

# North Shore Steelhead Report

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Thunder Bay's Josh Elcheson with Darren Wright of the Steelhead House on the Skeena River, BC.

## Family Business

By Keith Ailey



Keith, Charlotte & Brooke Ailey spend a day catching and releasing steelhead. Photo by Marilyn Ailey.

Fishing and family are two of my favourite things. When the two are combined, laughter, enthusiasm, screams of joy and huge smiles are pretty much guaranteed. In addition to all that fun, a family fishing trip can also be an educational experience, a source of family bonding, and the framework for memories that will last a lifetime.

I can remember as a young boy, stepping on and breaking my father's brand new graphite fishing rod. As far as I can remember, there was no adverse reaction-he just shrugged it off. Had the reaction been negative, there is a good chance my impression of the sport of fishing might have been spoiled.

That experience was on my mind when, a couple years ago, my wife and I were fishing with our daughters on Lake Shebandowan. When one of the girls dropped her rod over the side of the boat, I thought back to the broken rod incident, bit my tongue, and we just kept on fishing. Because my wife and I have worked hard to ensure every fishing adventure is a positive experience, our daughters also love fishing.

### Here are a few more tips to help ensure your next family fishing trip won't become your last family fishing trip:

- 1 Pick your day carefully. A cold, windy day is not the best time to hook a kid on fishing. If Mother Nature is in a bad mood, consider postponing the adventure. Just keep in mind that picking a date in the immediate future, and sticking to it, will be critical.
- 2 Target cooperative species in productive lakes and rivers because most young kids like the catching more than the fishing. Don't worry if they fixate on angling success at first, as they get older they will learn to appreciate all the other things too.
- 3 Don't expect children to go exploring through clouds of blackflies and mosquitoes to find a secret lake or river. Close-to-home spots with easy access to the water and a good reputation for producing fish are a much better idea. With a one-fish limit and size restrictions on urban waterways, catching steelhead from our North Shore tributaries is becoming a viable option for kids.
- 4 No matter what species you are chasing, there will be days that bites will be few and far between. Let the kids play with the bait, take some photos, and get some exercise when they get bored. It's also wise to bring some other activities and books to keep the kids entertained between fish.

5 When the first bite comes, I like to pretend I need my daughter to hold my fishing rod while I put on some sunscreen or unwrap a sandwich. This way, they can always catch more fish than dad.

6 Repeat step 5 until they are tired of reeling in fish. Then ask your child for some tips- it will empower him.

7 Even though it may be a warm spring or summer day, bring extra warm clothes. It is usually colder than expected on the water.

8 Properly handling your catch and releasing the larger fish will teach about the importance of conservation.

9 Be prepared to pull up anchor early. It's tough to leave when "the bite is on", but if the kids aren't having fun, neither will you. That's the deal. Consider it an investment- if you give in to them now, they'll be back, and the next trip will last a little bit longer.

10 Give them the good stuff. I believe giving my daughters a quality rod and reel with fresh line and an expensive lure that might actually catch a fish is well worth the risk of losing or breaking some gear.

When fishing with your family, you have a unique opportunity to pass on your knowledge and experience. While the quality time you spend together will produce some fond memories for you, the adventure will be even more important for your children.

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## He's Down...Again!



For stream anglers, wipe-outs (also known as falls, tumbles, spills, mugs, layouts, face plants etc.) are pretty much part of the game. The more time we spend on the stream, the greater the chance that, somehow and somewhere, we are going to wind up on the ground, or in the water. Let's admit it up front; we've all been there! True, some may be more spastic or less agile than others, but I think we've all taken a tumble here or there. If you have not, you are clearly not trying hard enough!

My first experience with this phenomenon came early in life, while chasing Brook Trout in the neighbourhood creeks. There was competition from other neighbourhood kids (in those days before video games and smart phones) so it was imperative to get moving right after school, in order to make it to the best pools first. On more than one occasion, I would catch sight of another kid with similar plans, and the race would be on! One time, I won the sprint and, swelled with pride and grinning at my defeated rival, jumped down onto the rocks at the head of the pool to stake my claim. In my well-worn and tread-less running shoes (popular wading gear of the day), I slipped on the greasy rocks and, none too gracefully, sailed head first into the pool. Sputtering, I looked up at the bank, and was greeted with the sarcastic jeer of "Way to go! You spooked the pool!"; as the other kid sped off to the next-best spot. Face-plant #1 was in the books.

I began Steelhead fishing in my teens, and quickly gravitated to the MacIntyre River, around Lakehead University. This stretch of water runs over slick bedrock, and can be tricky wading. One day, the river was swollen with fresh rain and, pack sack on my back and rod in hand, I rode my bike over to check out the action. At Catfish Falls, I put on my rubber booted waders (the standard, back then), and stepped into the shallows to test my luck. I could not quite reach the holding water I wanted to fish, so I cautiously stepped a little deeper into the current... and began a slow, steady and unstable slide down the slippery granite, pushed by the thigh deep current. I was

able to stay on my feet for a moment, and turned slowly toward the bank. With salvation in sight, I lifted one foot to jump to dry land, did an unplanned pirouette... and promptly slid below the waves.

My escape became quickly complicated by waders half full of heavy, cold water, but I managed to pull myself out on the bank. I looked up and down river, thankful that no-one important had witnessed my dip. Thinking that I had saved face, I dropped my waders to my ankles to drain. Unexpectedly, a call of 'how's the water?' came from across the river, where two attractive co-ed joggers stood, grinning at me as I stood in my sodden underwear. I silently gave them the thumbs up, and the girls strode off, laughing. Total fishing time: three minutes. Embarrassment: a lot more than 3 minutes.

There are several truths about wipe-outs. First: they can be embarrassing. Second: they can, when executed properly, be painful. Third, and most importantly: assuming that no-one gets seriously hurt, they can be extremely funny when they happen to someone else. Some years ago, a friend (who will remain unnamed) and I were fishing a favourite spot on a Dorion area stream. A large Cedar tree had spanned a narrowing in the river, and we often used the tree to cross to the west side. On this day, the water was high and lapping over the horizontal tree. Eyeballing this precarious situation, I announced that it 'looks a little slippery'. My companion had a look and, deciding things should be okay, stepped out on the log.

Now, he is a tall and strong fellow, and it seems that his added weight affected the hydro-dynamics of the log / stream interface. Half way across, the cedar (and angler) began to slowly bounce up and down, somewhat like a trampolinist starting their program. Then, on every down-stroke, the tree started to shudder sideways, like a tent in a heavy wind. Realizing that the outcome was fast becoming a foregone conclusion, I did the only thing I could think of to

aid the situation: I started to laugh. This, of course, led to a few epithets from my buddy, amidst his now frantic arm waving, hip thrusts and other gyrations for balance. All was of little use, and with a look of surrender in his eyes, he fell down squarely (and I mean SQUARELY) on top of the log, with one leg upstream, and one down. He emitted a low, guttural groan, and slowly slipped off into the water on the downstream side. It took a while to help him out of the eddy, between my efforts to stop laughing, and his efforts to drag me in with him. Another great tumble, remembered.

We cannot always predict when a rock will dislodge beneath our feet, or when an errant vine or fallen balsam will snag on a wading boot lace and send us sprawling. 'Tis the nature of the business, I suppose. As we get older and wiser, we become more careful of where we put our feet, and more wary of high water. Wipe-outs, naturally, will become fewer.

But... they won't disappear. Last spring, I was fishing among a group of anglers enjoying an afternoon on the North Shore. Fishing was good and, periodically, varied anglers would head down river after their fish. Amid this procession, luck was mine, and a dime-bright Steelhead peeled line off my reel, crossed the river and headed down the outside of a large tree stump. I had followed many fish around that stump before, but as I slipped past in the current, an insidious trailing root leapt up and hooked my toe. In a perfect parabolic arc, I tipped slowly forward into the waist-deep water, breaking my fall with one hand as I held onto the rod (and fish) with the other. I was wet from wrist to shoulder only, and less than a few cups of water had entered the top of my waders, but it was a wipe-out, for sure. A chorus of cheers went up behind me as I chased after the fish and, as I turned back to my fellow smiling anglers, I did the only thing appropriate in that moment: I gave the thumbs up, and took a bow.

Here's to another great Spring. Be careful where you put your feet...

*Tom Whalley*

Tom Whalley, President, North Shore Steelhead Association



## Centennial Park George Creek Project



Our new project for 2013 is the rehabilitation of a degraded Brook Trout nursery stream located within Centennial Park.

It is anticipated that over 150m<sup>2</sup> of previously altered and unproductive habitat will be restored through the construction and implementation of a natural channel design. This involves re-establishing pools, riffles, and in water habitat that has been lost over the past few decades.

The lower section of the creek will be rehabilitated to ensure fish passage from the main river under varying flow conditions which will allow for increased accessibility and benefits.

A further environmental benefit is related to aquatic and terrestrial species through the creation of a healthy riparian buffer area. This will involve a complex vegetation plan covering an area of approximately 800m<sup>2</sup>. A variety of herbaceous plants, shrubs, and tree planting will provide additional habitat while reducing the impacts associated with increased nutrient inputs, providing shade, and addressing general water quality concerns.

An exciting aspect of this project is that the project team is proud to construct this in a manner so that the George Creek Rehabilitation Project will act as a living classroom for the entire community (students, children and adults) highlighting the importance of cold water streams, groundwater cycles, brook trout biology, and the need to protect these critical areas in the future.

This project is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2013.

The NSSA along with Lakehead University will continue to study pre and post construction conditions in order to determine the success of the project and improve on future local restoration projects.

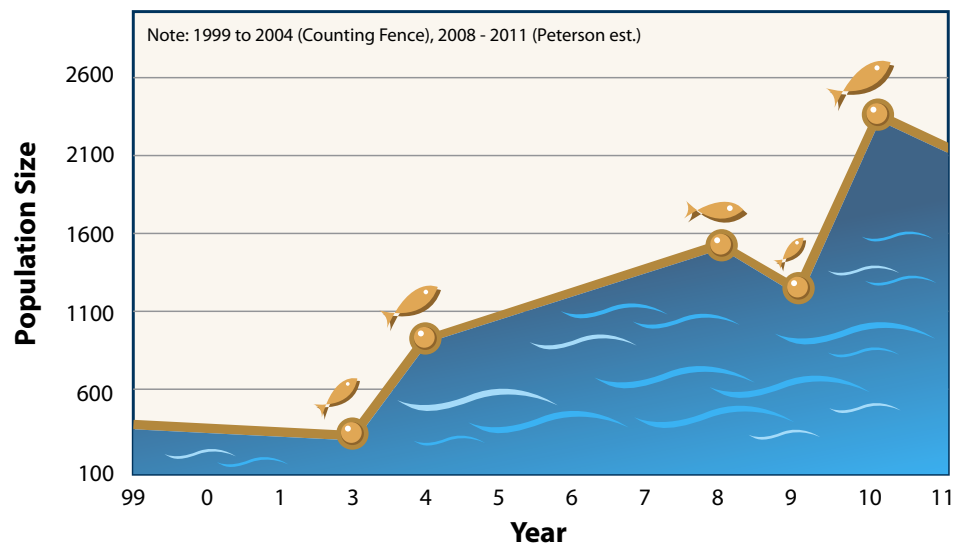
The North Shore Steelhead Association, the Thunder Bay District Stewardship Council, Lakehead University, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the City of Thunder Bay, and the Province of Ontario have committed funds to this project and while additional funds are still required, to ensure that this project will go forward as conceived, we are working towards that goal.

### Key Objectives Already Met:

- A survey of the stream has been completed and a draft plan of the channel is being developed by our engineering team Kevin Briggs (Hatch Mott MacDonald) and Bruce Adamson.
- Our vegetation team has completed a detailed planting design and plants are being sourced out at this time. The plan will take into account the native vegetation that is found in this area and mimic existing conditions through planting and utilize live staking as well as to restore the damaged riparian zone.
- Baseline Data has already been collected including electrofishing, water quality, existing habitat conditions, stream survey, and vegetation to be able to directly influence the design based on the limiting factors and compare the success of the project to in the future.

## McIntyre River Rainbow Trout Population Study 2012 Results

Four members of the North Shore Steelhead Association (Randy Beamish, Terry Kosolowski, Wes Bender and Keith Ailey) have been conducting an in-depth population study on adult steelhead in the McIntyre River, Thunder Bay (using the Portage Creek design). Over the past five years this group has been biologically sampling and fin clipping adult steelhead during the spring spawning migration. This has enabled managers to estimate the population size (see attached graph) and the life history characteristics of this heavily fished urban stream. The information collected can be used this to index the health of steelhead populations throughout Thunder Bay. Thanks to this dedicated group, a total of 300 to 400 adult steelhead have been fin clipped and sampled each year. The data also illustrates the value of the strict regulations of one fish over 69 cm enacted in 1999.



## Local Stewardship Council Supports NSSA Programs

By James Williams



The Thunder Bay District Stewardship Council (TBDSC) will be supporting several NSSA led initiatives in 2013. TBDSC, a group of conservation minded volunteers committed to natural resource education and enhancement have contributed \$5000.00 to the Cooperative Angler, McIntyre River and Portage Creek steelhead research programs. In addition, the stewardship council has provided an additional \$5000.00 to support the George Creek Rehabilitation Project in Centennial Park, another NSSA effort to restore a small coldwater tributary of the Current River.

**For more information on the stewardship council, please contact: [tbdsc1@gmail.com](mailto:tbdsc1@gmail.com) or visit us on Facebook.**

## Cooperative Angler Results



*Brooke Ailey releases a steelhead she caught on a Lake Superior tributary.*

The angler program allows anglers to participate in steelhead assessment as they fish Canadian waters of Lake Superior. Since 1991 anglers have been collecting biological data (length, sex and scale sampling) on tributary streams from Thunder Bay to Marathon.

The information collected allows managers to assess the effects of harvest and environmental factors on these wild steelhead populations. The more qualitative nature of this study can be used in combination with the more detailed population data been collected on the McIntyre River and Portage Creek.

The North Shore Steelhead Association (NSSA) will continue to deliver these steelhead research programs for 2013 in partnership with the Thunder Bay District Stewardship Council, Thunder Bay District Ministry of Natural Resources and Upper Great Lakes Management Unit. The NSSA acknowledges the financial and field support of these partners.

## Portage Creek Program 2012



The North Shore Steelhead Assessment (NSSA) continues to support the ongoing steelhead research on Portage Creek. This in depth study describes characteristics of a wild steelhead population in Canadian waters of Lake Superior. By estimating the adult population size and determining life history strategies managers can determine the health of steelhead stocks not only in this tributary but in other Black Bay streams populations. Portage Creek data can also be used to measure the effects of a growing perch and walleye population in Black Bay on lake survival of steelhead.

**The NSSA would like to thank** *Korkola Design Communications Inc. and Lakehead Printing for their assistance and contributions to this publication.*

## Fisherman's Park Update



On Nov 29th a group of volunteers from the North Shore Steelhead Association got together to put the new stainless steel sign up at Fisherman's Park at the mouth of the Current River here in Thunder Bay.

This sign will be taken down and polished this spring and re-installed by the City to meet their parks motif.

The City will also be paving the access to the larger shelter this spring, as well as installing a bike rack, and the NSSA will be installing a new interpretive panel along the trail. This panel will pay tribute to the use of the land over the years and will feature photos and time references.

An "official opening" celebration is planned for the early summer once the park has been completed. We hope that all members of the NSSA and the general public will attend.



**NORTH SHORE**  
**Steelhead**  
**ASSOCIATION**

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

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