

North Shore Steelhead Report

A North Shore Steelhead Association Publication
Volume 7 - Spring 2009



A Special Day on a Far Northern River

By Gord Ellis



Tyler holding Devin's first brookie on a fly.

Fly fishing is a very natural way to catch fish and is also extremely effective. However, there is a learning curve, and many first time fly anglers quit when they put a fly in the back of their head or worse.

So it was with this in mind I introduced my oldest son to fly fishing for the first time. The introduction took place two summers back on the Keezhik River, a fly in out of Miminiska Lodge (www.wildernessnorth.com). The Keezhik is legendary among brook trout anglers.

Devin, our guide Tyler Lancaster and myself were flown into Keezhik Lake on an Otter. It was then just a short paddle to the outlet of the river and the rapids. Devin and I waded to the edge of the large pool, and I went through the fundamentals of casting and retrieving a streamer. My son, who'd done quite well throwing on the Albany the day before, listened with the enthusiasm most teenagers have for parental advice.

"I got it Dad," he said and proceeded to strip off a few lengths of line from his 5 weight rod. Tyler, who was standing with the canoe directly behind us, was also watching Devin closely.

Devin started working the fly rod, putting perhaps a bit too much whip action into the back cast, but the fly was getting out there. After about 20 minutes, however, there was no brookie. Devin, luckily, was fishing with impressive dedication. He was casting his bead head Woolly Buggar out into the current, letting it drop and then stripping the line back in at snails pace. Just as our faith in the pool was dwindling, a fish took hold of Devin's fly.

"That's a brookie", said Tyler.

He was right. The fish rolled on top and the flash of a bright orange belly could be seen in the foam. The fish was taking line and Tyler was now helping Devin, giving him gentle advice on how to retrieve line while keeping a tight connection to the fish. Devin heeded the instruction and in a few minutes, Tyler was able to tail the wriggling trout with his gloved hand.

"It felt like snag at first," said Devin. "Then it started to move."

We decided to move on and paddled down the river until we reached a set of rapids a bit to swift to run. Tyler lined the canoe down, while Devin and I went through the bush. It was with much anticipation that we reached the pool at the base of the rapids.

Devin got his cast going and laid out a nice line. The streamer disappeared into the foam of the large pool and he started to strip it back in. After a time, Devin was rewarded with another "snag". This time, the snag rolled and there was the huge splash of a large trout. The fish made quite a commotion before disappearing back into the pool.

Devin was pumped, but kept his rod high and stayed calm. I looked at Tyler and got the "this is

a big one" look. We both new that this section of the Keezhik could cough up hog sized brookies. I'd landed a 23 incher here on a previous trip. The fish bolted, pulling line off Devin's little fly reel. The trout was into the backing when the fly pulled out. We all groaned, but Devin had simply been bested by a very large brook trout. There is no shame in that.

As the day wore on, the fish got more active and started splashing on the surface. Devin caught several more lovely specs on flies. Even the old man got into the act. In one wide pool a spec of about 21 inches nailed my Matuka Sculpin Yet for me, the real joy of the day was to watch this young man - my son - experience the thrill of fly fishing on an exquisite northern brook trout river. It was a day neither of us will ever forget.

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**NORTH SHORE
Steelhead
ASSOCIATION**



Green Energy Act not so green?

by Tom Whalley, President NSSA

By the time you read this, the Ontario Green Energy Act may be headed for a third reading in the Legislature. For those of you unaware, the Act is a measure designed to spur the development of "environmentally friendly" energy projects throughout Ontario. In trying economic times, this Act is an effort by our elected representatives to pursue a new direction in economic development, one aimed at leaving a smaller carbon footprint for every kilowatt of electricity generated in our province, while increasing base supply for energy hungry industries and ever growing household demand. The people need power, and the Government reasons that, by removing red tape from the approval process and providing incentives to developers, they can create jobs and wealth by building the generating capacity that will supply the power that will, in turn, support and create jobs and wealth in the future. The Green Energy Act will open the door, and "clean air" generation will charge right in.

On initial review, this may seem a wish come true: Ontario is to become a leader in Green Power. The people have asked, and government

will deliver. All will be well!

Or will it?

A careful review of this Act, as with any well-intentioned piece of legislation, raises serious questions. If left unasked, they may seriously affect the future of our fisheries, and not in a good way.

Our concern lies with one of the key provisions of the Act: a "Streamlined Approval Process" designed to remove barriers to development. Traditionally, projects required a somewhat lengthy review and approval process, one aimed at ensuring that values other than economics were protected. Projects that threaten environmental values, such as fisheries and aquatic habitat, could be rejected if not environmentally sound. Under the Green Energy Act, this review process may be gutted in favour of economic expediency, and the rush to create construction and service jobs in an ailing economy may well mean that reasoned review and oversight get pushed to the sidelines. As the Ontario Environmental Commissioner has recently blasted the Ontario Government for gutting the provisions and requirements of the Environmental Assessment process (*Getting to K(no)w Report - <http://www.eco.on.ca/eng/index.php/pubs/eco-publications/2007-08-AR.php#gettingtono>*), the streamlining provision of the Green Energy Act should clearly be seen as another attempt by the government to subvert environmental review, and squash reasoned opposition through

legislation. If you disagree with a project, expect to get thumped on the head by a new law. Fish and wildlife won't know what hit them, until it's too late.

For those of us concerned with protecting fisheries, this is very worrisome, for once construction of Hydroelectric generation sites begins on the rivers of the North Shore of Lake Superior (or anywhere else, for that matter), we will live with impacts of these developments forever. As citizens, we have every right to expect that our elected representatives will protect OUR interests, and we have the right to demand that reasonable oversight and project review remain an integral part of the new Green Energy Act. Environmentally justifiable projects may proceed, and those that cannot withstand scrutiny must not. We cannot, as a practice, trade "Green Energy" for the destruction of other "Green" values. Period.

To review the Green Energy Act, and to provide your comment to the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) registry, go to www.ebr.gov.on.ca/ EBR Registry Number: 010-6017

Tom Whalley, President

McIntyre River Steelhead Study



2008 saw the NSSA enter into a 5 year study to assess the population of the McIntyre River steelhead population. In the past population information was collected using a counter at the fish ladder on the McIntyre, this counter however became inoperable and it was decided by the club to try another method to estimate and collect data on the adult population size. The recommended method of estimating population size in this situation would be the

"Mark/Recapture" or "Peterson Estimate".

It is based on the number of fish marked in year one times the number of repeat spawners in year two divided by the recaptures in year two. This is the same method used on Portage creek, the essential components to the success of this study are random sampling of the entire migration and obtaining a large enough sample size (at least 100 fish/year) to biologically sample and fin clip then recapture at least 10 to 20 percent the following year. So with this information and sampling permits in place a group of volunteer NSSA anglers (Terry Kozlowski, Keith Ailey, Tom Armstrong, Dan Holinger, Kevin Wilson and Randy Beamish) took to the McIntyre to start this 5 year study in the spring of 2008. The first season proved to be a great success with 144 fish fin clipped (adipose fin) and sampled with only 11 of these fish being recaptured. This was good news giving a good sample size for the inaugural year of the study which will continue again in the spring of 2009 with the volunteers again taking

to the "Mac" to fin clip (Right Ventral) and scale sample at least another 100 fish watching for and recording the number of fish clipped from previous season. Thanks to all the volunteers for their dedication and hard work to this study which will ensure its success and supply valuable information on the Steelhead population in the McIntyre River.



**CONSERVATION
PRESERVATION**

Reading Water

by Tom Armstrong



For many steelhead anglers, after getting all your gear organized and loaded up, making the drive to your favourite river, gearing up, and making the trek to the river, all that remains is choosing a good looking piece of water to dunk your fly or roe bag into. Unfortunately, this task is not always as simple as it seems.

A great deal of most river systems are relatively unproductive water, highlighting the importance of understanding the differences between water that won't hold fish, might hold fish, or likely will hold fish. Keying in on prime locations in a river can substantially increase your chances of success while steelhead fishing. Some things to look for are quite obvious, while others are a little more subtle and require a little bit of investigative work to find.

One person I've learned a lot from about steelhead fishing, and understanding the river is my friend Kevin Wilson. A landmark on many local rivers in the spring, Kevin is a fanatical steelhead angler, who near as I can tell, lives on the rivers along the North Shore of Superior from April until about June. I've learned a lot about reading water, and where to find fish from Kevin, mainly from watching him catch fish in areas that I haven't, but learned nonetheless. I'm always amazed at how I can work a section of river until I'm completely satisfied it is devoid of all fish life, until Kevin comes along, and pulls a steelhead or two out from under my nose in a couple of drifts, then moves along down the river. Once again stressing the importance of thoroughly reading the water you're fishing.

Whether planning your first steelhead adventure

ever, or heading down to the river as you've done for years, these are just some of the basics to get you thinking. First, break a section of river into its major components. Rapids are generally not great places to find steelhead, as water moving violently over rocks leaves few places for travelling steelhead to rest. Riffles, on the other hand, can offer some protection to travel weary steelhead. Riffles are slightly slower moving sections of water, with water moving over exposed, or slightly submerged rocks. During colder water conditions, fish will be less likely to hold in these areas, but when water temperatures rise, you just may find steelhead seeking shelter behind rocks in a riffle. A good spot to fish in a riffle could also be where the riffle ends in a pool, with the water slowing down and deepening.

Next, we'll look at the pool. A pool generally has slower moving, deeper water. Again, pools can be great areas to fish under some conditions, but poor in others. With lower water temperatures, fish may congregate in pools, before moving upstream through faster water with warming water conditions. Also, when fishing early in the season, deep, slow moving pools can often hold fish that have been in the river system over the winter. Also, during low water conditions, pools can be one of the few places to offer shelter to fish. Fishing a pool below a set of rapids or falls can be a great place to find fish concentrated below, waiting for perfect water conditions to continue their journey upstream.

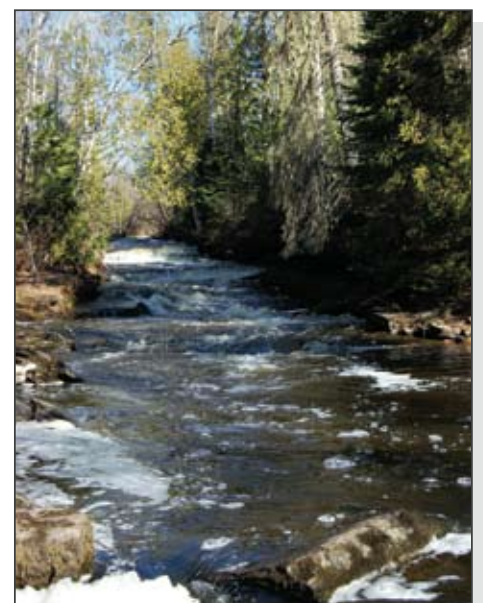
At the back end of a pool you'll find the "tail-out". This is where the water starts to shallow up and starts moving faster, often found leading into

another riffle or rapid. This can be a great spot to look for fish resting after navigating through a riffle or set of rapids.

Another slightly more subtle thing to look for is seams between faster and slower moving water, or between different currents. You can often see a subtle line or break on the surface of the water showing you the seam between two separate currents. Offering your bait right along this edge can often lead to success. Even looking for foam lines on the surface can sometimes give you a more visual indication of where a seam is.

Be aware of what the bottom structure is where you're fishing. Typically, you will find more fish in areas with rocky or gravelly bottoms, as opposed to sandy areas. In sections of the river where you can't see what the bottom holds, you can often find clues as to what lies on the bottom. Large rocks hiding under the surface often create a slight bulge in the surface of the water, indicating what lies beneath. Finding something like this can offer a chance to catch a steelhead resting behind a boulder.

Always make a mental note of where you're catching fish, because odds are if you've caught a fish in one spot once, you can do it time and time again. Many factors play a role in where fish will be in a river system on any given day; things like water level and temperature, fishing pressure and light conditions. Pay attention to where you're catching fish, where you're seeing fish, or where others are catching fish, to give you an idea where to focus your attention on that day. Reading and understanding water plays a huge role in steelhead fishing, so next time you're out, try to pick apart the water you're fishing, concentrate on some key areas, and hopefully reap the rewards.



Canadian Tire Stores make major contribution to the NSSA



The NSSA has had a long and successful relationship with the local Canadian Tire Stores in Thunder Bay. This year we are extremely happy to announce

that the local stores have included the corporate level of support to help the NSSA continue to advocate the conservation and preservation of the cold water fisheries in the region.

Canadian Tire Corporation's two locations in Thunder Bay, one on Arthur St, and the other at the Thunder Center, have long provided our members the availability of a variety of fishing products for all species during all the seasons.

This year the local stores have donated a major prize in support of our 2009 dinner and auction. The Canadian Tire stores have donated a full size camouflaged model 4x4 All Terrain Vehicle, which will be taken home by an attendee at our upcoming Dinner and Auction fundraiser at the DaVinci hall on March 27th.

Scott Bodnar, the sporting goods manager for the Arthur Street store explained to Frank Edgson that "Canadian Tire recognizes the value of the contributions that the NSSA makes to the fishing community in the area. The Canadian tire stores

appreciate the work that the NSSA is doing in our community to promote and conserve the cold water fishery."

Chris Cameron, store manager at the Thunder Centre store on Fort William Road, explains that the retail sales of outdoor products is very important to the Thunder Bay and area stores, and that by supporting local organizations such as the NSSA, helps to promote both the organization and Canadian Tire Stores involvement with the community"

The North Shore Steelhead Association is proud of the sponsorship arrangement with Canadian Tire and looks forward to continuing this positive relationship with a community leader in sporting goods that wants to support both fishing in general and local conservation efforts. We applaud Canadian Tire for it's commitment to the community. The NSSA is proud to be able to promote the patronage of this important retail operation in our region and City.

NSSA Membership Application

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ Province _____
 Phone _____ Postal Code _____
 E-mail Address _____

Dues are renewable each January. Dues paid by new members in November are applied to the following year's dues.

- 1 year - \$10 2 year - \$20 3 year - \$30

Make cheques payable to:

North Shore Steelhead Association, P.O. Box 10237, Thunder Bay, ON P7E 6T7

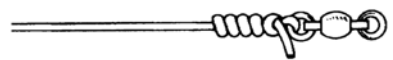
Knot Tying - The Improved Clinch Knot

1. An old standby for fishermen. Pass the line through the eye of the hook, swivel or lure. Double back and make 5 turns around the standing line.

Hold the coils in place; thread end of line through the first loop above the eye, then through the big loop as shown.



2. Hold the tag end and standing line while coils are pulled up. Take care that coils are in spiral, not lapping over each other. Slide tight against the eye. Clip tag end.



Devin Ellis leans into a Keezhik River brook trout.

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**The NSSA welcomes your
 contributions, opinions and ideas.**

Forward to:
NSSA Newsletter
 e-mail: jeff@korkoladesign.com



A Salute to the NSSA

Alan and Krista Cheeseman, of Thunder Bay today salute the efforts of the North Shore Steelhead Association.

The couple own and operate Canada's largest provider of fly in fishing adventures – Wilderness North - from their corporate offices and float plane base.

"Just last year the NSSA supported our efforts to salute the wounded veterans of Canada by making a contribution to our Project Healing Waters event at Miminiska lodge on the Albany River" Krista commented. "Their gift, combined with contributions from both sides of the border enabled us to welcome ten soldiers for a week of fly angling on the Albany, and paved the way for the first official Canadian chapter of Project Healing Waters to become a reality. We plan to stage the event again in 2009 and have been assured of NSSA's support."

"Our contribution of an outpost adventure for four persons to this annual event is our way of also saying how much we value NSSA's plan to renovate the Current River park." Said Alan who describes the group as a perfect model for an angler's association that recognizes the value of giving back to the community.

Wilderness North is widely renowned for both the quality and quantity of its fisheries. Remote lakes mean virtually untouched fish populations - and this means more big fish for Wilderness North guests.

Wilderness North has the only cabins or lodges on most of the lakes it serves, offering exclusive access to the fish there. An abundance of northern pike, lake trout, walleye and sturgeon — plus the ultimate Canadian fly-in fishing vacation — await guests. Guests never leave unsatisfied, catching plenty of fish including many "big ones."

Wilderness North
Box 22012 - Strathcona R.P.O.
Thunder Bay, ON Canada P7A 8A8
Phone Toll Free: 888-465-3474
Fax: 807-346-0832
Email: fishing@wildernessnorth.com



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Each year thousands of anglers from all over the world come to Thunder Bay to begin their fishing adventures in the pure natural boreal forests of Northwestern Ontario. For us, they board our planes and we transport them to the pure Canadian wilderness you know so well. Did you know that Wilderness North is Canada's largest provider of these fly-in fishing adventures. With our own fleet of deHavilland floatplanes, we open up the remote and remarkable lakes and streams to anglers seeking Pickerel (walleye), Northern Pike... even Brook Trout. From rustic outpost cabins to full service lodges, your neighbour Wilderness North can get you there. We support the NSSA efforts to revive the Current River Park and salute it's angling members for their community spirit.



Current River Park Update

The goal of the NSSA is to reclaim this abused area, and return it to a natural setting, while offering a view of the lower Current River and the wildlife which abounds.

June 2009

| 01

Beginning in 2009 the property will be thoroughly cleaned up of debris and garbage. The dead trees will be taken down and chipped on site. The property will be landscaped using light machinery to remove larger rock, and place fill wherever needed to level the property and provide proper drainage. Numerous native tree species and shrubs will be planted to beautify the area. A pergola, benches and a flower bed will be constructed for resting and viewing opportunities. In-ground garbage and recycling receptacles will be installed. A toilet facility (port-a-potty) will be installed for convenience. Boulders, and large rocks will be installed at

entrances to prevent unwanted vehicular traffic. A parking area will be developed to allow vehicles to remain outside the park area.

In the fall of this year the existing concrete wall will be evaluated for potential redevelopment or removal, dependant on engineering reports.

2010

| 02

This year will see a trail constructed along the circumference of the property, and the inclusion of 2 new flower beds and picnic areas. Storyboards depicting the history of the area will be added to the trail as interest items. Solar lighting will be added to highlight some interpretive signage, and flowerbeds. Dependant on the engineering reports done the previous fall, work to repair or remove the concrete wall may be considered.

2011 & Beyond

| 03

Possible development of the trail to include observation areas complete with fishing platforms. Also being considered is the construction of a bridge system, which would link the islands allowing access to the western side of the river, and the development of that property.

Volunteers Needed!

Volunteers will be needed to help us accomplish our goal and help with the cleanup of the area.

Clean Up Dates: June 6 & 7, 2009

To participate in this project, please email us at northshoresteelhead@gmail.com with your preferred volunteer date and contact information. Confirmation of your participation will be sent through email.

For more details, visit northshoresteelhead.com

Partnership Opportunities

If you wish to get involved, please contact:

Frank Edgson,
Project Coordinator
(807) 475-7712

Lorne Allard,
Fund Raising Coordinator
(807) 767-1555



Portage Creek - 2008 Results

Study Background Portage Creek is a small-spring fed tributary located on the Sibley Peninsula near the hamlet of Pass Lake (40 km east of Thunder Bay). This stream has long been recognized for its quality steelhead fishery.

How the Study is Carried Out Anglers (from the NSSA) and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) fisheries specialists work in partnership to collect and biologically sample adult steelhead during the spring spawning migration. Each day, over a six-week period (mid April to the end of May), one or two anglers and an OMNR specialist catch (using normal angling practices) and biologically sample (length, sex, scale sample) each steelhead. In addition, a numbered (colour coded) plastic disc tag is sewn on the front part of the dorsal fin. In order to take into account possible tag loss, a unique fin clip is also applied each year. Water temperatures are recorded throughout the open water season using automated temperature loggers. Life history information (stream and lake years,

age at maturity, total age and number of spawning events) is obtained by analyzing scale samples. Population size is calculated using a Petersen Population Estimate. Fish are marked (tag and fin clip) in one year, and based on the proportion of tagged fish captured the following spring, population size can be estimated. Tags are also used to determine growth rates of individual fish, validate ages, document movement patterns and provide stray rates.

Results The adult steelhead population in Portage Creek increased from an estimated size of 500 in 1992 to over 2000 in 2004. The population then decreased in 2005 and 2006 to 1500, rebounding to over 1800 in 2007. This initial increase in the adult population can be attributed to higher natural reproduction of juveniles, and better survival of adults following the end of harvest in 1994. The fluctuation in abundance from 2004 to 2007 is due to variance in production of juveniles, probably due to changes in the environment. Poor recruitment in 2002, 2003, 2005 and 2006 has left one strong

year class (2004) to maintain the adult population and juvenile production.

Value of the Portage Creek Study Year class strength of juvenile steelhead is generally similar over large geographical expanses, i.e. Western Lake Superior. As a result of this, Portage Creek's annual adult steelhead population estimates can be used to index the fluctuations of juvenile steelhead in most western Lake Superior tributaries.

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