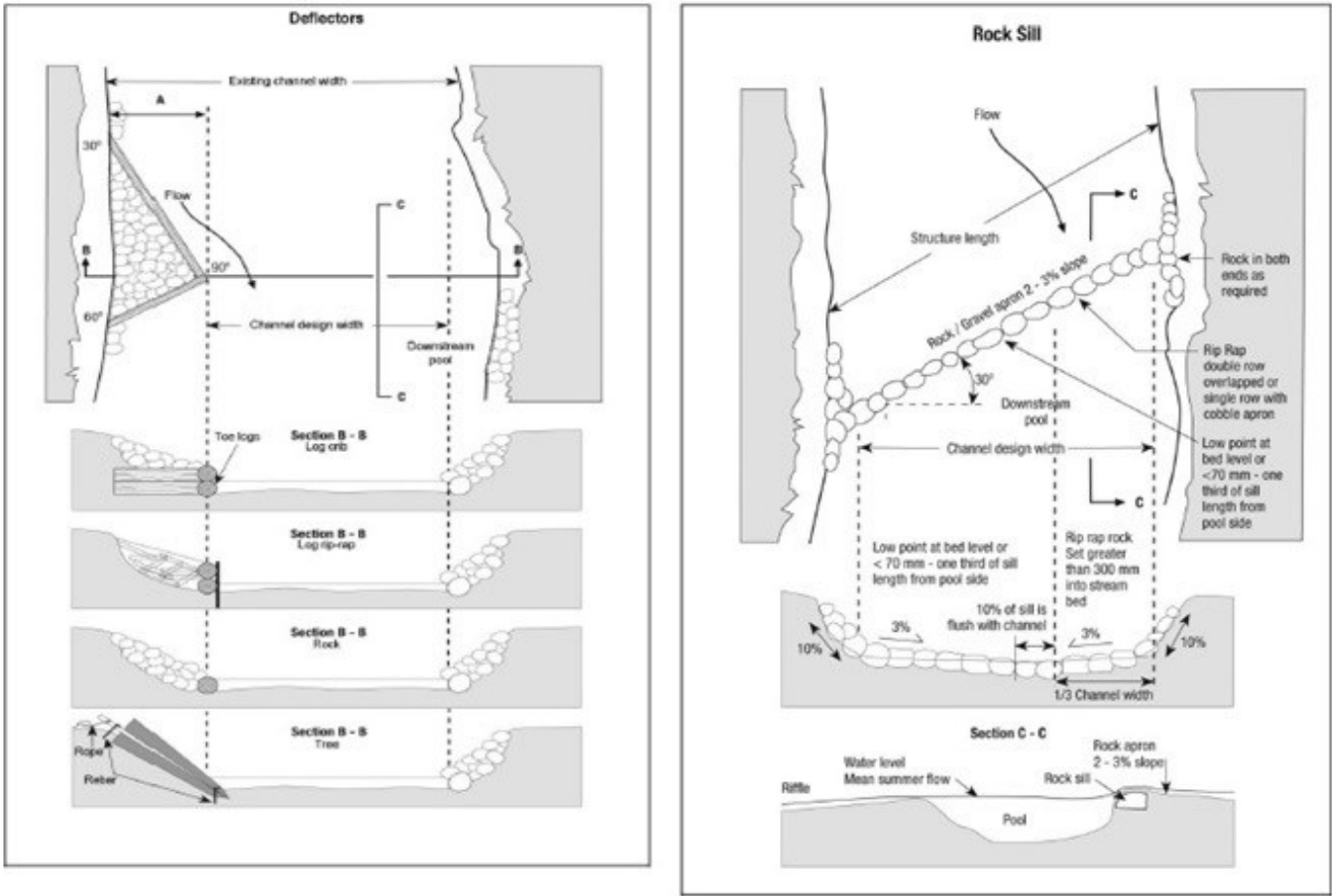


Figure 3: Conceptual drawing of the restoration structures used in the West Branch St. Mary's (source DFO 2006).

Figure 4: Indian Man Pool looking downstream



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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 31 2020 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, 2020. Any member of the Association may submit nominations for candidates for any or all of the open director positions.

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 2020.

#### **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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## INVASIVE SMALL MOUTH BASS UPDATE — Scott Beaver

On July 24, 2019, an Inland Fisheries (IF) Technician angled two smallmouth bass (SMB) from Piper Lake, Pictou County, a headwater lake in the St Mary's River. This is the first known occurrence of illegally introduced smallmouth bass in this important trout and salmon river. This is indeed disturbing news to say the least.

I am happy to say that Inland Fisheries has jumped into action on this one and it looks like we now have the threat contained and a plan is in place to eradicate small mouth bass from the system. Inland Fisheries staff quickly developed an action plan with three objectives:

- 1) contain the existing SMB population
- 2) control the number of SMB by targeted removals
- 3) eradicate all SMB from the St. Mary's River

Two barrier nets were installed the day after detection and 2 more shortly after that. SMB were observed by IF staff immediately downstream of the outlet of Piper Lake but not captured. Five additional sites along the stream that drains Piper Lake were electro fished and no SMB were caught. The SMB found below Piper Lake in the brook were eliminated by de watering. They also followed up with eDNA sampling and found no trace of SMB anywhere in the system other than Piper Lake itself. Native fish species are plentiful in the lake and stream leaving the lake. This is an indication that they have not been in the system for very long. We are confident that the SMB are contained. As an additional measure Piper Lake is now closed to all recreational angling for the time being.

A more secure barrier is now constructed to ensure SMB cannot escape the lake during high-water events. There is now road access to the lake to make it easier for eradication measures. Inland Fisheries will also prepare options for plans for other means to achieve eradication in 2020. This will include a possible de-watering of Piper Lake to facilitate removals and the possible use of Rotenone to kill all fish in Piper Lake.

Also being considered is more use of eDNA sampling which is a way to check broadly if the species you are searching for is in the area.

Thank you all for listening and thank you Inland Fisheries for a quick and decisive response!

St. Mary's River Associations AGM is just around the corner. Please take the time to renew your membership for the 2020 year.

(If it's been awhile since you were a member, we miss you! Come back.)

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***Exhibits related to salmon angling***