

Northshore Steelhead Report

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North Shore Steelhead Assoc.



North Shore Steelhead Rivers Rundown

by Gord Ellis

If beautiful scenery, uncrowded rivers and wild steelhead turns your crank, the north shore of Lake Superior is the place to be come spring.



"We're lucky to have such healthy runs of wild steelhead," says Thunder Bay Ministry of Natural Resources fisheries technician Jon George. "The level of repeat spawners is high, and during the last few years we've had excellent runs in most of our streams." George says the average Lake Superior steelhead is four pounds, but some specimens will top the ten pound mark. Many of the finest steelhead

rivers in Ontario are found along the Trans-Canada highway between Thunder Bay and the town of Marathon.

In the city of Thunder Bay you can access the McIntyre and Neebing Rivers, as well as McVicar Creek. All host runs of rainbows and the fish are usually moving by late April. On the north end of the city, the huge Current River is worth a look thanks to a wild steelhead stocking program and new fish ladder that's been a major project for the North Shore Steelhead Association.

As you move east of Thunder Bay down Highway 11/17, you start bumping into some classic steelhead rivers. The McKenzie, Coldwater, Wolf and Black Sturgeon all have healthy runs of chromers and all four are easily accessed from the highway. "Our studies show that some of the largest steelhead caught on the Canadian side of Lake Superior come from the Black Sturgeon and Coldwater," says George "Thanks to abundant forage, the growth rates of the fish from Black Bay is excellent."

At the town of Nipigon, Lake Superior's largest tributary the Nipigon River, can be accessed. You can fish right below the highway, but the best shore fishing opportunity is located at Alexander's Dam. It's just a 20 minute drive up the Pine Portage Road.

East of Nipigon, steelhead anglers will find the Jackpine, Cypress, Deadhorse and Steel. The Jackpine, Cypress and Deadhorse are challenging rivers to wade, but they're also the among loveliest you'll ever see or fish. The huge Steel River is high and intimidating in the early spring, but it always holds fish well into late June.

Other rivers worth a look are the Jackfish, Gravel, Whitesand, McLeans and Prairie. Drifting yarn flies or roe bags on the bottom of pools and deep runs is the most popular way to catch north shore steelhead.

To get the bait on the bottom, a small egg sinker or two is crimped onto a dropper line. Pink, chartreuse and orange yarn flies are proven steelhead producers. When the water is cold, I've found a small roe bag fished under a balsa float to be deadly in the slow water sections of these rivers. Cast the float upstream, and let the current drift the roe bag just off the bottom. Steelhead strikes will bury the float. The timing of the steelhead run is critical to angler success, but fish are usually in the rivers by the first week of May and can go until June. A call to the Ministry of Natural Resource offices in Thunder Bay (807-475-1471), Nipigon (807-625-5000), or Terrace Bay (807-825-3205), will give you an idea how the rivers are doing.

Bag limits for Ontario's Lake Superior steelhead changed in early 1999. Only one rainbow of any size will be allowed west of the Pic River.

The exception is the Neebing and McIntyre River system where that one fish will also have to be over 26 inches. The limit on Lake Superior steelhead east of the Pic River will be two fish.

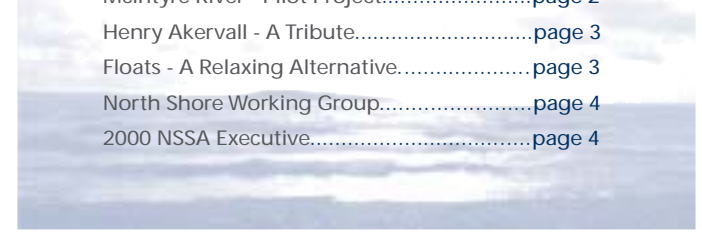
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Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce: 807-622-9642

North of Superior Tourism: 807-626-9420

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Message

from the **President**

by Frank Edgson

The initiative to preserve the self-sustaining capabilities of the local rivers and streams started in the early 70s with reaction to the construction of the dam on the McIntyre River. The North Shore Steelhead Association (NSSA) was officially formed in 1974 to provide a political voice to local steelheaders. The club strives to form alliances with various government agencies to protect and improve the rainbow trout fishery.

The NSSA has two Community Fisheries Improvement Program (CFIP) projects planned for this year, one project involving improvements to a spawning tributary of the Neebing River, and the other, the continued monitoring of Portage Creek. The Lake Superior Management Unit (LSMU) again plans to monitor rainbow trout migration on the McIntyre River employing electronic fish counting devices as well as video monitoring. The information gathered will be crucial in determining the effects of the current fishing regulations. The Current River will be the subject of increased scrutiny and discussion in our increased efforts to establish a viable fishery and deliver a remarkable fishing opportunity to the youth of our community. We are fortunate to live in an area that provides us with arguably the best wild steelhead fishing in both the United States and Canada; a fishery that has not been decimated by over-fishing, habitat destruction, or subjected to stocking programs.

Our fishery must be protected by those who enjoy this sport.

McIntyre River - MNR Urban Update

by Jeff Black

A pilot project to electronically count steelhead trout was carried out on the McIntyre River in the spring of 1999 by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in partnership with the North Shore Steelhead Association. Concern over a decline in steelhead numbers and low numbers of repeat spawning fish led to the implementation of a one fish limit with a 69 cm. minimum total length on the Neebing and McIntyre Rivers in the spring of 1999. In order to quantify the effect of this regulation on steelhead numbers, an electronic fish counter was installed at the upper end of the Lakehead University fishway in April 1999.

The electronic counter is a resistivity counter, which detects the passage of fish across an array of three electrodes. The installation at Lakehead University uses a floating fence to direct fish through the counter channel. The counter electronics continually monitors the resistance of the water above the counting array and calibrates for changes in this resistance every 30 minutes. When a fish passes over the three electrodes,

During its first year of operation a total of 414 upstream migrating fish were assessed to have passed over the counter between April 16 and June 3.

Peak migration of 115 fish (28% of the total run) occurred on May 1. When upstream fish events were broken down based on the hour of the day during which migration took place, little evidence of a preferred migration time could be observed. There was a small lull in migration between noon and 1:00pm and a slight peak in migration activity around 9:00pm, but upstream fish counts were recorded at all times of the day and night. Analysis of the peak signal strengths suggests a population that is dominated by spawners in the 2-4lb size classes with fewer than 11% of the run being composed of fish greater than 5lbs.

The Lake Superior Management Unit plans to operate the counter at the Lakehead University site for a number of years in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the new steelhead regulations on the McIntyre and Neebing rivers. Plans for the spring of 2000 include the installation and evaluation of a new electrode array mounted directly on the top step of the fish ladder. If successful, this will count fish as they exit the fish ladder and will eliminate the need to install the floating fence. The counter will also be equipped with an underwater video camera in order to verify that suckers are not being counted as steelhead.

While an accurate estimate of numbers of adults is extremely valuable, some idea of the age composition of the run is also needed. A fish trap was installed in the McIntyre River at the Harbour Expressway in the spring of 1999 in order to collect biological information including scale samples for determining age and spawning history. Low numbers of fish were caught, and concern that the trap was delaying migrating fish led to the decision to remove the trap on May 5. It was decided by OMNR and the NSSA that it will be less disruptive to use scale samples from angler caught fish to determine the age composition of the run. The Lake Superior Management Unit would like any anglers who fish the McIntyre to provide scale samples from any steelhead that they catch.



above: a floating fence directs migrating fish through an electronic counter (left)

a change in resistance occurs, as a fish is more conductive than the water it displaces. This change of resistance is recorded and analyzed by the counter using a firmware algorithm to determine whether it was caused by a fish or by another factor such as debris or waves. The peak signal strength received by the counter is proportional to the size of the fish. The counter installation was calibrated by pulling dead fish of known weights through the counter and establishing a relationship between signal strength and fish weight.

For more information on scale sampling, contact:

**Mike Friday (475-1381) or
Jeff Black (475-1268)**

Hank Akervall

The Northshores' True Friend

On February 18, 2000, Henry (Hank) Akervall, a founding member of the NSSA, a two-time past president and a long time member of the executive committee, passed away while doing what he loved even more than fishing, playing hockey.

Henry was instrumental in every major project of the Association including the Lakehead University fish ladder, the Boulevard Lake fish ladder, countless Dinner Auctions and many Youth Fishing Clinics.

He was admired, respected and trusted by the members of the NSSA and by countless others in the many community organizations in which he volunteered over the years.

Many of us consider ourselves fortunate to have known Hank and to have been able to call him our friend. His family and friends, the NSSA, and the community will miss him dearly, but we will not forget him.



Fishing Floats - In all the Right Places

by Alex Bartholomew

The nice thing about drift fishing or bottom bouncing is that it works and it's simple. You don't need any special gear and the basic techniques can be learned very quickly. In comparison, float fishing seems like a lot of bother. Balancing a float with multiple split shot sizes can be a tedious affair. However, once properly rigged, the natural presentation that float fishing offers can be tough to beat.

For me, the most important thing about float fishing is that it is more relaxing. I firmly believe that the more relaxed I am the more fish I catch. I start to get cranky after tying up and then breaking off on the very next drift -- especially two or three times in a row. Sometimes I can float fish for hours without hanging up and breaking off. There is something both tranquil and exciting about waiting for the hit as a well-placed float sneaks right along that perfect part of the river.

I'm convinced also that I catch more fish float fishing because, my bait spends more time in the water and in the right places. I spend less time tying up and I can let my float run a long way downstream.

My bait spends more time in the right places because I have much more control over where it is. One thing's for sure, if your bait's not in the water and not in the right place, your not catching fish.

Spending more time fishing in the right places means learning to adapt the basic techniques of float fishing to suit the specific stream conditions. Much of the float fishing hardware and many of the traditional techniques were developed in the large slow streams of Southern Ontario and just don't work as well on Superior's small high gradient streams.

I think a 9.5 foot to 10.5 foot six or seven weight fly rod, a float reel, and 8 to 10 pound mainline and lighter leaders to suit the conditions is a good combination for our streams. An equivalent

spinning rod or free spooling level-wind combination will also work. The basic rig is a leader attached to the mainline with an ant swivel and a small float on the mainline at a distance above the swivel slightly greater than the depth of the river. A row of small split shot is placed along the line between the float and the swivel. The float is lowered down the stream slightly slower than the current so that the bait travels ahead of the float and just slightly off the bottom.

In many situations however this set up does not work very well.

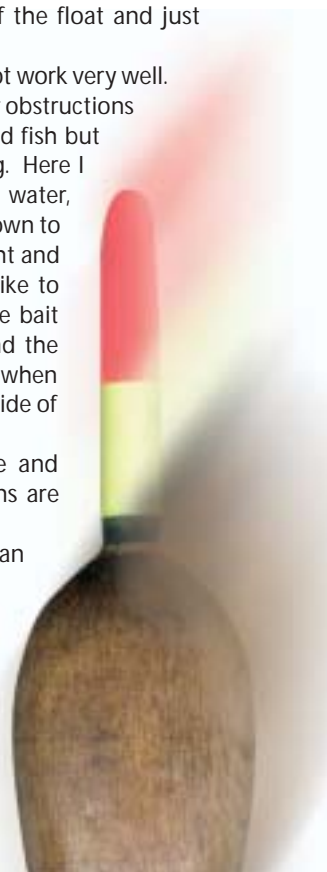
For example, pockets behind rocks and other obstructions in fast flowing parts of the stream usually hold fish but are difficult to get at with the normal float rig. Here I shorten my lead to about the depth of the water, maybe only 2 or 3 feet, slide all the split shot down to the swivel, maybe even add a little extra weight and sometimes shorten my leader. If possible, I like to cast above the rock and let the float, with the bait almost directly under it, float naturally around the rock and into the pocket. I use this same set-up when I want my bait to stay in a deep run on the far side of the stream.

Taking the time to adjust terminal tackle and spotting patterns to match stream conditions are the key to float fishing success.

For the versatile float angler, this patience can pay handsome rewards.

Here's hoping for a good spring, with lots of water.

**Conserve - enjoy - good luck
- tight lines!**





The North Shore Working Group

Partners Making Progress

by Tom Whalley

The North Shore Working Group is composed of representatives from angling groups and government agencies in Thunder Bay and area concerned with fisheries issues in Lake Superior and its tributaries. The goal of the group is to foster communication between concerned groups and agencies and to spearhead fisheries projects on the North Shore.

The NSWG is currently involved in several initiatives. The McIntyre River fish counter is an innovative new technology imported from the west coast which utilizes displaced water to record fish movement across a receiver array. This signal can be used to count fish and estimate their size.

This project was spurred by the NSSA in order to accurately measure the size of the run which was generally accepted to be in decline. Further information is included in the accompanying article by Jeff Black.

The NSWG will also be closely following the work of Jamie Mucha of the Lake Superior Management Unit concerning the habitat requirements of coaster brook trout. Jamie has been involved in the telemetry tracking of adult brook trout in Nipigon Bay and is uncovering some interesting data. Stay tuned for additional information this fall.

The walleye issue in Black Bay, or more truthfully the lack of them has been raised by members of the committee. There is a restoration initiative currently being undertaken by the Red Rock Fish and Game Club and the Black Bay commercial fisherman, with this issue to be followed closely by the working group.

As well, a project to assess the status of Lake Sturgeon in Lake Superior tributaries is slated to begin in the spring of this year. Strategy is preliminary, with more information to follow this fall.

In many ways, the NSWG grew out of the original Rainbow Trout Working Group, whose major achievement was the final draft of the Lake Superior Rainbow Trout Management Plan. This plan is to be released by the end of March 2000, and will chart the course for the rainbow trout fishery into the new millenium. A final word of thanks goes to Ken Cullis of LSMU for bringing the interest groups together to arrive at a final course of action, to Jon Tost for his participation in the working group and in the McIntyre River study, and a special thanks to Jon George of Northwest Science and Technology Unit for encouraging us to stay involved, work within the system and realize a few of our dreams.



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The NSSA welcomes your contributions, opinions and ideas.

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