

Stock Enhancement - Aug 2017 President's Report

Welcome to August 2017 on the St. Mary's River. This month I will be summarizing the SMRA stock enhancement initiatives. Our Kelt Project and our Sea Trout Project are two stock enhancement efforts we currently have underway.

Starting with our Sea Trout project, we have successfully completed the first year of this multi-year project. During the fall of 2016 we were issued a special licence by Inland Fisheries to capture 30 sea trout from the St. Mary's River. These sea trout were brought to the Frasers Mills Hatchery where they were spawned out with a hatchery strain of sea trout originating from the Musquodoboit River. This was done because wild females introduced to captivity do not survive well in this environment. We want to keep the St. Mary's strain of sea trout as close to original as we can while maintaining healthy stocks in the river. As a result of these efforts there were 21000 unfed fry introduced to various brooks flowing into the St Mary's this past spring. Oh yea, unfed fry are about the size of your baby finger! We released about 200 with our local Girl Guides which they used as a means to earn their conservation badge.

Our salmon stock enhancement efforts are still moving forward as well. This project which I have summarized in a previous article has been ongoing since 2014. Although 2014 was very much a learning curve we now have a process in place that is working. That is as long as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) continues to support our efforts!

In 2015 we purchased 4 large insulated tanks for transporting fish. Our team changed our angling strategy a bit and our kelt capture efforts resulted in the retention of 15 fish. These 15 fish were reconditioned at the Cold Brook Hatchery and spawned out. Their prodigies, 25000 unfed fry, were released during the spring of 2016 in the West Branch of the St Mary's river.

In the Spring of 2016 we captured 300 smolts for gene banking. Gene banking is way of helping to insure we have stock for the future. These fish are also held at the cold brook Hatchery. This has been done in the past and when the smolts mature they are returned to the St. Mary's River.

We also captured 55 kelt which would now be our 3rd year for this special fishery. These kelt were also reconditioned at the Cold Brook Hatchery and spawned out. Their prodigies, 60000 unfed fry, were released into brooks flowing into the St Mary's during the spring of 2016. You might ask how many of these fish will make it to the ocean and return to the St. Mary's? I myself have heard numbers from 3% to 8% which doesn't seem like a lot but 3% of 60000 is 1800. Every little bit helps!

DFO has committed to spawn our smolts with our rejuvenated kelt for fry release in the spring of 2018 and that is great news for us.

Our efforts are still focused on continuing our kelt project into the future despite being informed recently by DFO that neither funds or resources have been budgeted in support of this program for the current fiscal year. Hopefully someday we will see salmon numbers meeting our conservation requirements and create an opportunity for salmon angling once again on the St. Mary's River.

Thank you all for listening and I hope to see you on the RIVER!

(Article by Scott Beaver)

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