

# *Antigonish Rivers*

*Christmas Edition 15/12/2023*

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

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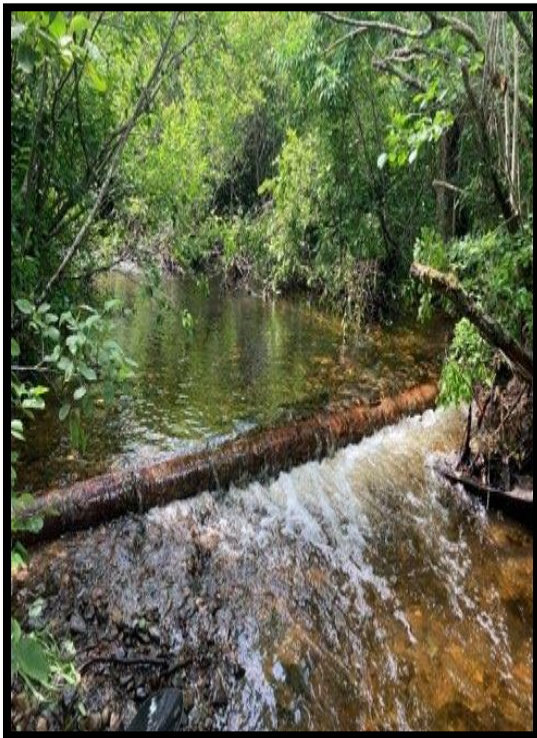


*Photos by Deirdre Green, Andrew Lowles, Marc Arseneau*

## 2023 President's Message

2023 provided an interesting year for salmon fishing throughout North America. Some rivers had exceptional runs while others did not. The fall salmon fishing on our local rivers followed this pattern to some extent. With the high water, we lost about 14 fishing days. The West River had a fantastic September, and it was great to see several anglers landed their first salmon. In October, they were much harder to find. Then a good run of salmon entered the West River the first week of November.

Our river systems are under siege and are changing rapidly; flash flooding in the winter and hot, dry summers take a toll on all aquatic species. Clear cutting can raise the water temperature 2 to 5 degrees. When the water temperature exceeds 20-degrees salmon parr and trout stop feeding. This translates into smaller and weaker smolt migrating out to the ocean, which reduces the odds of them returning to our rivers.



Some good news stories for the 2023 season:

- The electro-fishing showed a massive increase in the salmon parr and trout populations.
- Twenty-seven redds were counted on a one-kilometer section of the James River, where the river restoration was done.
- Brierly Brook had over 110 redds in the sections of river that was restored in 2021/22.
- Department of Highways left a great "fishing" parking area on the West River by the # 7 Highway bridge.
- ARA planted well over 4000 trees.
- We are seeing more young people fishing in the Fall and attending the winter fly tying sessions.

From April till November, ARA crews were busy installing digger logs, rock deflectors, riparian planting, placing spawning gravel and much more. This combination provides cold water refuge for the trout and salmon parr and spawning beds for the returning salmon. ARA provides the boots on the ground, restoring the Antigonish waterways and fighting against climate change.

*ARA is a small organization that gets positive results!*

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year*

*from the ARA Executive and Board*

*Tim Handforth*

*President, ARA*



Winter on the South River

One of many bank stabilization sites.



# Antigonish Rivers Association

## ARA EXECUTIVE

2020-2021

• • •

President:

Tim Handforth

Vice President:

Malorie Crispo

Treasurer:

Christine Hanlon

Secretary:

Leo Callahan

Past President:

Nicholas MacInnis



ARA NEWS

*Christmas Raffle*

This summer as I was peacefully enjoying my early morning coffee, I got a video call from Wayne Grant at Eskape Anglers. Wayne, as many of you know, has a lot of energy especially early in the morning. ***"I have a great donation for your dinner."*** When I told Wayne that the dinner was biennial so 2024 Wayne undeterred said, "What do you think about a Christmas Raffle?" As Wayne rhymed off the prizes his suppliers had been convinced to donate, I said, "Wow!" A quick call to President Tim and the ball was rolling.



Wayne's only conditions were that the draw be close to Christmas and that the funds be directed to a specific river project. Check and check.

All proceeds will go to the 2024 South River Bank Stabilization Project. Draw date Dec. 22, 4 pm at The People's Place Community Room, Antigonish

And what a package it is!

- Red Truck Diesel 11' 7 weight switch rod
- Red Truck Diesel SD Migration 7/10 fly reel
- Snow bee 7/8 400 gr. Integrated switch line



- Hand-crafted Tyler Bartfai Mayne Angling Walnut &

Maple Optimist net

- Eskape Anglers Hat
- Fly tying Package: 3 capes, 8 packs of hooks, 3 calf tails, natural brown deer hair
- 2 aluminum fly boxes

- Fly Box with 6 Bombers and 6 wets tied by Mr. Grant!



Value: \$2500 NS Lottery Permit # AG D -332334-23

Tickets \$20 each

A ticket will make a great early Christmas gift! To purchase tickets, contact:

President Tim Handforth 902 870 0625

Gerry Deepwater Doucet [salmondoucet@gmail.com](mailto:salmondoucet@gmail.com) 902 318 6061

Allison White [allisonwhite.ara@gmail.com](mailto:allisonwhite.ara@gmail.com)

David MacNeil [djm acneil349@gmail.com](mailto:djm acneil349@gmail.com)

[Eskape Anglers](#) (902) 367-3112 If you are in Charlottetown or ordering from the shop you can add a ticket to your order!

The most common question that I get, "Is that all one package?" Yes!

Thank you for your support and a special thanks to Wayne Grant for making this happen and to Allison White for taking the lead on the project.







As you know our Biennial Wild Atlantic Salmon Dinner Auction is our major fund raiser so in an off-year like 2023 we try to supplement our funds. This year we had a successful on-line auction in March and an ongoing sale of fly tying materials as well as rods and reels which we purchased from an estate sale. Thank you all for your support and for your patience with a lot of email notices.



**Less than a week to go and there are still a few tickets. You can't win without one!**



**Cameron Lake News:** The Cameron Lake Accessible Fishing Site proved to be a popular destination this summer and fall. The family-friendly fishing and picnic area was well used. The floating dock and access point were also used for several canoe instruction programs.

The ARA in cooperation with [The Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq](#) is pleased to host an information display on Katwew (American Eel) at our Cameron Lake Accessible Site. On hand for the Installation was Victoria Maxwell, Assistant Program Coordinator for the confederacy. If you haven't visited the site, drop in next summer and enjoy a peaceful, beautiful stop for a coffee or a bit of fishing.

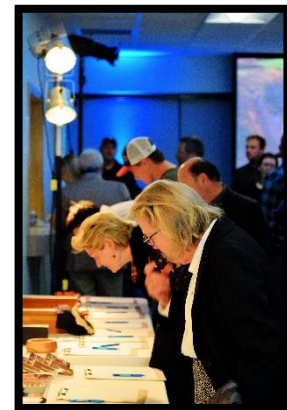


**Fishing Derby News:** Well after Covid-19 and unseasonal ice conditions our losing streak for a derby on the Nova Scotia Inland Fisheries Free Fishing Weekend continued. Who knew that having an ice-based event in Nova Scotia in February would ever be a challenge. Undaunted President Tim has vowed to try again on Feb. 17/2024. Stay tuned.

We also tried to add a summer derby in June but after a lot of work by Allison White we were cancelled due to the forest fire woods closure in June. Maybe 2024?



**2024 Wild Atlantic Salmon Benefit Dinner and Auction:** The Dinner Committee is at work planning our biennial spectacular for October 2024. Details will follow as we move along but rest assured that we are committed to making our event even better. With good salmon fishing the past two seasons the challenge will be getting off the river in time to take in the festivities. We hope to continue to add to the all-day experience with information sessions, tours, equipment demos, BBQ, free food and more. We can't wait to see all of you again gathered to celebrate salmon, friends, and sport.





**Fly Tying:** The ARA will be hosting fly tying sessions weekly, starting in January for beginners and experienced tiers. Each week we will focus on a type or style of fly and do several patterns. Generally, we all tie along but you are also welcome to join the group and fill your own book with your favourites. Last year the ARA purchased a digital projection system which proved to be a great tool for demonstrating techniques. All materials and tools are provided thanks to the ARA and our member donors but you are welcome to bring your own. Meeting times and dates will be posted on Facebook and in your email box.



We are also doing a Learn to Tie Flies session with the local 4-H club in January. This was a lot of fun last year and we were invited back so I guess they thought so too.

We are also doing





### Brood Stock Collection

Salmon can be hard to catch, but you probably know that. Once again, our efforts to collect brood stock on South River fell short. The South is a challenge as it is hard to seine, and the fish arrive very late in the angling season. In our attempts to capture salmon by angling there seemed to be a good number of fish in the system but they apparently had other things on their minds. A snorkel survey by Fraser's Mills Hatchery staff showed that fish had begun digging redds, so we suspended our efforts and let nature take its course.

On the subject of hatcheries Dr. Hannah Harrison, an assistant professor and researcher at Dalhousie University, and graduate student Katherine Dalby, conducted a research project that examines the social aspects of wild Atlantic hatchery and stocking work in the Maritime Region. This project was supported in part by the Inland Fisheries Division for the Province of Nova Scotia, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Fundy National Park, and Dalhousie University.



The purpose of the project is to understand the human side of salmon stocking and enhancement. Much is known about the ecological and biological aspects of salmon stocking, but the social side – including the perspectives of people who support and operate hatchery programs – is not well understood. Several members of the ARA took part in the interview process, so we are looking forward to the release of Dr. Harrison's research paper.

If you are following the salmon news after a very disappointing summer on many rivers you will see that there is a major push from many New Brunswick angler groups to increase the role of hatcheries in helping to preserve Atlantic salmon. The role of hatcheries is a key discussion point in DFO's finding as they try to develop a new Atlantic salmon strategy.

### 2023 Watershed Coordinator Report

By: Allison White

It was another busy year for the Antigonish Rivers Association from planning restoration activities and managing the growing tree nursery to instream restoration using well-established techniques and building upon a spawning gravel pilot project introduced in 2022, to implementing Atlantic Salmon conservation plans set out in 2021 and 2022. Our field works portfolio has expanded exponentially in the last several years to include many critical components for the successful ongoing restoration of the 4 main watersheds within the county of Antigonish.

The restoration crew consisted of Bruce Wheadon, Bailey Randall, Allison White, Emma Purdy and Rory Adams. The instream work season commenced on June 1<sup>st</sup> and came to a close on September 30<sup>th</sup> however some crew mates began in early Spring and some continued to stay on with ARA until mid-November. In that time the crew installed and built 55 instream restoration structures between 3 restoration sites around

the county. Work began in MacIsaac Brook, a tributary to the Ohio River, accessed by the West Ohio Road where 25 structures (digger logs/rock sills) were installed/built through a 1km section of river restoring 23,400m<sup>2</sup> of aquatic habitat. The next site was James River, a tributary to the West River, starting downstream from the dam and working our way up building large rock sills and a couple digger logs to catch and sort the spawning gravel that was later added to the river bank for the water to pull into the river



*Digger Log installed in MacIsaac Brook, a tributary to the Ohio River*

during bank full events. Through 1km of James River, 20,000m<sup>2</sup> of aquatic habitat was restored. The final restoration site was the North Right's River in North Grant. This site was 1.5km long and 10 instream structures were installed (digger logs, deflectors, rock sills) restoring 10,400m<sup>2</sup> of habitat. In addition to structure installation, the field season also included maintenance of structures, tree nursery management and maintenance, pre- and post-restoration monitoring which includes Habitat Suitability Index Surveys, temperature probe deployment & retrieval, electrofishing and redd count surveys to measure and record the success of our projects. Tree planting has also been an important tool for restoration and this year we have planted approximately 3500 trees including willows, red and white Oaks, and red maples in vegetation-starved gravel bars and stream banks to stabilize soils, provide food, shelter, and shade for the aquatic ecosystems we work in.

ARA was able to host the Nova Scotia Salmon Association's *Adopt-A-Stream Field Crew Training* again, held at the MacIsaac Brook restoration site in early July and for the first time, we hosted the NSSA's *Habitat Suitability Assessment Training* in West Pomquet River in mid-May. The ARA crew had a great time meeting new people from this end of the province, making new connections, and catching up with old friends. We are always excited to host these events and look forward to hopefully continuing to do so.

Unfortunately, this year was very difficult for many Nova Scotians with the fires that raged and then the rain that made the rivers swell into backyards and basements. In light of the fires burning in our province, ARA made the decision to postpone the Spring Fishing Derby that was to be held at the Cameron Lake Barrier-Free Picnic Shelter and Dock. The Summer Family Fishing Derby will be held on the free fishing weekend in June 2024.



The Antigonish Rivers Association raises a significant percentage of our project funding through various events and contributions by members, but we also applied and received funding from the Nova Scotia Salmon Association's (NSSA) Adopt-A-Stream Program and the Foundation for Conservation of Atlantic Salmon (FCAS). Without the financial and in-kind contributions from our partners, we would not be able to complete such an extensive amount of habitat restoration each year. I think it is vital to highlight the volunteer hours that ARA members work each year – it very impressive and so appreciated.

Frenchman's trail clearing with Gerry Doucet and Rory Adams







Bailey Randall unloading the truck before planting along the West River towards Frenchmen's Pool

James River  
Spawning Gravel  
Project: new  
spawning gravel is  
easily identified as  
the clean substrate  
whereas James  
River pre-spawning  
gravel additions has  
very dark substrate  
that was  
predominantly  
boulders.







Electrofishing in Brierly Brook (L-R)  
Charlie MacInnis, Emma Purdy, Bruce  
Wheadon, Allison White

Riparian Tree Planting along the Lower Right's River





*The coming year will bring lots of new adventures and opportunities for ARA to grow and continue to restore and maintain aquatic habitat integrity in the watersheds throughout Antigonish County. Happy & Safe Holidays to all!*

The Crew 2023: (L-R) Emma Purdy, Bailey Randall, Allison White, Rory Adams, Bruce Wheadon





## Competitive Fly-Fishing Update

By Ken MacAulay

This past year has seen the return of a full schedule of local fly-fishing competitions in Canada. The highlight was Canada hosting the World Women's Fly-fishing Championships and World Master's Fly-fishing Championships this past fall in British Columbia. The women's team had an impressive performance, winning the team silver medal. This was the first ever team medal won at a World Fly-fishing event for Canada! In addition, Kathy Ruddick won the women's individual bronze medal. The Master's Team narrowly missed a medal finishing in 4<sup>th</sup> place (missing bronze by only one placing point). Team member, Mike Learmonth, was able to capture the individual silver medal. Canada also sent a team to the 2023 Commonwealth Fly-Fishing Championships in Islay, Scotland where they finished a respectable 7<sup>th</sup> place. Of note, team member Morgan McLean won the distance casting competition at the Commonwealths. These results bode well for Team Canada's progress and future at FIPS-Mouche International Fly-Fishing competitions.



(Members and coaches for the Women's and Master's 2023 Fly-fishing teams)



Within Canada, the highlight for the year was the Canadian National Championships held in Mont Tremblant, Quebec in July. Under difficult conditions, Team Mark Anderson (the same team that had represented Canada at the world championships in Spain) won the team gold medal. The team was excited to see their coach and captain from Spain, Byron Shepherd (fishing for Team Tungsten), win the individual gold medal and team silver. Byron's win was very popular among fellow competitors as he is a well-liked and respected fly-fisher (not surprising as Byron is originally from PEI and is a Maritimer at heart.)

(Byron Shepherd – 2023 National Champion)

Going forward, Fly Fishing Canada (FFC) has decided to make the re-ignition and development of the youth program a priority. The youth program is facing a twofold problem: first, previous members of

the youth team have aged out of the program, and second, due to Covid, competitions were severely curtailed and as a result, the development of new youth fly-fishers was adversely impacted (some members may remember that Jacob Lorefice of Antigonish made the world youth team but, due to Covid, was unable to compete in Europe). FFC would like to send a youth team to the 2025 World Youth Fly Fishing Championships that are being held in the United States (likely Idaho or Colorado). FFC has plans to deliver a number of clinics for youth (boys and girls, aged 13 to 18) in 2024 and these will be posted on the FFC website (<https://www.flyfishingcanada.net/>). The purpose of these clinics will be to introduce youth to skills and techniques that can dramatically improve their fishing (both rivers and lakes). If you are aware of any young people that would be interested in attending one of these sessions, please reach out to Colin Huff at [colin@woodsideagency.ca](mailto:colin@woodsideagency.ca). I am also available to answer questions and would be happy to chat about anything fly-fishing related. I can be reached at [nsffl@outlook.com](mailto:nsffl@outlook.com). Youth are encouraged to sign up for a Fly Fishing Canada membership (it is free for youth, \$45 per year for adults) to receive updates, notices of events and access to various fly-fishing articles/videos.





(Canadian Youth Team in Europe)

*Ed. Note: ARA Director Ken MacAulay will be part of Team Canada at the 2024 World Fly Fishing Championship to be held in France, June 2024 . We wish Ken and his team mates all the best.*

**Closing Day 2023**



Photo by Deirdre Green





Season's Greetings!

By Amy Weston

It was another rewarding and productive year for the Nova Scotia Salmon Association and our habitat restoration program, Adopt-a-Stream, which provided funding and technical support to approximately 20 groups across the province. After several years of warm and dry weather during the summer months, 2023 certainly presented challenges – lots of rain, which was great for trout and salmon but created some hurdles



for getting restoration work complete. Nonetheless, our dedicated affiliate groups were still able to get lots of meaningful work done. Over \$270,000 in project funding, primarily from the NS Sportfish Habitat Fund, was distributed across the province to our affiliate groups to complete restoration activities on 70 watercourses.

In Antigonish, the ARA was able to complete another stellar season of habitat restoration, working in three important tributaries to the West River watershed: James River, North Rights River and MacIsaac's Brook in Ohio, the ARA crew

surpassed the 40,000 square meter mark of restored habitat and planted over 2000 trees. Despite the challenges of the weather, ARA's dedicated volunteers and experienced work crew were able to persevere, a testament to the value of watershed planning. As some readers and members may recall, ARA was one of three river association partners involved in the Gulf Priority Rivers Project (2019-2023) supported by the

Canada Nature Fund and led by the NSSA. One of the legacy pieces of the initiative was to provide funding and technical support for planning work by the ARA, the Inverness South Anglers Association, and the Margaree Salmon Association to develop watershed stewardship and monitoring plans. In Antigonish, plans were developed for the South River in 2021 and the West River in 2022. The focus of these plans was to identify and prioritize restoration projects within each watershed as well as to develop rigorous monitoring schedules for assessing the effectiveness of restoration work. For those who haven't had a chance to review these plans we encourage you to find them on ARA's website. They are informative and well-done!



This July, the NSSA and ARA hosted an Adopt a Stream habitat restoration training day in MacIsaac's Brook attended by 30 people from nearby watershed groups and the aquatics crew from the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq. Two other restoration training days were held in the province, with one conducted on Zwicker Brook in the LaHave River watershed and the other in Tompkins Brook, a tributary to the Northeast Margaree. In total, over 100 enthusiastic people attended these training sessions.

Looking forward into the year ahead, the NSSA team is excited to be reviewing upcoming applications to the Adopt a Stream program as well as beginning a new chapter in collaborative conservation with new funding from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, targeted at continuing habitat restoration work for Atlantic salmon and other important aquatic species.



And speaking of the NSSA team, things are changing up, and congratulations are in order. In his new role as NSSA's Manager of Habitat Restoration, Nick MacInnis will be leading the Adopt A Stream program, as well as other aspects of our field programs across the province. He will be working closely with all NSSA affiliates. Nick has a great track record, and he is a passionate ambassador for habitat restoration. I have the utmost confidence in his ability to carry the program forward, and I am excited about continuing our ambitious conservation work together.

*Nick hard at work!!*

Happy New Year!

Amy Weston, NSSA Managing Director

*Ed. Note: All of us at the ARA add our congratulations to Nick. Well Deserved!!*



## Starting a Fly Fishing Journey

By William Lowles



My name is William Lowles and I am seven years old. This year I wanted to learn how to fly fish like my dad. He does a lot of fly fishing and I have gone with him before but used a spinning rod. Last Christmas I asked for chest waders so that I could stay dry when I was walking in the river. My Dad's friend, Brent, knows how much I like to go hunting for grouse and ducks with my dad. He was very excited to hear that I wanted to learn to fly fish. He gave me a TFO Bug Launcher fly fishing rod, reel, and line combo for me to keep. It was so nice of him, and I was so excited! If you are reading this, thank you, Brent!

One day, Dad said that the water looked perfect for trout fishing, so we went to a river near our house. My Mom and sisters came with us. My Mom has been learning how to fly fish, too. I let my two older sisters try my new fly-fishing rod, but they still wanted to fish with their spinning rods. Dad tied on a green Wolly Bugger and started teaching me how to cast my new fly-fishing rod. It didn't take me very long and I could cast part way across the river. Dad said I could cast well enough to move to some of the better fishing spots. We stood at the edge of a deeper pool that Dad said would be a good spot for trout. He told me to cast my line across the pool and to hold on in case a fish bit my Wolly Bugger. After a few casts I felt a pull on my line but missed the fish. I cast to the same spot again and another fish came after my fly. This time he was hooked! I yelled to my dad that I had a fish on the line. I reeled the extra line onto reel and started fishing the fish. It jumped a couple of times and splashed a lot. It fought hard and pulled a lot. Dad ran fast with the net because he didn't want me to lose my first trout on my new rod. He got the net under the fish



and scooped it up. We kept the fish in the water while my dad unhooked the fish in the water. He told me that keeping fish wet is important since we are going to let the trout go. We used a barbless hook, and it came out of the fish easily. This was my first ever wild brook trout, and I was super excited. I have caught a few rainbow trout when I was ice fishing once and another time, I was out a trout derby at Trenton Park and caught a brook trout. Did you know that brook trout are Nova Scotia's provincial fish?



That day I caught two or three more brook trout. My sisters caught a few fish, too. Mom didn't catch any and I don't know if my dad even fished or just helped us fish. We took a quick break to eat goldfish crackers because fishing can make you hungry. I had a lot of fun my first-time fly fishing and got to go a few more times in the summer. I can't wait to go fishing again next summer. I am going to learn to tie flies with my dad this winter. That way I can try to catch a fish on a fly that I made - I think that would be cool. Maybe some day I will be big enough to go fishing for Atlantic Salmon with my dad. I would love to catch a salmon some day, especially if my dad was there. He would be so excited for me that he would probably scream.

I hope you have a great holiday and Santa brings you fishing stuff.

William Lowles



*Fall Trout Time*



Photo by Leo Callahan

## *The Picasse*

*By Dave MacNeil*

I was going to say that a few years ago I first discovered the Picasse but on reflection I realized that it was probably more like 20+ years ago. Time flies! While discussing my plans for a trip to the Gaspé a friend recommended the Picasse as an essential fly and he gave me one that he had from a previous trip. The original pattern that I used for a model was based on this pattern:

Hook: Up eye Atlantic salmon hook

Under body: Black thread

Body: Black or clear v-rib or similar body material.

Wing: Black over yellow bucktail.

Collar: Blue eared pheasant

Cheeks: Amherst pheasant & Jungle cock

Head: Black



<https://www.flyfishingforum.com/threads/atlantic-salmon-fly-of-the-week-%E2%80%93-picasse.23906/>

When I got to the Gaspé and was fishing the Petite Cascapédia my guide suggested a Picasse. When I tied on my pattern he said, "Non, non, not like dat!", and he took out his own fly box and gave me a "new" version of the Picasse. "Dis was tied by Marc himself", he said.



*Marc Leblanc tie and photo*

The Picasse was designed by noted tier and guide, Marc Leblanc, as a durable guide fly for high water. The original pattern was tied for early season high water on Gaspé rivers like the Grand Cascadepedia, Petite Cascadepedia and Bonaventure. According to the originator the fly got its name as follows:

*"... after teaching a guide training course for salmon fishing, I found myself one morning guiding in the company of one of my students who accompanied me for a practical week-long internship. We were in June and the water was very high and cloudy, after doing a few drops with my 28-foot canoe in the Mills Brook pool on Petite-Cascadepedia and nothing had happened, I said to my fisherman: "I tied a new fly yesterday evening and we are going to try it." The fly was mounted on a very large 3/0 hook.*

*So, I tied the fly to the line and my fisherman throws this big fly downstream in the current. The young guide who accompanied me, André Henri (now deceased), exclaimed at the sight of the fly striking the water with a splash due to its size and its weight: "It fell into the water like a picasse." And after a few feet of drift, a large salmon caught the fly, gave a whole fight to end up in the landing net. When calm returned, I asked André: "What is a picasse?" He answered, "It is an anchor".*

Translated from <https://www.fabri-mouches.ca/les-mouches-de-marc-leblanc-spey-qc-picasse-spey.html>

The name stuck but the pattern has undergone several variations, and the now standard pattern is in the style of a Spey fly

:

Hook - traditional salmon 8 to 1/0

Body - Large black vinyl rib, Swannundaze, Larva Lace or similar product

Wing - yellow arctic fox tail, uv black Krystal flash and grey fox

Hackle - Black spey hackle or black ringneck pheasant rump

Collar - Silver Pheasant body feather

Cheeks - Jungle cock over small Lady Amherst neck feather

Head - Black thread with a yellow stripe (optional)

Although originally designed for high water the fly proved effective in smaller sizes and in lower water. Noted Gaspé guide, David Bishop, uses the pattern all season in sizes ranging from #8 to #3/0 changing sizes as water levels and temperatures change. It is a "go to" fly on very dark days when it is starting to rain. <https://www.flyfishingforum.com>

Like all patterns, the Picasse is continually being tinkered with. The addition of UV Black Krystal Flash being a good example. The original bucktail wing is usually replaced by more mobile Arctic Fox -or kid goat. You'll notice in the picture of the original that it has a very sparse wing. Most flies now, especially commercially tied versions, have a much fuller wing. Apparently commercial tiers noted that customers wanted a fly that "looked" more complete.



Marc LeBlanc now ties a number of variations with different underwing colours. Jacques Héroux in *Atlantic Salmon Flies/Mouches pour Le Saumon Atlantique* features Marc Leblanc and the Picasse with several variations. The basic variation picks a colour for the underwing, for example green, and changes the Krystal Flash to green, then uses a fine green oval tinsel in between each turn of black Swannudaze.



If you are in the Antigonish area, you can pick up a copy from Damian at Back East at Home. Both Damian and Jacques are ARA supporters so buy local.

Many variations leave out the original Lady Amherst cheek and just use Jungle Cock. The flowing Black Heron and Silver Pheasant collar is a key feature. I like flies that have a lot of inherent movement, so I much prefer this Spey-style look. The use of a Spey-designed hook like an Alex Jackson from Daiichi really adds to the appearance (although this is probably more aesthetic than functional, they are excellent hooks; strong with very fine, sharp points).



Another variation is to alter the body colour either by using a different colour vinyl rib or using a clear vinyl rib over an underbody of fluorescent floss—such as the two featured in the picture. A fluorescent green body covered by clear vinyl rib and a green wing has a terrific visual impact (at least for the angler if not the salmon). A hot orange body covered with clear vinyl rib and orange Silver Pheasant would make a great Northumberland Strait rivers variation.

The new Spey style has added movement that accentuates the original durable, basic guide pattern. It is a perfect pattern to swing and it has enough variations to meet water levels, seasonal temperature change, water flow as well as your personal favourite colour combination. A good selection of sizes and colour variations will make this a very versatile pattern in your fly box.



# LA PICASSE...EN MASSE

Tanner-Tied Flies  
Bennington, Vermont USA

*"Flies that Look Good in Your Hat"- Remembering Rick MacDonald**By Don MacLean*

Rick MacDonald was a well-known fly tier on Cape Breton Island and his flies were always in demand by knowledgeable trout and salmon anglers. Rick was born in Sydney in 1949 and spent his working life at the open hearth and coke ovens at the Sydney Steel plant. He worked a lot of back shifts and would tie flies at all hours, whenever he came home from work. When I interviewed him in 2005, at his home in Lake Ainslie, for my book on Atlantic Canadian fly tiers he had been tying flies for 45 years. "I was taught by my father and some of Dad's friends, like Alex Libbus," Rick told me. "When I started tying very few people on Cape Breton were selling flies commercially. Anglers either ordered flies from England or tied them themselves." Rick told me there was a fraternity of fly tiers at that time on the Island who tied out of necessity. "You could buy trout flies, but they were cheap things which that sold for five cents and soon fell apart when you fished them." Rick began tying hair-wing salmon flies because he couldn't afford to buy feather-wings. He also began experimenting with different fly patterns for both trout and salmon and kept a logbook to record their effectiveness.



As a commercial tier Rick told me there were two types of flies, ones to catch fish and ones to catch anglers. "The fisherman flies look great in your hat," Rick told with his characteristic laugh. He believed in tying standard patterns which had stood the test of time, but he was constantly modifying them to improve their fish catching abilities. One example was his Royal Coachman which he tied with one wing, instead of the usual two. "I can tie it faster that way, and the fish don't seem to mind," he told me. When I interviewed him Rick felt one of the biggest improvements in fly tying was the quality of fly tying material available to the average fly tier. "The quality, and selection, has definitely improved over time. Today there is genetic hackle which is outstanding. When I started tying in the 50's and early 60's we had to order most of our material from Veniards in England. Joe Aucoin in New Waterford used to sell some materials and we bought some stuff there as well." One thing Rick was nostalgic about was the old hooks. "The Gaelic Supreme hook was the standard for salmon, it was a beautiful hook, all handmade. Mustad hooks began to replace the old hooks and the Mustad 36890 soon became widely available." Rick also remembered the old-style Atlantic salmon flies he used to tie. "When I started tying there were no bugs, bombers, or Muddlers. The Cosseboom and MacIntosh were popular patterns locally, as well as standard English patterns such as the Jock Scott, Silver Gray and Green Highlander."

Rick did not believe in hard and fast rules when he came to fly tying. He constantly created new fly





*Bras d'Or Creeper*

patterns for Cape Breton trout and salmon, many of them based on what Rick saw in the water and inside fish he caught. "I always look at the stomach contents of any trout I keep. Why use a red fly if they are eating brown caddis that day?" But Rick also believed that some standards can't be improved on, for example the Mickey Finn. "No other combination works as well as that red and yellow wing, and I know, I've tried them all!"

Rick was also a keen observer of how his flies looked and moved in the water. When he was a younger man he once lay

on the bottom of a pool in the river while breathing through a piece of garden hose while a friend cast flies and drifted them through the pool so he could study their size and movement in the water. In my fly collection I have three patterns which Rick tied for me; a Bras d'Or Creeper, an amphipod or scud and a GP streamer. The Bras d'Or Creeper and amphipod are good examples of patterns developed to match local conditions. The Bras d'Or Creeper was Rick's attempt to imitate a saltwater shrimp, a major part of the diet of brook, brown and rainbow trout in Cape Breton's Bras d'Or Lakes. Rick told me that when he was trying to come up with an exact imitation of the local sand shrimp or crawdad, he studied natural shrimp and worked to develop a fly which comes very close to imitating it. After much trial and error, he came up with the current pattern, which I still fish. Amphipods or scuds are also common in the lakes. The GP streamer was a stripped-down version of the General Practitioner salmon fly and in Rick's day, was a very popular fly for trout and salmon in the lakes and rivers on Cape Breton Island. While Rick was a long time Atlantic salmon angler his favourite fish was the brook trout. He often fished a traditional cast of three flies for trout. I asked him about what flies he liked. "The point fly is usually a Muddler Minnow, leech or some minnow imitation with a Dark Montreal on the drop and a Queen of the Waters on the dib or bob." Rick was a firm believer in selective harvest and released any trout under ten inches. He was also a big fan of brown trout and the largest he caught was nine and three quarter pounds.

*GP streamer*

Rick continued to tie traditional feather wing salmon flies in addition to his commercial and custom orders. He also found time to teach fly tying classes in Sydney during the winter, a job he enjoyed. "It is fun passing on what I know," he told me. The first thing he taught his students was that a fly should be sparse and well-proportioned, especially if it is going to be sold. In comparing the flies he tied for himself and those he planned to sell Rick told me, "If you are tying for yourself then please yourself. When I am tying flies to



sell I tie by the book, people deserve to get the correct pattern they ordered, but the flies I fish with are usually much simpler.”



In later years Rick added writing to his skill set as he served as the fishing editor for Cape Breton Outdoors magazine. In every issue he provided an article on his experiences as a fly tier and angler on the waters of Cape Breton. He also added the title of “award winning fly tier” to his resume when he won the annual Eastern Woods and Waters fly tying contest.

Rick passed away in 2010 at the age of 61. His funeral in Sydney was well attended by a large number of Cape Breton fly tiers and anglers and I remember thinking at the time, as I looked around the funeral home, that with his passing

*Amphipod or scud fly*

meant we had not only lost a great fly tier, and friend, but also a connection to an earlier generation of fly tiers on Cape Breton such as Alex Libbus and Joe Aucoin. Rick’s legacy lives on however through his flies and the skills he passed on to another generation of fly tiers.

Tight Lines and Merry Christmas

All images by Don MacLean



James River structure #13



Atlantic Salmon Federation  
Fédération du Saumon Atlantique

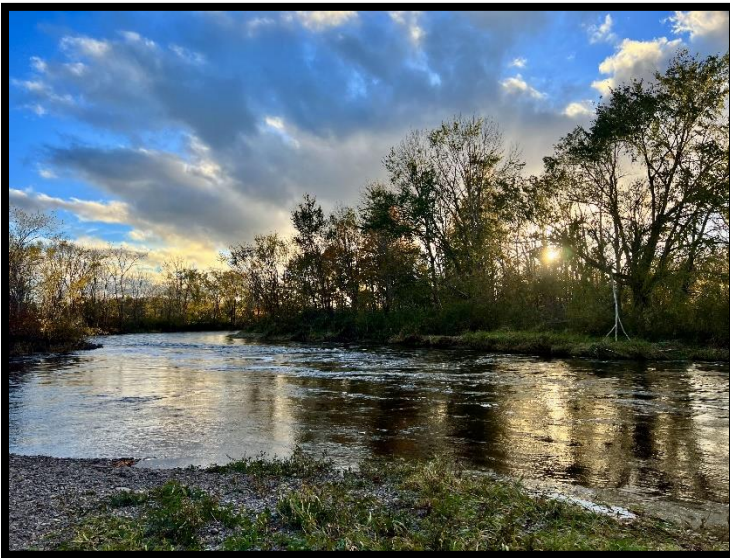


### *Fishing Intentionally*

*Submitted by Deirdre Green, Director of Nova Scotia Programs, Atlantic Salmon Federation*

*The river has taught me to listen; you will learn from it too. The river knows everything; one can learn everything from it. You have already learned from the river that it is good to strive downwards, to sink, to seek the depths. —Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha*

Earlier this year, while attending the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation



(NASCO), I had the opportunity to connect with an Indigenous Elder. As we spoke about our respective work on behalf of Plamu and their natal rivers, we shared stories; stories about life's challenges, what drew us to Atlantic salmon, to fly-fishing, and how this work shapes our lives. The Elder commented that *"the river gives so much if only we let it."*

Like many of you reading this entry today, the river has given me a strong sense of place and purpose. In fact, it changed the trajectory of my career and in turn, my life.

*A swollen West River October 2023*

This last season presented high water challenges both for anglers and those working on in-stream restoration. Of course, for others it presented personal challenges as well. Health, economic hardship, old age, the list is long, yet it is heartening to see so many seeking solace through time in nature.



When I was able to eke out a few moments of solitude, I revisited the Elder's comment above and endeavored to fish intentionally, reflecting on the gifts I've received from the river. Not surprisingly, while deep in thought I had a dime bright, MSW salmon leap less than a rod's length from me and a Great blue heron perch upon a tree overhead. Gifts indeed!

Through fishing, my son and I are exposed to friendships we would not have made otherwise. Since birth he has heard lively riverbank discussions and experienced the magic of connecting with wild Atlantic salmon. Lachlan's



fascination with the journey to the river, aerial displays and how fish disappear and reappear is something I hope will last a lifetime.

age-old Mi'kmaq concept of *msit nokmaq* or *All our Relations* teaches us that all living things are considered kin, and that all humans share a responsibility to care for them. I have found this to be even more sobering as I navigate parenting. To care for the trees, water, and fish as we care for our relations is truly the greatest gift we can give.

In this season of gift-giving, let's make time to talk about how the river has enriched our lives; and consider the ways in which we might give back in reciprocity.





*ASF's Nathan Wilbur, Serge Collin, Deirdre Green with Gerry Deepwater Doucet*



*"Dawn of the 'Abaco Shit Show': A Hilarious Prelude to a Bahamian Fishing Fiasco"*



By Gerry Doucet, David Cudmore, Daniel Doiron

As the sun peeked over the morning horizon in South Abaco, we gently steamed to the south-western side where a broad expanse of fishing flats awaited. This is world-renowned fly-fishing haven. Postcard-perfect, it was almost suspicious. The flats were calm, the water clear as glass – the kind of day that makes you wonder if



Mother Nature is setting you up for a punchline. And oh, what a punchline it was going to be...

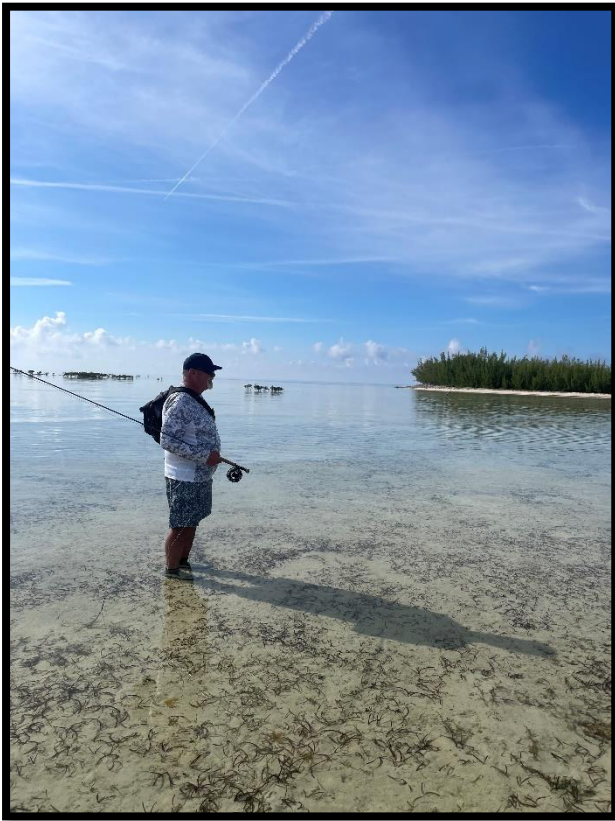
In the midst of pristine turquoise waters, surrounded by the lush green of mangroves, stood Dave and Dan, knee-deep in the azure Bahamian sky. Dave, a seasoned angler of decades, and Dan, our excursion's newest member to the fly-fishing community, had met for the first time on this trip.



Arthur, calm tempered Bahamian man whose smile was constant and infectious, his demeanour laid back, reflecting this Island culture. For over fifty years, Arthur collected intimate knowledge of each creek, cay, flat and gut associated with these Caribbean waters. A commercial fisherman by trade for conch and lobster, his expertise was only matched by his passion for the sea.

This trip came to be in the months previous during salmon season. Dave, Dan, and I were the trio of anglers. I was the lead on the trip as I had travelled here numerous times previously. This imparted local connections for accommodations, guides, vehicle rental, supplies and fishing success. We were collectively elated in anticipation with the varying degrees of bonefishing bravado. Dave, the self-proclaimed 'Bonefish Whisperer,' Dan, the 'Fly-Fishing Philosopher,' and myself, Gerry, the 'Rod-Wielding Raconteur.'

On the third day of our 10-day trip, in the heart of the Bahamian flats, surrounded by a mosaic of mangroves, my mates waded through tranquil waters under a mottled sky, where clouds danced across the sun. The flats, a sanctuary of serenity and wild beauty, teemed with an abundance of marine life. Sleek bonefish glided through the shallows, their silvery forms a fleeting whisper in the clear waters. Schools of shad and jacks darted playfully among the green turtles, while ominous shadows of barracudas, and prowling sharks added a thrilling edge to the underwater ballet. Above the water, a mercurial avian presence graced the skies - greater egrets and blue herons stalked the shallows with regal grace, while pelicans dive with unerring precision, punctuating the backdrop.



Bonefishing these flats is an exercise in patience and exhilaration, a dance with shadows and flashes beneath the sunlit waters. Anglers stand in nervous anticipation, looking for ghosts, eyes scanning the surface for the sparkling tails of bonefish or a push of nervous water. Signs of this elusive quarry takes patience and time coupled with a discerning eye.

The water around shimmered with life, each ripple a hint of the vibrant ecosystem below. Communication among anglers a key to success. A quiet call of "fish at 10 o'clock" would set hearts racing, yet a profound calmness envelope these special moments, culminating in a shared understanding and respect for the challenge at hand. When a bonefish was finally hooked, reality surged back with the scream of the reel and the occasional bash of a knuckle, a jolting reminder of the fish's power. Amidst this intense struggle, comedic errors were never far away, be it a tangled line or an unexpected slip, adding a layer of humility and laughter to the experience. This is a

testament to the unpredictable joy of bonefishing.

As the day unfolded, the group, buoyed by moderate success, found us adapting to the ever-changing

rhythms of the moon-driven tides. These tides, like unseen hands, gently nudged the fish deep into the mangrove estuaries forcing the angles to seek easier prey along outer coral shores, where the remaining schools often congregate. Here, the transition was marked by a shift from flies constructed with bead chain eyes to the heavier tungsten dumbbells, a nod to the depth and strength of the waters we now faced. Suddenly, the thrill of a tussling barracuda sent ripples through the water, pointing us to a giant school of bonefish. Nervous water turned into frantic water. The circus began.

Dave stepped to the bow and in short order tightened on a beautiful silver bullet. Glimpses of a cruising 'cуда inspired Gerry's quick flip to steel leader with a large green mesh tube fly, enticing the beast with quick frantic strips. A fearsome take of the darting fly ran electric through the group. The chaos of the 'cуда encounter drove the bones to a rocky, mangrove-infested mound, seeking refuge.

This natural fortress, encircled by the protective arms of the mangroves, became a scene of dramatic tension as barracudas and lemon sharks prowled the edges, their sleek forms casting ominous shadows. I, Gerry, observed from a distance on the skiff with our guide Arthur. Dave and Dan entered the lively water adamant to test their skill and nerve. Assigned to navigate the labyrinth of roots and rocks, required

casting with precision and care, while maintaining a vigilant eye on the predatory audience encircling their mangrove haven. Each cast now carried the weight of heightened stakes, a dance with danger and opportunity in the wild heart of the Bahamian flats. Along the edge of the large school of bonefish, hookups were coming efficiently with the aim to land the fish quickly to avoid the lurking piscine predator.

In an intense moment amidst the rocky mangrove ledge, Dave found himself in an unexpected tango with a lemon shark. While intently focused on a bonefish straining the end of his line, he suddenly felt an abrasive nudge against his leg. In a mix of surprise and reflex, Dave performed what could only be described as an impromptu jitterbug on the shark's head, his feet moving with a speed and rhythm he never knew he possessed.







Nearby, our guide Arthur with his watchful eye, sprang into action. Armed not with a weapon but with his 30-foot fiberglass pole. Arthur brandished the pole as a water-slapping deterrent, creating a series of dramatic splashes that would make Poseidon proud. With the flair of an Olympic javelin thrower, our protective ghillie hurled the staff at the beast turning it away from his brethren. This spectacle of shark-stomping and pole-wielding shenanigans unfolded under the watchful of the mangroves, as if nature itself had paused to enjoy this absurd display of human ingenuity and reflex.

The moment was a blend of high stakes and high comedy, a story which will be retold with laughter and disbelief for years to come. Our thrilling moment henceforth will be known as: The Shit Show in Abaco!

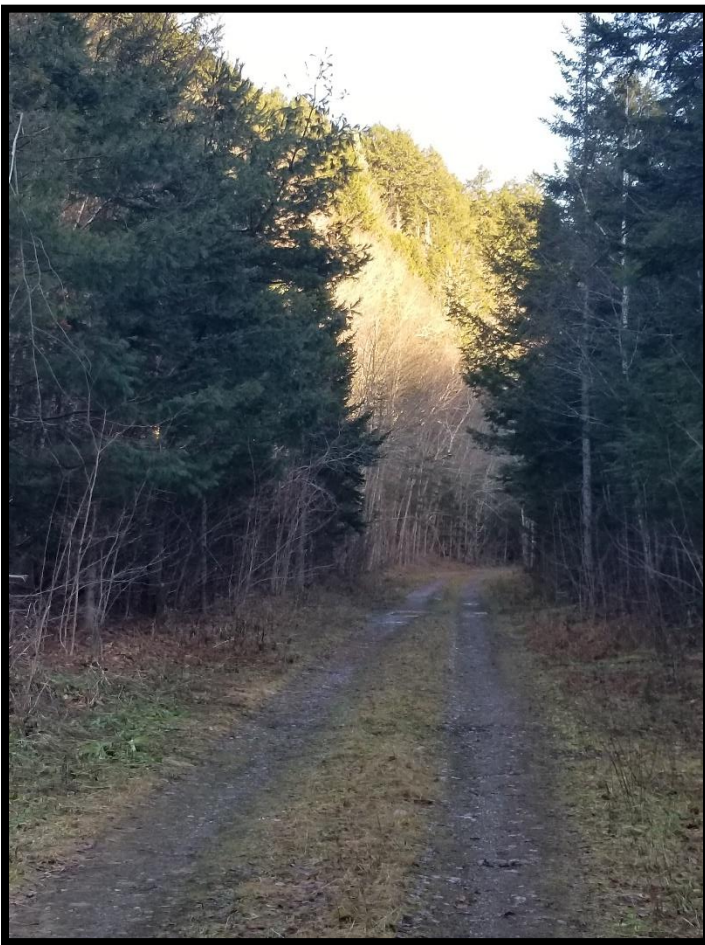


## Walking with the Water Whisperer;

James River Spawning Gravel Project

By Dave MacNeil

Recently a few ARA Directors took a tour of the James River with Charles MacInnis. Charles, a retired DFO biologist, now does consultation and fieldwork through his firm, MacInnis Natural Resources. He's a busy, busy man during the summer field work season. Charlie wanted to show us the results of an innovative program to restore the James River's spawning potential. This is the second year of the project, and it is already showing impressive results based on redd counts and anecdotal reports.



The James River is one of the main tributaries to the West River and traditionally an important spawning and rearing area. It flows through a deep, steep valley and when we were there on an early December afternoon it looked like dusk on the valley floor. The river was dammed in the 1990s to create a reservoir for the Town of Antigonish's water supply.

Now probably like many of you, I really hadn't thought of the gravel in a river migrating. We know it moves around and we all check our favourite pools every spring to see how the winter ice and floods have changed things. But of course, the movement is always downstream. What happens when a dam is in place is that there is no new gravel being introduced. So, each year more and more gravel is washed down river leaving exposed bedrock. The loss of gravel affects invertebrate life in the stream which provides food for fish. The loss of gravel also means that there are no suitable spawning beds. Gravel also affects the flow of the stream. It decreases the velocity and force of the water flow and as it is deposited it helps to develop the meanders, pools, and banking that are part of

a natural and productive stream. Restoring a more natural flow helps the ecosystem but also helps to mitigate storm damage to human structures caused by floods and erosion.



So back to the James River. The ARA is fortunate to have Charlie MacInnis as our in-house expert. To walk a river with Charlie is a whole different experience and perspective. As we hiked along Charlie pointed out remnants of the old river course, traces of early settlement which have long since been abandoned, and stream work that had been done in previous decades. It is not enough to just dump more gravel into the river. Series of sills, digger logs and deflectors need to be constructed to restore a more natural flow to the river. These structures allow the current to deposit gravel and create natural bars and gravel deposits that dissipate the water flow. The gravel needs to be sized correctly and a base layer of larger gravel is followed by finer gravel more suitable for spawning. This, of course, is a simplification and Charlie is probably chuckling at my grasp of hydrology but hopefully you get the picture.

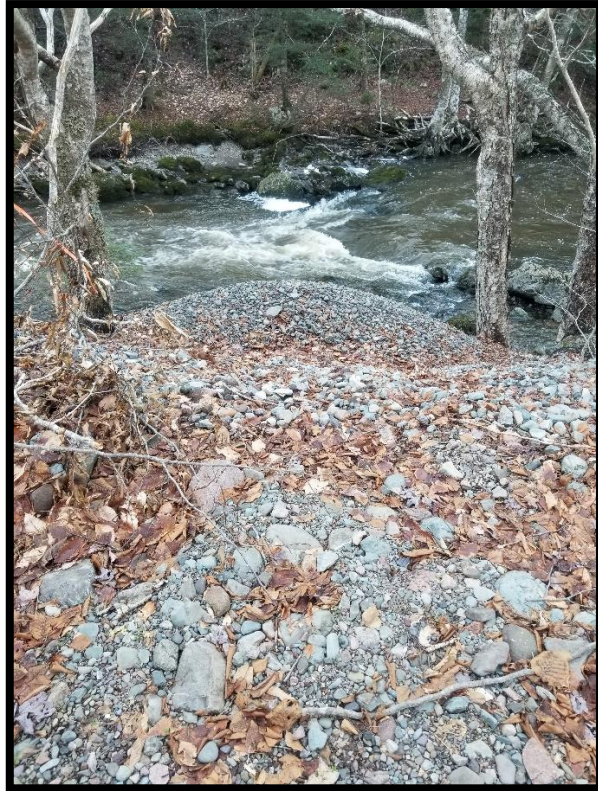
Charlie says that as soon as the gravel beds are formed, they have spawning salmon and trout on them the next fall. Because the James River flows in a steep, rocky valley there are not a lot of the longer gravelled pools that we think of on a river like the Margaree. But there are many gravel pockets forming behind larger rocks and behind deflector logs. All these smaller beds are utilized by spawning salmonids. Charlie has another plan to utilize part of the old river bed as a spawning area, but we'll save that for another day.



I always enjoy spending time with someone who is knowledgeable and passionate about their work and Charlie is all of that. We had a grand tour.

This work is made possible by your support of our organization and fundraisers. Those funds which you so generously donate provide the seed money that allows us to work with funding partners like NSSA Adopt A Stream, the Town of Antigonish, the Foundation for the Conservation of Atlantic Salmon and others. Thank you.





*A Christmas List for the Avid Angler*

1. Membership to one or more of our conservation groups. Locally there is information here for the ARA. You can join the NSSA for free and on the international level the ASF needs our support.

2. For the fly tiers among us, there is a great new head cement, Salarlaq, on the market. Developed by noted Maritime tier, Jerome Molloy, it is available locally. Add a bottle or two in your next order from *The Tying Scotsman* or *Escape Anglers*.



3. Everybody needs a good book to browse over the holidays and there are a few good choices. If you are in the Antigonish area, you can drop in and visit noted tier Damian Welsh at *Back East at Home*. Damian has signed copies (Charles Gaines and Bill Taylor) of Atlantic Salmon Treasury, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. There are lots of other gift ideas and great food to help you along.



4. What looks better than a sporty angler with a handmade, custom net. Just check out those pics of Robert Chaisson! If you don't win our raffle, you can get your own signature net at Mayne Angling: Custom Landing Nets.

5. I've had my trusty Leatherman multi-tool for many years, and I would recommend it to anyone. There are lots of variations and I see Simms has a nice new product. Always good to have one handy.



6. When spending a long day on the water it is important to hydrate so a good water bottle with a holster and some electrolyte tablets would make a thoughtful gift.

7. A relatively new addition to my fishing kit are sunscreen gloves. Those of you who travel south have long used them but it is wise to protect your hands even in our northern dimes. There are lots to choose from so check your local fly shop first.



8. What do they need? A gift card from your favourite local fly shop is always appreciated and takes out the guess work. *Escape Anglers*, *The Tying Scotsman* and *Fishing Fever* would all be happy to arrange one for your angling friends.

9. There are some excellent new DEET-free insect repellants available now. If you've ruined a fly line or sunglasses with DEET you'll really like these new products. There are several brands available in stores. Great stocking stuffer.

10. This one is from last year, but it bears repeating. After a long session on your favourite river take a break and have a coffee and a snack. A gift certificate from one of our local cafes is a nice gift; perhaps the Tall & Small after a cold morning on the West, or if you're on the Margaree a stop at The Dancing Goat! The Goat now has a rewards program so that free coffee means extra scones!



Thank you to the contributors: Tim Handforth, Deirdre Green, Don MacLean, Amy Weston, Allison White, Gerry Doucet, David Cudmore, Daniel Doiron, Nick MacInnis, William Lowles, and Andrew Lowles.

Anyone with ideas, flies, stories, or other items for the Newsletter please contact The Editor. [djmacneil349@gmail.com](mailto:djmacneil349@gmail.com)

ARA Director Liam Fulmore



*Merry Christmas and All the Best in 2024*