

# Antigonish Rivers

Christmas Edition 20/12/2020

<https://www.antigonishriversassociation.ca/>

<https://www.facebook.com/AntigonishRivers/>

*The Joy of Fall Fishing Photo Contest Winner submitted by Mark Dort*



## From the President

### President's Message 2020

First, I would like to *thank* all the dedicated volunteers who helped make 2020 a successful year. Since we could not hold our bi-annual dinner/auction for obvious reasons, we held casting clinics and fundraising events at *Salmon Central*. ARA will also have an online auction early in 2021 to raise funds for next year's habitat restoration projects. Dollar for dollar, ARA gets amazing results!

This year (2020) the summer works program maintained over 250 structures along the local rivers and streams (*digger logs, bank structures and riparian restoration*). NSSA and Adopt A Stream provided funds for ARA to install armor rock and riparian zone plantings along two sections of the South River. Using a grant from the Town of Antigonish, ARA is working on a three-year program to improve the spawning grounds on the James River. ARA worked successfully with Inland Fisheries to collect brood stock on the West River. Our Fall weekly newsletter was greatly anticipated by our members whose numbers have more than doubled!

Looking ahead to 2021, ARA has partnered with NSSA and Adopt A Stream on the *Gulf Priority Rivers Planning Project*. ARA's focus will be the West and South Rivers and we have hired Allison White as Project Planning Coordinator. The projects focus is on Atlantic Salmon, American eels, and Sturgeon in the Antigonish area. This is part of a larger project that includes the Mabou River and the Margaree River systems and the Southern Uplands. In a nutshell, the project will gather existing data on the waterways and conduct surveys with the stake holders. The information will be placed on an interactive map. This information will provide ARA with a blueprint for short term and long-term habitat restoration projects. Work on the James River will continue, and the Dinner Committee are planning on holding the biannual dinner/auction this coming October.

Antigonish County is fortunate to have some of the best fishing opportunities in the province. Sea trout, brown trout and Atlantic salmon are all abundant in the rivers and streams. Many of us have felt at peace, standing in our waders, laying out the perfect cast, anticipating that heavy tug and flash of silver. It is this type of experience that you, as

members of ARA, have dedicated your time and energy into by preserving our waterways for all of us to enjoy.

*Season Greetings and hope to see you on the water in 2021!*

*Tim Handforth*

***Joy Fall Fishing***

Submitted by Rob Kanchuk



Submitted by Robert Chiasson



**Antigonish  
Rivers Association**

*ARA Executive*

*2020-2021*



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Tim Handforth

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## ARA NEWS

### 2020 Bi-annual Wild Atlantic Salmon Research and Restoration Dinner and Auction **Postponed!**

2020 has been a year like no other for all of us and we hope that all of our members and friends are healthy and doing well in challenging times. The Dinner Committee made the difficult decision to postpone the event based on the public health protocols and the financial uncertainty faced by many of our supporters and contributors. We have scheduled the event for Oct. 16, 2021. So continue following public health guidelines and stay safe and we will meet again this fall.



The Dinner and Auction is our only major fundraiser and we have big plans for 2021 and beyond so a number of fundraising events were planned for the fall of 2020. The Dinner Committee with the leadership of Dinner Chair Gerry Doucet set out to keep members connected, to raise awareness and to raise funds for the ARA.

The Dinner is a chance for us to touch base with many of our members and friends in the weeks

leading up to the event as well as at the festivities so to help fill the gap we launched a weekly newsletter for the salmon season. Fishing conditions, tips, fly patterns and news of upcoming events were shared among our members.

In another effort to keep connected to our members Director Don Wescott took on the challenge of updating and organizing our membership. The Dinner weekend is a chance for many to pay their dues and for new members to join our association so this was an excellent opportunity to launch this initiative. There is more on memberships and dues later in the newsletter. Thank you to Don for his efforts!



Chair Gerry Doucet organized two events at Salmon Central to promote awareness and comradery. Atlantic Salmon Federation President Bill Taylor was the featured guest for an evening

of salmon news, tall tales and reminiscing. The following weekend Kris Hunter, ASF regional representative, and Nick MacInnis, NSSA Adopt-A-Stream representative gave presentations on the state of salmon stocks and the challenges of river restoration.



Promoting salmon angling as a pastime and part of a healthy lifestyle for folks of all ages and abilities has been a cornerstone of the ARA's mandate. For two weekends this October certified casting instructor and Guideline field representative Neil Houlding led a series of workshop for beginning casters as well as those wishing to learn the art of two handed casting. Chris Chisholm graciously donated the use of **Taigh Aibhne** on the banks of the West River. Guests enjoyed a lunch of hot soup, sandwiches or burgers, snacks and drinks. Then some casting instruction from the Master and a chance to test cast Guideline's newest offerings in a park-like setting. Neil led two different sessions for female casters and two sessions for those looking to learn Spey and Scandi techniques.

Both of these sessions provided a chance to chat and learn about the state of Atlantic salmon, their habitat and also the magic of the chase for salmon anglers. Both events sold out quickly and added funds to the ARA's restoration projects.



The events are sponsored by **Guideline Flyfishing**, **Patagonia Halifax** and the **Atlantic Salmon Federation**. Guests' names were entered into a raffle for salmon rod from Guideline, and a clothing package from Patagonia. During the

Oct.24 session **A.A. Munro Insurance** announced a major donation of \$1000 to support the work of the ARA. I'm happy to report that A.A. Munro added another \$500 to that donation to make a great conclusion to the fall fundraising events.



Throughout the season Gerry Doucet organized a 50/50 Draw from Salmon Central. When the season ended Tim Handforth was the lucky player. Tim left the cash with the ARA and opted for a lifetime membership.

This summer the ARA in partnership with the Nova Scotia Salmon Association Adopt-A-Stream program had a field crew working on some new sites as well as doing maintenance on many existing structures that had been installed over the years. There is more about this work in Amy and Nick's report. ARA members took an afternoon and planted trees along one of this summer's major bank stabilization projects on the upper South River and returned in December to finish caging the saplings. See much more about this year's river work in the NSSA Adopt-A-Stream report later this issue.

*New Fly Fisher photo*

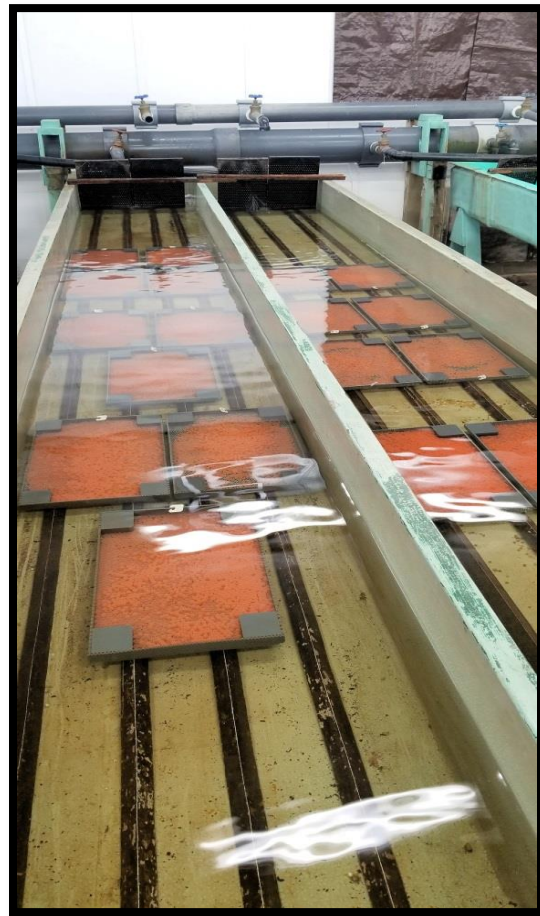


The lack of rain this fall caused lots of headaches for anglers but also for our brood stock collection. Our usual seining operation

conducted by the NS Department of Inland Fisheries didn't happen in October and when the rain finally arrived we were able to collect by angling 5 females and 3 males. The salmon were successfully transported to Fraser's Mills Hatchery where they were spawned and returned to the river by the Doucet family and friends.

Thank you to Darryl Murrant for arranging the permit, to Stephen Thibodeau and the staff at Fraser's Mills and to Gerry Doucet for his organizational skills.

*Kate Boudreau photos*



The ARA with the support of NSSA Adopt-A-Stream has hired Allison White as a project planning coordinator as part of the 3.5 year project the NSSA is heading through the Canada Nature Fund for Aquatic Species at Risk. Allison has extensive experience with in river restoration projects. We are pleased to welcome her to our association.



. The November Directors Meeting was held in person with appropriate social distancing and COVID-19 protocols in place. It was a great opportunity for discussing the year's work to date and making plans for 2021 so we thank Deverness Stables for the use of their meeting room.



We hope to continue our winter fly tying sessions but with the current public health concerns we will wait until early in the new year to make a decision. Our Family Fishing Derby at Gillis Lake is also on hold until we see how the provincial health situation evolves following Christmas.





Also at the meeting a major item of discussion was the DFO announcement of a Consultation on Adding the Eastern Cape Breton Atlantic Salmon to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. This listing includes the Baddeck, Middle and North Rivers and has many implications for river restoration, angling and the impact on nearby waters. We urge all of our members to consider the implications of this listing and to respond to the DFO consultation,

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry/consultation-documents/atlantic-salmon-eastern-cape-breton-summary.html>

You can also fill out your Salmon Report Card on-line if you haven't already sent in the paper copy. Data is important in managing salmon fishing.

<https://beta.novascotia.ca/salmon-fishing-licence-report-card-sportfishing>

*Ray Plourde's runner-up photo for The Joy of Fall Fishing*

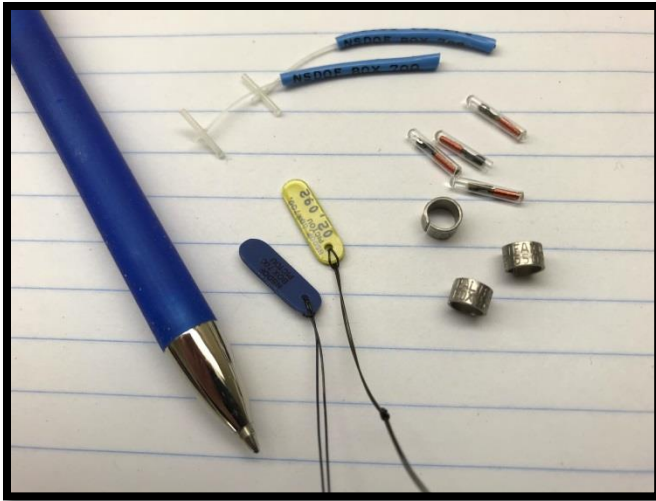


## ***Fish Tales: Marking and Tagging Fish***

By Darryl Murrant

Everyone likes a good mystery. Perhaps that is why so much effort has been put into marking, tagging and tracking the movement, growth and behavior of fish. Where do fish travel? What do they do on their trip? What adversaries and adversity do they encounter? How do fish navigate their life cycle? Scientists and fisheries managers need data to make sound decisions. Anglers, too, are curious about these creatures they pursue.

Marking fish can be as relatively simple as clipping a fin or extremely sophisticated like a surgically implanted acoustic tag that can send signals to receivers deployed in the freshwater or marine environment. The information can even be passed via satellite. There is a whole range of tagging options which can be used. The choice depends on the information being sought, resources available and, of course, expense.



Pictured : Four types of fish tags NS Inland Fisheries occasionally use.

- 1) Blue Floy (Spaghetti) tags
- 2) PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tags
- 3) Jaw tags
- 4) Carlin tags

Here is some information which members of the Antigonish Rivers Association may have heard

about, over the years.

In the 1980's, a fish fence operated on the South River, Antigonish County. The fence allowed fish moving upstream or downstream to be captured, identified, enumerated and in some cases tagged. The fish movements and growth could then be monitored. Brook trout, Brown trout, Rainbow trout and Atlantic salmon were tagged.

Two types of tags were used at fish fence; yellow plastic Carlin tags which are surgically bound to the back of the fish below the dorsal fin and metal jaw tags (small metal rings) that wrap around the fish's mandible. Both types of tags worked well in some instances and both had problems associated with them. Small salmon smolt were difficult to Carlin tag without causing significant scale loss or other damage that cause delayed mortality. Also, there was much concern, at the time, that the Carlin tag acted as a lure, attracting attention of larger predatory fish and birds. Many Carlin tags from smolt released on the St. Marys River, around that time, were found in cormorant nests in a nearby colony. The metal jaw tags had to be properly fitted to ensure they didn't cause damage to the mandible. Some fish captured from previous years tagging had deformed mandibles.

*Mark Dort photo showing a Margaree fish with attached Carlin tag.*



ARA member and fish habitat guru, Charlie MacInnis will recall that a Brown trout was captured which weighed approximately 6 pounds. It was re-captured in each of the following two years; weighing 9 and then 11 pounds. (Also see Andrew Lowles's Brown trout tag capture and recapture from last year's, newsletter.)

Many ARA members will be familiar with NSDFA biologist John MacMillan's (Carlin) tagging studies on River Denys. These mark and recapture studies provided good data to allow for population assessment and provide insight as to how different management tools, such as size and bag limits, cause a shift in the size and age structure of a population.

The River Denys tagging project also provided this author with an opportunity to tell a few fish tales. The largest Brook trout I ever caught was one of the fish in this study. It was 17 ½ inches long and weighed 2 ¾ lbs. It had been tagged early in the spring of the previous year and weighed just under a pound. Two seasons in the highly productive estuary allowed for incredible growth.

Tagging also allows for tracking fish movement ... or lack of it. I personally tagged a fish in River Denys Basin and subsequently caught it again two weeks later in the same location and again a few days later. I'm not sure what that means other than the fish liked my flies.

**ATTENTION**

Tracking Sea-run trout in Antigonish Harbour with sound tags and receivers

**DO NOT EAT FISH**

**DO NOT FREEZE TAG**

**IF CAUGHT:** Please record red tag ID# and **RELEASE** if unharmed,

**OR** if dead, bring fish to **DFO Antigonish.**

**Internal Tag**

**External Tag**

Report capture to Aaron Spares,  
Dalhousie University  
(902) 494-2357  
[aaron.spares@dal.ca](mailto:aaron.spares@dal.ca)

ARA members may be familiar with the sophisticated, acoustic tags as some of them assisted in a study that tracked the movement of anadromous Brook trout in the Antigonish Estuary. The tags were surgically implanted in angled trout and receivers were deployed at various locations in the estuary.

Other tags types include Floy (spaghetti) tags which attach to the fish beneath the dorsal fin, in the same way a price tag is attached to a piece of clothing. These are typically used in studies which track fish movement in the short term as tag retention is not long lasting.



In hatchery spawning projects at the Fraser's Mills Fish Hatchery, PIT (Passive Integrated Transponder) tags have been used to follow the egg production of individual Brown trout females over several years. These small, grain of rice-sized, tags are injected into the fish. Each tag has an individual code that can be read, using a hand held wand; much the same as how a debit or credit card can be "tapped".

*Aaron Spares with an Antigonish sea trout with an acoustic tag implanted*

NSDFA biologist, Andrew Lowles has worked on tagging projects in Ontario. There, millions of Pacific salmon are tagged with very small coded wire implanted nose tags, prior to being released onto the Great Lakes.

A few years ago, a researcher used acoustic tags to track the movement of salmon kelts in the Baddeck and Middle rivers, Cape Breton. Receivers were deployed in both rivers, the Bras d'Or Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. One female was observed to have swum out of Bras d'Or Lakes via the St. Andrews Channel, into the Cabot Strait and eventually up the Strait of Belle Isle. She must have avoided the receivers after that. However, she could not evade the sharp eyes of the staff at the Margaree Fish Hatchery who noticed sutures on the fish which had been collected for broodstock. They contacted the researcher who was able to remove the tag and gather the information.

The Margaree Fish Hatchery staff use Carlin tags to mark all the Atlantic salmon broodstock they have spawned when the fish are returned to the river in November. These tagged fish are used by DFO biologists to help with population assessments in their mark-capture spring kelt (black salmon) survey.

One such tag was recovered in September 2020. The angler sent a picture of the tag to Margaree Hatchery supervisor, Jamie Vallis. He checked the records and was able to provide the date the fish was spawned in 2018 and also the length of the fish at that time and the number of eggs collected.

The simplest mark commonly used in NSDFA hatchery programs is the adipose fin-clip. Hatchery staff, along with many dedicated volunteers from the Margaree Salmon Association and other local people, remove the adipose fin from all Atlantic salmon parr and smolt. The fin does not grow back. So, fish are readily identified as being of hatchery origin when they return a year or two later. To reduce the likelihood of hatchery induced selection, Salmon with clipped adipose fins are not taken to be used as brood stock at

Provincial hatcheries. In 2020, 22% of salmon caught in routine netting of pools on the Margaree were of hatchery origin.



*A Runner-up in our Joy of Fishing Photo Contest submitted by Deidre Green. Deidre is holding this healthy grilse with a clipped adipose fin showing it was of Margaree Hatchery origin*

The next time you catch a trout or salmon take a quick look. You may be surprised to see that someone else has held it before you. There may be a mark or tag on it with a fish tale to tell.

## *Tips for Challenging Conditions*

By Mark Dort

### **Slow Swing? No Swing? No Problem**



2020 proved to be a challenging year on many fronts. Warm conditions with extended periods of drought decreased angling opportunities across the Maritimes. One was hopefully cooler temps and higher water were coming for September /October and that there would be opportunity to connect with an Atlantic Salmon.

As September passed the temperatures did cooperate and landed within seasonal trends. However the rain from many promised storms often was diminished by the time it passed through the North Shore. Small to

marginal water level increases did occur and enticed salmon to start their migration up river. As anglers who live for the majestic Fall season of vibrant colours, crisp mornings and chasing Atlantic Salmon it meant the “45 and down” swing may not be possible at times. The lower and slower Fall water did provide me with an opportunity to get my 6-year-old daughter and wife out to the river in comfortable wading conditions. As we used the tactics below both Denver and Tanya were successful in landing Fall Atlantic Salmon.



I had some decent success this past season and hope the tips below will come in handy for any angler in years to come.



## Tactics, Tides & Moon Phases



Without a doubt a small hitched black fly will produce a take. The riffle hitch (which I have written about before) is highly effective in slower water as we experienced this past season. Size does matter as 8-12 sized fly will hitch easier and provide a softer presentation in slow to still water conditions. Moose wing flies hitch the best. Case in point, on the final day of the season my brother and I had fished over several schools of fresh fish. We tried the typical shrimp patterns, Mickey finn and Marabous without luck. At last he put on a small hitched moose wing Blue Charm and within a 30 minute span had hooked 3 fish. I'm not sure why we waited so long to try it that day!

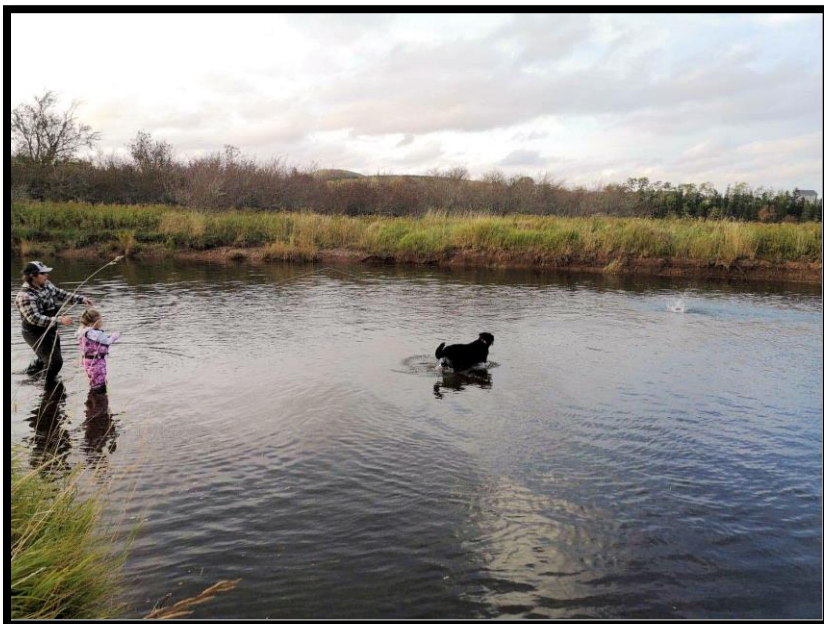
It must have been the -1 Celsius temperatures and high wind impacting our decision making.

As the water flow was often slow at times the success of hooking an Atlantic Salmon often was determined by how well an angler kept their fly moving. That meant manipulating the fly line with your fingers or retrieving the fly with a slow/consistent strip. Anglers often saw me cast my fly and then tuck the reel under my arm. From that angle I was able to use both hands in a hand over hand motion to keep the fly moving through the pool. The other option is to use your fingers to do a “figure 8” retrieve with the fly line so the fly is consistently moving.

As the mornings were often quite cool in mid to late October, I found myself resorting to the hand over hand motion as it was easier to accomplish with cold numb fingers. When the water has minimal flow casting directly across the pool (as opposed to 45 degrees) before retrieving your fly is a good tactic to try. The slow natural drift aided by the angler moving the fly will turn a few heads.



Looking back to warmer weather in mid -September to early October I recall having success with dry flies. It was a time where salmon were edging into the tidal pools with each tide. Although the lack of flow on the water surface was challenging a well-placed dry fly with a 11-12 foot leader enticed several salmon to grab the fly. The fly may not have drifted much but when they looked up it irritated them to strike. My best results were with a #8 Bumble Bee dry fly. This fly will always hold a special place in the fly box as it was the fly we used when my daughter and I hooked our first Atlantic Salmon together early in October.



As many anglers do, it is helpful to prepare for a fishing trip by watching water graphs, weather reports, tide charts and moon phases. As I gave up watching the water graph, I did pay particular attention to upcoming tides and moon phases. The key piece to focus on here is the height of the tides. Although the tide chart may be reading it is high tide, I think paying attention to how high that level reaches is an important piece of data.

As some tides are higher than others migratory fish will sense this additional water flow and then move from estuaries into the river. The same is true on a full moon and the resulting large tide that follows.

## “Skinny” water flies

- Size 8-12 Black Bear Green Butt, Blue Charm, Black Bear Red Butt (riffle hitch)
- Small green machines or bug variations. Fish them wet and keep them moving
- Muddlers at dusk
- Size 6-8 Mickey Finn and Shrimp flies
- Dry flies (salmon bombers)



No two seasons are the same so be prepared to think outside the box and be creative with your approach. I wish you all the best in 2021.

## *Piper Lake Smallmouth Bass Eradication Project*

**By Andrew Lowles**



In July 2019, Inland Fisheries staff caught smallmouth bass in Piper Lake, Pictou County during routine invasive species checks. Immediately, staff worked to ensure bass could not migrate downstream and establish themselves throughout the St. Mary’s River system. Containment was achieved by placing a series of barrier nets, both seines and fykes across the narrow outflowing stream. These



nets were checked regularly to ensure that smallmouth bass were not attempting to follow the currents, downstream. Each day, after the nets were checked, staff would attempt to angle large bass while plans were made to borrow the electrofishing boat from our federal counterparts at DFO.

Since there was no vehicle access into Piper Lake that would allow us to launch the electrofishing boat, we once again called upon the Department of Lands and Forestry. The electrofishing boat was tied and suspended a hundred feet below their newly acquired helicopter, and the boat was air lifted the few hundred meters into Piper Lake.



Electrofishing took place over four nights. Electrofishing at night is effective since fish tend to move shallower in the low light conditions and the smooth water surface makes spotting fish easier with the use of high-powered spotlights. Staff were able to collect nearly 350 smallmouth bass over those four nights, with the majority of those being sub-adult fish: either that year's cohort or one-year old fish.

While this field work was happening, staff engaged partnering departments and

designs were made for a concrete housed culvert and earthen berm to enable staff to prevent fish migration while still allowing water downstream. This was achieved by placing several large metal screens in front of an enclosed culvert. The openings in the screen would allow water to pass, but several screens of different sizes would be fitted to prevent young of the year smallmouth bass from being able to escape downstream.

With significant challenges, the applications to apply the fish toxicant rotenone were filed with Nova Scotia Environment and DFO. Rotenone, a naturally occurring substance derived from the *Fabaceae* (Legume) family of plants found in South America and has been used for centuries by native tribes to kill fish for food. The substance functions by inhibiting the respiration at the cellular level and preventing the uptake of dissolved oxygen by gill breathing organisms. It breaks down naturally and rapidly at warmer water temperatures, but that degradation rate slows as water cools. Inland Fisheries staff became licenced pesticide applicators in the province and when through several training and safety courses. Public and First Nations consultations were soon to follow, with the approval being granted in early October and plans made for an October 15 deposition day.



Early on the morning of application, Inland Fisheries staff were on site arranging safety equipment, sorting out last minute logistics, and preparing for the application itself. With staff from Nova Scotia Environment, Lands and Forestry, DFO and the media arriving, the safety and application plans were explained to onlookers. Trained staff mixed the product to the desired concentration and began applying the product to the periphery of the lake from the canoe before switching to the motorized

tin boat. The application took several hours to complete as staff ensured that no small pocket of water that could harbor bass, would be left untreated. Shortly after an area was treated, fish would begin to turn and were collected by staff.

Although the application was performed in a single day, dead fish were collected over the next several days. Different species of fish react in different ways to rotenone, with species requiring less dissolved oxygen for survival, generally being less vulnerable than others and as a result, more tolerant species require a prolonged exposure to succumb to rotenone. For nearly a week,

staff and volunteers walked the shoreline collecting dead fish. All fish were sorted by species for further analysis at the Inland Fisheries Lab.

The lake itself was dammed to prevent any treated water from escaping the lake and having negative impacts downstream. Live fish in Piper Brook were monitored throughout the application and have been monitored for several weeks following and have shown no ill effects from the treatment. When the rotenone concentration at the lake is at a safe level for release, it

will be allowed to slowly seep downstream under the careful and watchful eyes of fisheries biologists.

In time, fisheries managers may have to intervene by helping to recolonize native fish species into the lake from within the system. First, the lower trophic levels; plankton and invertebrates must repopulate. Eventually, the lake will return to its natural state and with hope, the St. Marys River system will remain free of invasive species.



## *Man of a 1000 Casts*

*By Deidre Green and Gerry Doucet*

Over the past few years, you have likely noticed the presence of a casting instructor on our riverbanks here in Antigonish. It's not uncommon to see this world class fly caster in the practice field across from Ron MacGillivray's. Never far from his well-organized arsenal of rods, he has helped many local anglers improve their casting abilities.

Who is this man? What's his story? And what brought him to Nova Scotia?



Neil Houlding is a Fly Fishing Federation Casting Instructor in both Single Hand (CI) and Two Handed Casting (TCHI). He is an accomplished guide, the North American Ambassador and Technical Representative for Guideline; a passionate proponent for the sport of fly fishing.

Throughout his career, Neil has served in a variety of roles with industry leaders. For some 20 years, he was on the Pro Staff team with G. Loomis and worked closely in the design of their Roaring River line of two handed rods. Pre-pandemic, Neil was a frequent participant in spey casting clinics worldwide. And in 1998, he was a coach and mentor for the first World Youth Fly Fishing Championship in Wales. Throughout the years, Neil has inspired countless anglers, young and old.



Born and raised in Leyland (Lancashire, England), he came from a family of four. His two sisters and one brother still reside in Lancashire and Neil routinely returns home to spend the winter months with his family. Off season holidays in the old country are vibrant and happy; visiting with old friends, nights at the pub, meals with extended family and, as always, fishing. Opting to stay in Nova Scotia and Quebec throughout this Covid season, Neil can often be found tying beautiful flies, video chatting with his daughter,

grandchildren, family and friends. A goal of one thousand flies for the winter season is in the offing, and he's right on track to accomplish that.

How does a man from the UK find his way to Canada and make this country his chosen home? When Neil was 26 years old, he did some deep soul searching and courageously elected for a change of venue. Canada was the target. He first arrived in New York and within a few days had made his way to Cambridge, Ontario. Arriving on December 4, 1980, he began working the very next day as a Millwright. He remained in Ontario for the next 30 years where he fished, guided and began his journey as a Casting Instructor of the First Order. Fishing for a variety of species, his chosen targets were salmon and steelhead. This began his initial foray to the cherished grounds of the Gaspé Peninsula. Friends and alliances were made and

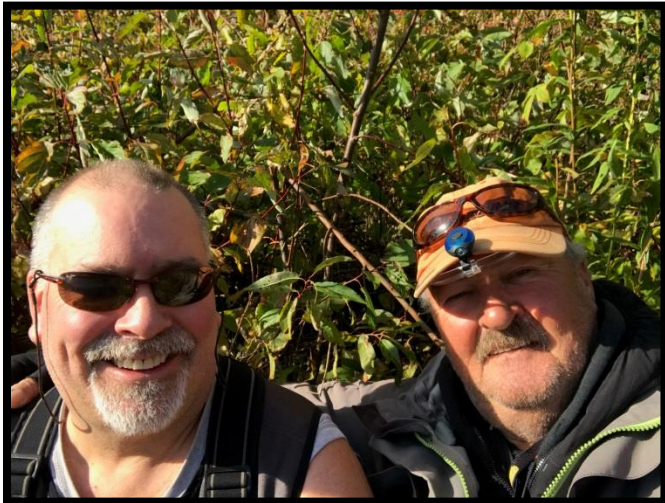


ultimately, this would shape Neil's fishing landscape for decades to come.

Upon retirement, he moved to St. Paul, Quebec for three years and eventually found himself in New Richmond. For the past seven years he has resided here, near the riverbanks of the world renowned Grand Cascapedia. His lifelong thirst has been quenched; he has found his fishing home. Could there be a better place for someone with Neil's passion and talents? Hard to imagine. Considered the North American epicenter for Atlantic salmon fishing; this home base is but a short drive to access rivers named: Bonaventure, Matapedia, Moise, Restigouche, York and more.

Having fished all over the UK, Norway, Scandinavia and throughout Canada, Neil will not hesitate in telling you that his favorite river today is the Matapedia. Close to his home, fishable with canoe or wading (Neil owns a 26-foot Sharpe's freighter canoe), the Matapedia is ideal as it affords the opportunity to comfortably and economically employ both approaches for large Atlantic's.

As a Guideline Ambassador, Neil's assignments brought him to Nova Scotia to liaise with Alex Breckenridge, whose shop, The Tying Scotsman, is on the Margaree River. Breckenridge is now a Guideline dealer and as the brand's presence grows in the Maritime provinces, so do Neil's local connections.



Upon invitation from longtime friend Gerry Doucet, Neil began coming to Antigonish several years ago to stay with him at Salmon Central, and fish for Atlantic salmon during the month of October. Neil quickly felt at home and loved fishing our little rivers so much, that he made this Autumn trip an annual pilgrimage. After salmon season closes in Quebec, Neil makes his way south to complete the final chapter of his angling season in Nova Scotia with dear friends on West River, Antigonish and several rivers on Cape Breton Island.

Despite his sometimes gruff exterior and colorful vernacular, Neil candidly shares that he feels a real affinity to the community here and our wild Atlantic salmon runs. He has never been one to arrive, fish and then go home. Known for being generous with both his time and efforts, his big heart can be at odds with the perception you may originally have of this unique man. He is a fan of our grass roots river associations and our community as a whole. Over the years, he has contributed significantly to the ARA by way of sponsorships and donations. Noteworthy, are his diligent efforts this year where he single-handedly landed a major sponsor for our fall activities, in lieu of our bi-annual dinner. Neil has also raised the level of casting competency in our region by always being accessible as a mentor and resource, with particular effort in encouraging women and youth to give the sport a try.



As a casting instructor, Neil is uniquely qualified. He has the innate ability of finding the appropriate language to move concept to technique. It's one thing to be technically proficient and another to be able to teach. As far as we are concerned, he is best in class. Germane to this point, experienced anglers in our community regularly ask Neil to be their swing coach on and off the river. Be it Robert Chiasson, Chip Sutherland, Jim Lericos, Phil Zwicker, Tim Hanforth or Aidan Doucet; all of these competent anglers, and many more, rely on Neil to elevate their casting game each and every season. They usually

walk away with one or two pearls of advice that are highly technical and that fix a small, but critical flaw. Neil has an intuition about him and the special skill of not only identifying the deficits but communicating a variety of methods to rectify these.



His teaching language is the culmination of decades of research, practice and due diligence, resulting in a conversation style that rapidly breaks down barriers for his students. Technical concepts are simplified in a manner that fulfills the equation required between teacher and pupil.

So... the next time you see this man on the river, or riverside having a wee nap, give him a cheery hello, and he will respond in like manner. It is highly likely you will soon begin casting with him; a new friendship formed and an exciting journey of discovery has begun. You can tip him with a Joe Louis, a Twix candy bar or lemon tart. He will readily accept.



## *NSLC Adopt-A-Stream Report*

*By Amy Weston and Nick MacInnis*

### **Partnering to support Gulf Priority Rivers Project – great things in store for Antigonish rivers**

Last year, the Nova Scotia Salmon Association launched a four-year, multi-partner project to support habitat restoration and to improve watershed stewardship in four priority rivers in the Gulf Region - the West and South Rivers in Antigonish and the Mabou and Margaree watersheds in Cape Breton. Funded in part by the Canada Nature Fund for Aquatic Species At Risk (CNFASAR) the project is aimed at improving habitat conditions for Atlantic salmon and American eel as well as assessing the habitat suitability for Atlantic Sturgeon, all species assessed at risk in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence. Across the province, on the Atlantic side, the NSSA launched a similar, and even larger project for species-at-risk focusing on 8 watersheds in the Southern Uplands. These projects build on the NSSA's flagship restoration program Adopt A Stream and West River acid rain mitigation project. *MacMillan's Before and After photos*





*Drone photo of MacMillan's*





The Antigonish Rivers Association is among the key collaborating partners in the Gulf Rivers Project along with other affiliates the Margaree Salmon Association (MSA) and the Inverness South Anglers (ISAA), as well as the Mi'kmaw Conservation Group (MCG) and the Unama'ki



Institute of Natural Resources (UINR). The overarching goal of this project is to restore habitat, improve stewardship capacity through assessment, conservation planning and restoration prioritizing to position the NSSA, the ARA and others, to complete meaningful conservation work for years to come.

Right off the bat, this funding allowed NSSA to support affiliate groups to complete high impact shovel-ready projects in the NE Margaree, SW Mabou and a major bank stabilization and riparian planting project on the South River, completed this past field season. More restoration will be funded in 2021 and particularly in 2022. The NSSA was recently granted a budget “top-up” that enables our affiliate partners to have project planning coordinators in place this winter to contribute to

watershed-based, geo-referenced databases of past work and studies and collect local community knowledge. Earlier this month, the ARA hired a new watershed coordinator, Allison White, to fill this role. Allison has worked for the ARA in the past, as a field technician on the restoration crew and as a watershed coordinator for ISAA. Allison brings a variety of skills, experience and

work ethic to the ARA that will benefit the organization greatly.



ARA had a wonderful and productive field season completing instream restoration, riparian zone tree planting and completing necessary maintenance on the many existing restoration structures

found in Antigonish County. The instream restoration component of ARA's field season consisted of three bank stabilization projects on the South River - which involved bank-rocking to prevent future erosion as well as the establishment of a riparian zone through tree planting. Two sites were completed on the Overmars Farm and one site was completed across from MacMillan's Greenhouses in upper South River, and a total 300 meters of stream bank erosion was fixed and

over 500 trees were planted, staked, and fenced.



*The ARA Crew 2020, from L to R: Greg, Aidan, Andrew and Bailey*

ARA's restoration crew was used to plant trees along the Overmars' sites while volunteers from ARA gathered for an afternoon in early September to plant trees in upper South River. The crew, Andrew Grace, Gregory Shields, and Aidan Doucet, also installed a series of 12 digger logs in upper Brierly Brook, restoring approximately

500 meters of stream. ARA also employed a summer internship student, Bailey Randall from St. FX's Aquatic Resources program. Bailey's work focused on surveying local anglers and conservationists about their perspectives on the state of the South River watershed. The goal of Bailey's project is to better inform ARA restoration and stewardship work so that it aligns with the values within the communities as well as addressing issues identified by ARA members.



We are looking forward to more success from our collaboration in the coming months and years. Best wishes from your NSSA Adopt A Stream and Gulf Rivers team -  
*Nick MacInnis and Amy Weston*



Atlantic Salmon Federation  
Fédération du Saumon Atlantique

*Atlantic Salmon Federation Update*



*Kris Hunter*

Season's greetings from the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF). As I watch the snow fall outside my window and reflect on the past year, I realize just how much has happened since I last provided an update. Covid-19, of course, leaps to the forefront. So, before anything else I wish to pass along my wishes that you all can stay safe and relatively sane as we push through what are hopefully the last phases of this pandemic. I also wish to pass along my condolences to those of you that have suffered and lost during these difficult times.

COVID-19 has presented many challenges to us all both personally and professionally. Important fundraisers (the lifeblood of non-profit organizations) have been curtailed or cancelled, projects have had to be reworked, new safety protocols figured out, in person meetings have had to be moved to conference calls or online, to say nothing of the immense personal toll that self-isolation, job losses, and the threat of illness and loss has taken on us all. Despite these challenges there has also been a lot of success and triumph. All told the salmon season was pretty good this year and I know that ARA and others were able to overcome several obstacles and accomplish a

lot on behalf of salmon. ASF was no different.



ASF's research and management teams, headquartered in NB, dealt with fundraising challenges, travel restrictions and all sorts of COVID-19 related logistical constraints but were still able to achieve most of our 2020 objectives. Adapted tagging and tracking programs took place and we were able to continue research into what is killing salmon in ocean, which is important for all salmon rivers. Another

positive step in 2020 for all salmon rivers was the continuation of Greenland agreement. Despite

some challenges with overages in the first few years this agreement is working and saving significant numbers of salmon. Reporting has increased significantly from less than a third of the professional catch to now around 90% of all catch, meaning for the first time ever we have an accurate picture of what is happening in Greenland. By coupling better reporting with reductions in quota and season length, we have reduced the catch of this mixed stock fishery, which has coincided with more reports of large salmon returning to rivers throughout North America. It is estimated that our current and past conservation agreements with Greenland have now allowed roughly 200,000 additional large salmon to return to their home rivers to spawn.

Closer to home aquaculture has probably been one of my busiest files this past year and one where we have seen some major success. This past year we saw a major expansion into Nova Scotia waters by Cermaq abandoned due in part to our opposition and we aided in the formation of a new provincial coalition, the Healthy Bay Network (HBN), that will help to unify and give voice to communities and organizations in the aquaculture debate. We have also been working on the Town Point shellfish application and working with our partners here on the East Coast and the West Coast to try to stop the impacts that open net pen aquaculture is having on our wild salmon through the development of an Aquaculture Act and the by working to ensure the Liberal government's commitment to get the pens out of the water by 2025 is honoured.

Earlier in the year I also spent a significant amount of time working on Gold Mine issues. We worked with our partners to successfully advocate for more protected places, which will both help protect wild Atlantic Salmon habitat and help prevent impacts on rivers from the impacts of gold mines. With the SMRA and the NSSA we released a spawning video and press release and gave several presentations on how these gold mines (Cochrane Hill and Beaver Dam in particular) threaten wild Atlantic Salmon. This advocacy was very effective, getting local, regional, and national media attention.



More recently I have been involved with providing continuing support for groups in NS and PEI. Some of my activities have included presenting to groups, assisting in watershed restoration planning, working on invasive species issues, and helping people prepare for a potential listing of salmon as a species at risk.

The invasive species issue especially garnered a lot of attention as this fall ASF continued to work towards eradication of smallmouth bass from Miramichi Lake in NB and in NS the province made the first application of rotenone to eradicate

illegal introduced bass from rotenone in Piper's Lake on the St. Mary's. Going forward ASF will continue to work with our partners to develop solutions for invasive species issues and all other issues to help conserve and restore native salmon populations.



## A "Normal" Year of Salmon Angling

By Jakob Lorefice

Unfortunately like many of our past fall Atlantic salmon seasons here in Antigonish and along the north shore of Nova Scotia we were left hoping for large amounts of rain with no avail. It would seem we are all becoming accustomed to low water salmon fishing and perhaps even adapting; with hopes of picking up a fish or two in these not so fortunate conditions.

Like many I love fishing high cold water in search of fresh Atlantic salmon, but the 2020 season presented very few opportunities to truly be able to fish in the conditions we all love, and in my case with my 14 foot spey rod.



My salmon season was heavily favoured on the eastern side of Nova Scotia this year, fishing the Margaree River where unlike our rivers on the north shore it had nice water for a few great periods of time which presented opportunities for some excellent fishing. Early on in the season I spent 3 weeks fishing the Margaree with my good friends Aaron Krick and Robert "Roberto" Chiasson. We fished hard but due to extreme hot spells and low water, the first half of my trip was a bust with little to no fish being hooked on the river at all. As one would expect this drained just about every ounce of confidence I had.

On July 5th the tables turned, with a full moon and large tides in combination with some much needed cold nights we began to experience a drastic change in our angling success. Over a three-day span we

hooked upwards of 12 fresh chrome salmon. The biggest of which, around 16 pounds , I landed on a traditional blue charm.

After a couple of months we began to close in on the last month of salmon season and the favourite time among many anglers. With two hurricanes in the forecast, we were all excited as it appeared we would be on the rivers in no time. I and many others couldn't have been more ready. But unfortunately the predicted rain did not come and we anglers were left hanging once again.

Fortunately for us we still had one option; the fantastic fall salmon rivers in Cape Breton experienced huge amounts of rain which gave us some hope for a good end to the 2020 salmon season. Later in October I spent 4 days fishing with my friends Charles Gaines, Neil Houlding, Gerry Doucet, Jim Lerikos and Dr. Dave Cudmore. We could not have asked for better conditions as the water was high and there were a great number of fish on the move. We all landed several great fish and couldn't have asked for a better way to cap off the not so "normal" 2020 fishing season.

I will leave you with the old saying "You must make hay while the sun shines." There is no better representation to our past season.



## *The Well Stocked Fly Box-Trout*

By Don MacLean

My father spent his working life as a carpenter so I spent a lot of time as a boy helping him with carpentry projects. The two most important lessons I learned were: a good craftsman looks after their tools and, you need the right tools for the job. For my father that meant a well-stocked tool box and, in his case, it also meant a well-organized tool box, with a place for every tool. I think, as anglers, we can borrow a page from my father's book and follow a similar approach to our selection of flies. A well-stocked fly box will ensure you will have the tools you need to tackle anything the fish, weather or water will throw at you.

While my Father had a well-stocked tool box, if forced to reduce it to a bare minimum, he could have got by with four tools, a hammer, saw, measuring tape and square. Similarly, in my opinion, anglers need four basic fly types. For trout anglers your tool box should include nymphs, wet flies, dry flies and streamers. A basic collection of flies from each group, in a variety of sizes, will allow you to face any fishing situation.

### Nymphs “Little Brown Bugs”

We all have favourite things we like to eat. Trout are no different and, with nymphs making up 80 per cent of a trout’s diet, it makes sense to offer them flies which make up a big part of their diet every day. This is especially true in the cold water of spring when trout may not feed actively because of the low temperature. While most anglers are familiar with fishing streamers or bucktails to imitate minnows and bait fish or dry flies which imitate the adult stage of stream insects fewer of them fish flies which imitate the nymph stage of aquatic insects. Most anglers have seen nymphs in streams. They look like little brown bugs. There are dozens of different species but you don’t have to worry about fishing a perfect match. Any small buggie looking fly should do the trick.



Fishing nymphs is fairly simple. The usual approach is to cast upstream and let the nymph drift towards you. Your choice of fly line can improve your chances. Since nymphs live on or near the bottom you have to get your fly down to where the fish are feeding and, while a full sinking line will get your fly down they are harder to cast since you have to lift all the line out of the water. Fly lines with a sink tip, sinking leaders or using flies weighted with cone or bead heads, are a good compromise.

Nymphs are effective because trout are used to seeing, and feeding on them. While emerging mayflies, caddis or stoneflies are only available during a very narrow period of time the nymph stage of these insects are available throughout the year. The way trout rise to the water’s surface can clue anglers in to what the fish are feeding on. When you see trout tailing in the shallow end of pools, their tails breaking the water, they are almost always feeding on the bottom for nymphs. When you see the trout’s back coming out of the water they are often feeding on nymphs rising to the surface to hatch. That’s when fishing a nymph as a dropper fly, with a dry fly as a strike indicator, can be deadly.

If you want to add some nymphs to your trout fishing arsenal there are a few standards which will match most aquatic insects we see in our waters. My basic nymph selection includes the Pheasants Tail, Tellico, Woolly Worm and Hare’s Ear

### Wet Flies “The Classics”

I have always been a fan of fishing small wet flies for trout but these days wet flies seem to have fallen out of favour, with most anglers instead choosing nymphs and streamers. And that’s a shame, because wet flies are a great method of catching trout. I’ll never forget a day spent fishing brook trout on Third Pond in the Gander River with Darryl Murrant a number of years ago. It was late June, cold, wet and windy but the

trout were numerous, and hungry. I was fishing a Parmachene Belle paired up with a Dark Montreal and I lost count of how many times I caught two trout at a time.



Like many things related to fly-fishing wet flies originated in Britain. Those early anglers were after brown trout, a species which is very wary and notoriously hard to catch. This resulted in the development of small drab patterns with names like Black Gnat, Cow Dung and March Brown. Many of these anglers fished more than one fly on their line. In England, where the technique originated, a multiple fly rig is called a cast. Traditionally three flies are used a fly at the end of the leader, called the point fly, a second fly, called the dropper fly, tied about 16 inches above the point fly on a short piece of leader and a third fly called the dib farther up the line. The dib fly gets its name from the

technique known as dibbling. That's when an angler lifts their rod tip resulting in the dib fly skating or dibbling along on the surface. This technique imitates a hatching may fly or caddis and can be very effective.

I often use two flies, when it is legal, because I find a three fly cast tangles too easily. There are several ways to rig a dropper fly. The simplest is to tie on a piece of leader using a blood knot and leave one of the ends long. Some anglers tie a piece of leader to the bend of the dropper fly and tie the point fly on that. The trick is to not make the dropper leader too long. I find anything over a foot will wrap around the leader and leave you with a tangle.

Wet flies are usually tied on short shank, heavy hooks to ensure they sink readily. Most are simple patterns, with bodies of tinsel or chenille, a wing and some hackle at the head. Tie a variety of patterns in sizes ranging from 10 to 14 and you will be ready to hit the water anywhere. A basic selection should include the Dark Montreal, Parmachene Belle, Butcher and Black Gnat.

### *Dry Flies "The Big Three"*

Wading the shores of a trout lake on a spring evening, while casting to rising trout, is one of my favourite forms of fishing. It is exciting, challenging and, if you are in the right place at the right time, with the right fly, very effective. When fishing dry flies we are generally attempting to imitate one of the three main aquatic insects while they are in the process of leaving their aquatic stage of life to become adults. This much anticipated hatch is usually driven by water temperature so being on the water when it is occurring can be somewhat of a guessing game. The "Big Three" of aquatic insects are mayflies, caddis flies and stoneflies and a basic understanding of their life cycle can make you a better angler.

#### Mayfly Time

Many anglers consider mayflies to be the most important trout stream insect. Mayflies belong to the order of insects called Ephemeroptera, from the latin Ephemero which means short lived, and ptera, meaning wings. The mayfly life cycle consists of four stages, egg, nymph, dun and spinner. Eggs hatch into an underwater form called a nymph. This period lasts about a year and is followed by emergence. When the nymph is fully developed it swims to the water surface and hatches into the winged mayfly known as a dun. The dun rests on the water surface for a short period of time drying its wings. This process is the



hatch we anxiously await. The duns are very vulnerable to trout while on the surface and the right fly can bring exciting action.



With over 100 species of mayflies in North America it is unlikely that anyone will be able to match the hatch for all of them. However in every area there are one or two hatches which are well known to seasoned anglers. They have names like Green Drake, Pale Morning Dun or Light Cahill but one fly which is effective in imitating most of them, and which most anglers wouldn't be caught on the water without is the Adams. The Adams represents a range of mayflies and you should never be without a few in sizes #12-#18 in your tin.

## Queen of the Waters

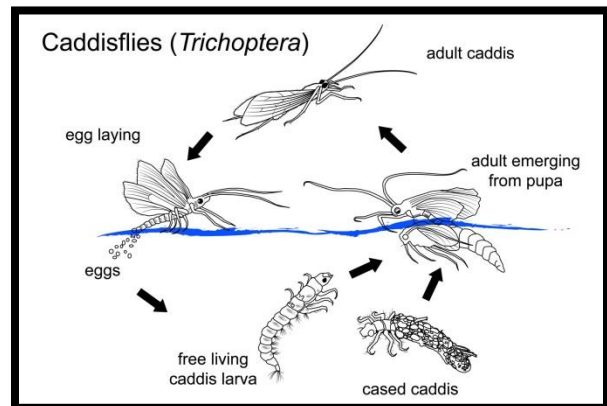
While many anglers consider the mayfly hatch to be the pinnacle of fly fishing I have often found that, year in and year out I have better fishing using caddis fly imitations. Caddis, which are members of the order of insects known as Trichoptera, are small, moth like flies which can be distinguished by their four wings which look like a tent when folded on their back. Unlike mayflies, caddis have four stages in their life cycle: egg, larva, pupa and adult. With 1200 species in North America caddisflies are found in all types of aquatic habitats.

Caddis are found in all types of aquatic habitats throughout the year. This availability makes them very attractive to trout. I've seen a hatch of caddis flies on the snow in March. The life cycle begins with eggs laid in the water which hatch into a worm like larva.

When the larva matures it makes a cocoon in which it changes into a pupa. *Gwenangling diagram*

Once the pupa has fully developed it cuts its way out of the cocoon and swims to the water surface. Some species crawl onto land to hatch while others stay in the water film as the adult fly splits out of the pupa skin and flies away. Caddis live much longer than mayflies and, since they mate on land, only the females return to the water to lay their eggs, and to be eaten by hungry trout.

Flies which imitate caddis larva and pupae are easy to tie and can be very effective. There are also many patterns which imitate the adult stage. Anglers should attempt to match the general size and colour of the natural but I have found almost any caddis imitation in tan, olive and dark brown from #10-#14 will be effective, with the Elk Hair Caddis being one of the most popular. My favourite caddis imitation however, and also my all-time favourite trout fly is the Queen of the Waters. This simple fly is an old English pattern which has been fooling trout on both sides of the Atlantic for over two hundred years.



## Flies of Stone



As their name implies these insects are found on, and under stones in fast, clean running water. Stoneflies belong to the order of insects known as the Plecoptera. They are similar to mayflies in that they begin life as eggs, hatching into a nymph and finally emerging as an adult. The nymph stage can take up to three years and, as a result they are an important part of the diet of fish. In appearance stonefly nymphs resemble those of mayflies but they tend to be a little larger and have two distinctive wings cases or pods as well as two tails and antennae. Another distinguishing characteristic are the light coloured gill

filaments located between their six legs. Stonefly nymphs spend their lives crawling on and under stones. Occasionally they will be caught in the current and washed downstream. Trout often set up a feeding station in areas where the current will direct drifting nymphs to them.

When the nymphs have completed their life cycle they swim to the surface to emerge as adult stoneflies. Stoneflies crawl out of the water onto dry areas of shoreline and emerge as adult flies. They leave an empty nymphal case or shuck behind on the shore. You will often see them if you check the shoreline of your local trout stream. If you see several of these shucks it is always a good idea to tie on a nymph pattern and drift it through the run in case trout are still in a feeding mood.

Adult stoneflies vary in colour from yellow to brown and have four wings which are visible when they are flying. Whenever I see adult stoneflies flying they remind me of tiny helicopters as they flutter over the water. At rest stoneflies carry their wings flat on their back, in marked contrast to both mayflies and caddis. Mating takes place following emergence and the females deposit their eggs on the water surface either by dipping their body in the water repeatedly or floating on the surface as the eggs wash off. Regardless of the method used the female continues to beat her wings while the eggs are deposited. While less well known than our caddis and mayflies you should always have a few stonefly patterns in your fly box. The Yellow Sally and Stimulator will do the trick, most of the time.

Streamers “The Big Fish Flies”

Most anglers are familiar with streamer and bucktail flies and know how effective they can be for catching big trout. The late Col. Joseph Bates, who popularized these flies with his excellent books, coined the phrase “the big fish flies” to describe them and there is no question they attract large fish. I like to call them the all-around flies since they can be fished in fresh and saltwater for almost every fish that swims so they definitely deserve a place in your fly box. The reason for their success is quite simple, big fish get

that way by eating a lot, and since it takes many nymphs and aquatic flies to make a meal the preferred food of big fish is smaller fish such as minnows and smelt or other bait fish.



While strictly speaking a streamer is a fly tied with feathers as a wing and bucktails uses deer hair, today both types of flies are generally called streamers. While still water trout feeding on mayflies can be selective, trout living in running water have to make their minds up quickly whether they want to eat the food going by. If they are too fussy they won't eat. Usually, as long as the fly looks similar to something they eat, in colour and size, they will attack it. This means trying to match your fly to the common food that is in the river when you are fishing. We often make the job of picking the right fly more complicated than it has to be. Where I do my fishing in early spring this usually means smelt, and a lean looking fly with a silver body can be deadly if fished when smelt are

spawning in the streams. Later on in the season the preferred minnows may be killifish or sticklebacks so a bulkier fly may be required. The Muddler Minnow, in silver or gold is always a good choice. I would add several others which I consider essential. They are the Mickey Finn, Black Ghost and Woolly Bugger.

#### A Well-Stocked Fly Box

Ensuring you have a well-stocked fly box will help you match any situation you may find on the water this season. In my case I always add a few patterns every season, so that is why I often end up hauling around half a dozen fly boxes, but I always ensure I have a good selection of the old standbys, in a variety of sizes, in one fly box. With them in my tool box I am ready to tackle anything that swims.

#### Tight Lines and Merry Christmas

*Don wants to let his friends know that he and Judy have retired to Cape Breton where he plans to spend a lot of time chasing trout and salmon in his old haunts. His latest book: *With These Hands-Traditional Arts, Crafts and Trades of Atlantic Canada* was published by Nimbus in 2019.*



## ***Trout Fishing in the Shoulder Seasons***

By Ken MacAulay

Earlier this week I was wading the shallows while fishing for trout in the Bras d'or Lakes in Cape Breton and, later in the week, the Pinevale lakes in Antigonish County. Fishing lakes in the late fall and in the early spring is a great way for fly fishers to extend their trout season. However, judging by the small number of anglers that I encounter, more fly fishers could take advantage of these opportunities. Fishers may not be aware that the sport can be spectacular and the days quite enjoyable! If you are inclined to take advantage of this opportunity but do not know how to get started, you may be interested in employing an approach that competition anglers use to fish a lake.



In preparing for competitions, anglers will often follow a four-step approach to determine how to best fish a lake. This approach requires an angler to consider, in order: location, depth, retrieve and fly. A useful mnemonic (LDR-F) is to think about it as the LDR (leader) before the Fly....that is, to maximize their chances of catching fish, anglers should consider their location, depth and retrieve before their fly. At the end of a practice session, anglers want to have identified the locations on the lake that have good populations of fish, the depth of these fish, the retrieves that worked best and the fly patterns to use. The recreational angler may find this approach useful also. For example, if an angler was fishing for browns in the spring and had a baitfish pattern that worked consistently in the past, they should likely start with that pattern. If the angler was not catching any browns, rather than immediately changing their fly, they

should ask am I in the right location? If the location is fine, they should ask am I fishing at the right depth and at the right speed? Only after answering these questions, should they consider changing their fly.

**Location** – In lakes, wading shallow waters and bays in early spring and late fall can be very productive. In spring, these areas are often the first to warm up, which attracts trout to feed on the insects/baitfish that may be active. In the fall, as the water cools down, trout will re-enter these waters to feed aggressively in preparation for winter. Over time anglers will get to know when and where they can expect the trout to be. For example, in the spring, we like to target brook trout in the River Denys basin and, in one bay that we fish, it is not unusual for the trout to be gone by the end of the first week of May as the water warms up. In the fall, we have been successful in targeting large browns in Cameron lake mid to late October as they moved into the shallows to feed (but note they were there for only a couple of weeks). To determine the best areas to start fishing, consider using the Nova Scotia government bathymetric maps for lakes (see



<https://novascotia.ca/fish/sportfishing/our-lakes/lake-inventory/#rfa2> ) or commercial websites for the Bras d'or lakes (see for example [http://www.gpsnauticalcharts.com/main/ca\\_ca376272-bras-d-or-lake-nautical-chart.html](http://www.gpsnauticalcharts.com/main/ca_ca376272-bras-d-or-lake-nautical-chart.html) ). Once you have several possible targets, try to find a relatively calm day to fish if it is your first time fishing a particular shoreline. Take the time to closely observe the water and look for rising fish (or more subtle signs like nervous water and/or small waves going in an unusual direction). These will provide you with a starting point. If you

cannot see rising fish, look at the shore features to determine where fish may be located. After several trips, you will have identified the locations that consistently hold fish.

**Depth** – The location of fish in the water column is absolutely key when angling from a boat. Trout could be anywhere from just below the surface to 20+ feet deep and multiple lines from floating lines to Di7s may be needed. When wading the shorelines, it is likely that the waters fished will only range from 2 to 6 feet deep. Choice of fly line is not as important as most fish can be reached with a floating line and appropriately weighted flies. It is important however to recognize where the trout may be feeding and the kind of fishing pressures they may be seeing. For example, at Gillis lake earlier this fall, the fish had seen lots of lures and nymphs, and as a result, surface presentations such as small CDC dries/emergers were very effective even though it was late October and early November. In Whycomomagh Bay, in the fall, large rainbow trout can be found in as little as eighteen inches of water. About a month ago, I was fortunate to have the bay to myself one morning. While standing in water that was mid-thigh deep, I found myself turned around and casting to the shore to target pods of rainbows that were coming in to

feed. These trout seemed to consistently follow defined paths that were set slightly deeper depressions in the floor bottom. That morning, I caught 12 trout and all of them were likely in water of 3 feet or less. It goes without saying that hooking an 8 lb rainbow in 2 feet of water is exciting as the fish can only go sideways. I would also be remiss if I did not mention that targeting these fish requires close attention to the water surface to locate the pods...it is important to notice “nervous water” as the signs for a pod of fish are not always obvious.

**Retrieve** – The importance of the retrieve cannot be overstated and is often missed by anglers as one of the most important factors in catching fish. Anglers should be proficient in the hand twist retrieve, strip retrieve and the roly poly retrieve. The speed of the retrieve and the target depth will interact to determine which type of line an angler should be using. For example, if the fish are looking for a fast retrieve and are willing to chase the fly on the surface, a floating line will work...if however, the fish are looking for a fast retrieve at depth, a sinking line will be needed to keep the fly at the required depth. It is very important that fishers try different retrieves to see which retrieve is best. Many anglers often have a natural retrieve that they automatically use and it will often produce fish. Other retrieves however may produce more or bigger fish and anglers should consider trying different retrieves in the same way that they think of changing their flies. I recall a banner day last year when I was fishing Whycocomagh Bay. It was a fish nearly every second cast, using a very fast one-foot strip retrieve on an intermediate line (fly was just below the surface). I decided to experiment and try a fast roly poly retrieve and also a much slower hand twist retrieve. I caught fish on both but at a much lower rate than on the strip retrieve...I would guess that the catch rate on the strip retrieve that day was at least four times higher than the other retrieves. On another day, it could be just the opposite, but it is important that the angler consciously consider their retrieve each time out.

The other tactic that all anglers should incorporate in their retrieve is the pause...I think that many anglers would be surprised by the number of times when they retrieve a fly that fish follow but do not commit. To help convert these fish, anglers should introduce a pause into their retrieve, especially on slower days. The fish will often take the fly on the pause or on the first movement of the fly after the pause. In addition, at the end of the retrieve, anglers should remember to hang their flies...this is a very effective technique especially on the slow days. The final item to note is that very cold water will likely require a very slow retrieve and anglers should consider presenting their flies under a bung/indicator at these times.



**Flies** – Anglers will often have an idea of the flies that are likely to work and are well advised start with these flies. If however anglers are fishing new waters and are unsure of where to start, they should consider using a three-fly cast (on a long leader) to speed up the identification of patterns and retrieves that will work best. My standard cast to

explore new waters is a three-fly cast which consists of an attractor pattern on the top dropper (blob, sparkler), a small natural pattern on the middle dropper (cruncher, diawl bach, cormorant, etc.) and a streamer-type pattern on the point (wooly bugger, vampire leech, minkie, olive damsel, zonker, etc.). I like to space these flies about 6 feet apart and start fishing the top of the water and work my way deeper. As I fish the cast, I will vary the retrieves until I find fly, depth and retrieve that consistently catches fish. For example, if I find that a slow retrieve about two feet deep is consistently producing fish on my cruncher, I may replace my point fly with a diawl bach to provide the fish with another nymph alternative. Further, I may even change my fly line to get to the desired depth more quickly. One exception to this approach is when I am targeting large rainbows in the Bras d'or lakes...here, after I have located a pod of fish, I will use a single fly on a long leader (the fish are so strong that you will lose one or both if you get a double). I should also note that because they are pressured in some areas like Whycocomagh Bay, a long leader will help prevent lining the fish (and spooking them) when casting to a pod.

## What gear is needed?

When targeting lakes like Gillis or Cameron, a 5 weight rod is sufficient, but when targeting larger fish in the Bras d'or lakes, a 7 or 8 weight rod is likely necessary. A floating line and an intermediate/ slow sinking line will likely suffice



for 90% of the time that you are fishing from shore. My favorite line is a Rio hover line that sinks at 0.5" per second. I like it because it is better than a floating line for keeping in touch with your flies on windy days. Low stretch fly lines are also preferred as they will better transmit those soft takes. With respect to leader materials, any good strong, low diameter fluorocarbon works well. I am a big fan of 2x Rio Fluoroflex for the large rainbows in

Whycocomagh Bay but will also use a stiffer fluorocarbon like Hanak Fluorocarbon Tippet on very windy days

## When to fish?

In the spring, lakes can be waded from shore as soon as ice-out happens. In the fall, these same lakes can be fished from shore starting in late September/early October and continuing until ice forms. If dressed appropriately, you can often get a full day of fishing in. Days with little to no wind and shores with the wind on your back will make for an enjoyable day. My last day of fishing last year was early January in the Bras d'or lakes so there may be a couple of days left this season, weather depending. (Tip of the day: Both Cameron and Gillis lakes were stocked with large browns this past summer which should make for some great fishing this coming spring).

## *Greetings from The Tying Scotsman*



A strange year for all of us as Covid-19 progressed. So many friends unable to enter the province to fish as they normally do.

As a retailer should we opened as usual in June?  
We decided to open with all

transactions done online and kerb side pick-up. This worked very well with people even ordering from our driveway. Then pick up from the bench, have a socially distanced chat and then off to the river.

With the big water in June it got busy and there were lots of happy anglers around the river. A good number hadn't fished in years but decided to get back into fishing and get out of the house. Quite a few new comers to the sport also showed up.







By August the water level had once again dropped away, with temperatures climbing and fewer anglers around. Eventually warm water protocol kicked in and the lower river was briefly closed.

October brought plenty of water and with the Middle and Baddeck rivers opening for salmon it was a busy time again. We opened the shop to one customer, masked up, at a time and that worked well too. Most people masked up before leaving their vehicles.

Looking ahead to next year no doubt it will be more of the same; I imagine it will be well down the road before any sense of normalcy sets in. Meanwhile our online shop is open all year round.

We wish everyone all the very best during the coming Festive season. Above all "Stay Safe." See you all next season.

Kay, Alex and Ghillie.

<https://thetyingscotsman.ca/>

## *A Christmas List for the Avid Angler*

1. A membership to one or more of our conservation groups. Locally there is information here for the ARA. You can join the NSSA for free in their new membership drive and on the international level the ASF needs our support.
2. Casting lessons with the master, Neil Houlding. You can contact Neil [nhouding@guidelineflyfish.ca](mailto:nhouding@guidelineflyfish.ca) . *Straight up and around the sombrero*. See I remembered!
3. A new Guideline Coastal Evolve line for chasing those late season Bras D'or Lakes fish.

I wonder if *The Tying Scotsman* has these yet? Hmm



4. A cool, wet 2021 just like 2011. Don't let the beach lovers hear you say this one.
5. Tickets for the 2021 Wild Salmon Benefit Dinner and Auction. Be an optimist.
6. The latest issue of *Chasing Silver* magazine. A great article and photos by Ray Plourde. The article also features a well-known deep wading lefty.
7. A fishing trip to anywhere outside the Bubble!
8. Some fly tying material. I have my eye on some Future Fly American Opposum. Seems to be the hot new fur. *The Tying Scotsman* photo.
9. Since it is December and there is still some fishing left a nice pair of fleece fishing pants would be a hit. Patagonia Halifax maybe?
10. Good health and an end to COVID-19.



**Late Breaking News:** Neil Houlding just informed us that our friends at *Fishing Fever* will be carrying Guideline products in 2021. You can see Guideline's product line at <https://guidelineflyfish.ca/>. Neil says that he is always available for help with tackle selection and recommendations at [nholding@guidelineflyfish.ca](mailto:nholding@guidelineflyfish.ca)

## Membership

As mentioned earlier Don Wescott has taken over this file and has made great strides in updating our membership and contact information. Paid members are important in that they represent a commitment to an organization and its purpose. The number of paid members is critical when we seek support. We have added a number of easy options for you to buy or renew a membership:

1. Our website is secure and has a PayPal option. The website is being update and you will soon be able to complete the contact section. <https://www.antigonishriversassociation.ca/>
2. We have an e-transfer option for your convenience. [payment@antigonishriversassociation.ca](mailto:payment@antigonishriversassociation.ca)
3. You can purchase a membership and get your new hat from our friends at Fishing Fever Fly and Tackle Shop or Leaves and Limbs.

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Anyone with ideas, flies, stories or other items for the Newsletter please contact The Editor.

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*Ray Plourde photo*