

Northshore Steelhead Report

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A Steelhead for Tristan

by Randy Beamish



Every fall it's the same battle, when to give in and admit that the open water steelhead season is over. This realization usually kicks in while I'm plodding through a foot of snow or busting ice to launch my boat to get in one last day on the steelhead water. This scenario is played out every year simply because of the fact that pursuing these fish can be addictive, to say the least. Winters are long here in the north, long months spent tying flies, tuning tackle and dreaming of the spring break up and the steel-headers cycle beginning anew. There is an alternative and growing numbers of anglers are taking advantage of our winter opportunities to chase winter steel under the ice.

Recently my four-year old son had his right of passage into ice fishing steelhead when he caught his first one under the ice. There nothing like watching down into the clear waters of Lake Superior and watching a silvery shadow swim past the bait and then do its attack run. I'm not sure who was more excited me as I whispered directions as not to spook the fish or my son hanging onto his miniature ugly stick for dear life after the hook set. It was an epic struggle with the colorful buck peeling line every time Tristan got it near the hole, several times he tried to hand the rod off to me to no avail. Once on the ice it was another story I jokingly tried to convince him to release it and was met with a terse no he was taking it home to mom for dinner.

Anglers in the northwest are blessed with a wide variety of species to pursue during the hard water season with walleyes, lake trout and pike being the most popular. We anglers who are addicted to fishing steel need not miss out on this portion of the year simply because our adversaries are hiding under an icy covering. These fish are easily fished for through the ice and are quite accommodating to the angler who puts in the time to seek them out. Tactics and tackle are similar to those used for other species, it is common to catch trout, whitefish and even salmon while targeting steelhead. I feel a key component is finesse along with a good reel especially one with a smooth drag, these fish while somewhat lethargic but can still scream

a drag. There are lots of good ice fishing rods on the market today or you can build one, which is what I prefer usually in the 36-48" range again to control these powerful fish. Good 6-8# test line preferably clear works best to avoid spooking fish and it imparts a natural look to your lures and bait. Lots of anglers feel steelhead need to be targeted with spawn or spawn imitations while this tends to be true in rivers, fish in the big lake seem to like minnow imitating baits, some of my favourites are jigging rapalas, small williams, micro tubes and even flies. A small stone fly suspended above your lure can be deadly. Location can be important but don't shy away from experimenting most of the shorelines along the lake have fish cruising along them with points near river mouths being a favourite. I generally fish from 6 to 30' of water with a lot of strikes occurring just under the ice. There are even hut rentals available in proven areas, so next time you have the winter blues get out and try ice fishing winter steel it will dull that spring urge even if just a little.

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Steel River Saved



It has been said that "the price of freedom is eternal vigilance." We in the conservation community have been vigilant, and thus have been able to preserve a part of the freedoms we enjoy here in the North, namely the recreational opportunities and fishery of the Steel River.

For those who are unaware, we came very close to losing the Steel River, located 20 km east of Terrace Bay, to a provincial government sponsored hydroelectric development. For as little as 2 megawatts of power (barely enough to power an average residential subdivision), the powers that be were prepared to allow developers to build a hydro development at the Santoy Lake falls. This development would have involved as much as 2.5 km of the river, disrupting natural water flows and altering or destroying habitat critical to the fisheries of the Steel River and Lake Superior. In addition, access to the site and surrounding area would have been permanently restricted for anglers,

paddlers, naturalists, and other recreationists. It was immediately apparent that such a project was not acceptable at this pristine site, particularly for such little power and its negative ecological and social consequences.

Realizing what would be lost if we did not take a stand prompted decisive action. The NSSA quickly formed an opposition coalition made up of local conservation groups including the Northwestern Ontario Sportsmans Alliance, the Thunder Bay Flyfishing Club, and the Thunder Bay Salmon Association. When our appeals to the Ontario government received little response, we enlisted the support of provincial and national organizations. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, various southern Ontario and Great Lakes States conservation clubs, Trout Unlimited Canada, and the Sierra Legal Defense Fund united with us to fight the proposed hydroelectric development. With this groundswell of support, and the

backing of local M.P.P.s Bill Mauro and Michael Gravelle, we were finally able to successfully bring our concerns forward. The ensuing media attention, petitions, and letter writing campaigns convinced the Minister of Natural Resources to revisit both the proposal for the Steel River and the process that allowed this ecologically sensitive site to be considered for development in the first place. This review has led to the cancellation of this highly questionable project.

There are three valuable lessons to be learned:

- Only by paying attention to the issues affecting fisheries can we ensure that the freedoms and access we enjoy today will be preserved for tomorrow.
- By working together with other local, regional, provincial, and national conservation organizations, we can create a voice that cannot be ignored by government or unrestrained development interests.
- There are at least two M.P.P.s who are prepared to, at considerable political risk, put our environment and northern heritage ahead of the interests of those who would seek to destroy these values for even the smallest of profit.

So take a moment to reflect on the importance of remaining vigilant in a time when sensitive ecological systems are under constant threat of destruction. And if you see Bill Mauro or Michael Gravelle, take the time to thank them for their efforts - from all of us.

Yours in conservation,

Tom Whalley, NSSA President

No Dam Construction on Steel River: Announces M.N.R. Minister Ramsay



The Northshore Steelhead Association would like to thank the many individuals, supporting agencies and coalition partners who helped stop the proposed damming Northwestern Ontario's Steel River.

On Friday, February 17, in a surprise announcement at the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters' Annual Wildlife Conference, in Toronto, Minister Ramsay gave his personal assurance that no private dams will be constructed on the Steel River, near Terrace Bay.

"This is good news for Ontario's natural resources, it's good news for the people of Ontario, and it's

especially good news for over 81,000 O.F.A.H. clubs and members who worked so hard to oppose the potential damming of the Steel River," said Dr. Terry Quinney, O.F.A.H. Provincial Manager of Fish and Wildlife Services. "The O.F.A.H. and the North Shore Steelhead Association congratulate Minister Ramsay for acting on what he has heard from the very people who are working so hard to protect and enhance Lake Superior's world class fishery."

Minister Ramsay accredited "local knowledge," particularly from O.F.A.H. members, for inspiring a major improvement in provincial policy. Minister Ramsay told O.F.A.H. members that local and district M.N.R. offices will now be required to undertake consultations before fisheries related proposals (such as damming rivers) are announced.

Dinner Auction Update

Our annual Dinner & Auction event has been a NSSA tradition since 1983. The decision to host the first event twenty-three years ago was spurred by the need to improve the rainbow trout fishery in Thunder Bay. This inaugural fundraiser was a great success and allowed us to direct funds towards the construction and operation of an upwelling box (portable hatchery) capable of housing up to 100,000 fertilized steelhead eggs. In 1984 and 1985, almost 60,000 trout fry were stocked in McVicar's Creek, establishing the sustainable run we enjoy today. Over the following years numerous high profile projects, such as the construction of fish ladders on the

McIntyre and Current Rivers, have been undertaken using money raised from this event.

The Dinner & Auction continues to thrive and, as the NSSA's sole fundraiser, it plays a critical role in maintaining fishing and recreational opportunities in our area. All money raised through this event is invested in Northwestern Ontario to further develop our fishery. The NSSA has many accomplishments that it can be proud of and the efforts of our dedicated members ensure that we will continue to achieve even more in the future.

Nipigon River Brooktrout

by Randy Beamish

I am fortunate to have been involved with two ongoing co-operative angler programs recently, one involving steelhead and the second with Nipigon River brooktrout. This volunteer work involves my two favorite species and allows me to give a bit back while pursuing these fish. These programs involve taking samples from fish before releasing them, analyzing these samples help fisheries specialists learn more about the species which aids in their management.

The brooktrout program involves sampling and tagging of fish to learn more about movement, aging and growth to help in their ongoing rehabilitation. While no final scientific analysis has come from these samples yet, there has been some amazing things show up with only 2 years effort on my part (other anglers have been involved for longer periods). I have concentrated my efforts on the Nipigon River primarily in the upper sections. Of the fish I've tagged/sampled several highlights have been one fish tagged by another angler at Virgin Falls in July/2003 being recaptured below the Pine dam in June/2004, this is no mean feat as it had to come through or over the dam! The only physical damage was the end of one pectoral fin was sheared off. A large male specimen (24 plus inch) was captured and tagged early in the 2004 season by the end of the season it had been captured two more time with the addition of one inch of girth.

Of more interest was the growth rates observed from recaptures tagged in the 2004, five of these fish were recaptured again in 2005 (one year later give or take a few days) from their original tagging dates. So with their dimensions logged from 2004, I was shocked at the growth these fish had put on in only one year. The largest length increase of the five fish was 5.75 inches (a female #3596 tagged June/04 was 14.25 inches and when recaptured in



June/05 she had grown to 20 inches). The least was 2.5 inches, the largest girth increase was 3.75 inches.

Weight gains were just as amazing with some fish doubling their weight in a one-year period and all recaptures showing large increases. Although we can't draw any conclusions from this it is still very interesting.

The number of tagged fish reported to the Nipigon office was however disappointing and it was suggested to biologist Rob Swainson that signs informing anglers about the program and the need to report information to the local office, (whether harvested or released) might be beneficial. So in co-operation with local OFAH and OMNR through a small CFIP Community Fisheries Involvement Program), grant we had signs made up informing anglers to report the capture of tagged fish with the tag number and dimensions to the local OMNR office. We have been posting these signs at local access points with the hope it will at least inform anglers of the ongoing program and the need to report any tagged fish, it will also be very interesting when all of the scientific data is finalized. It has been a pleasure to be involved with both these programs because it allows me to fish for these magnificent fish plus contribute to learning more about them, and who knows possibly hook a record fish.

Did You Know?

"Somebody just behind you while you are fishing is as bad as someone looking over your shoulder **while you write a letter to your girl**"

– Ernest Hemingway

The Nobel Prize - winning writer lived from 1899 - 1961.

"**Fishing teaches concentration**, patience, assiduity, keenness of observation, skill and physical endurance"

– Walter M. Gallichan

Gallichan wrote The Happy Fisherman in 1926.

"An angler is a man who spends rainy days **sitting around on the muddy banks of rivers doing nothing** because his wife won't let him do it at home"

– Irish saying

"Lots of people committed crimes during the year who would not have done so if they had been fishing. The increase of crime is among **those deprived of the regenerations that impregnate the mind and character of the fisherman**"

– Herbert Hoover

Hoover was the thirty-first president of the United States.

If you are interested, in becoming a member of the NSSA, you can contact **Frank Edgson at 475-7712**



NORTH SHORE
Steelhead
ASSOCIATION

Current River Update



The NSSA attended an open house held by the City of Thunder Bay in mid January requesting public input on the development of a Water Management Agreement (WPM)

for the Boulevard Lake hydroelectric facility. Once approved, this WPM will be filed with the Ministry of Natural Resources and will have a significant impact on the future of the Current River rainbow trout fishery.

The NSSA attended this open house to express our concerns and determine whether the planning process was following proper water management principles. The goal of water management planning is to contribute to the environmental, social, and economic well being of the people of Ontario through the sustainable development of waterpower resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

Subsequent to the January meeting, the NSSA sent letters to the City of Thunder Bay, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Ministry of the Environment outlining our suggestions for improving the movement of fish through the Current River fish ladder. As a result, the NSSA has been invited to participate in a newly formed stakeholder working group investigating Boulevard Lake Dam Water Management Plan issues.

Should all the opportunities for improving flow rates be realized, the next question to be answered is, "Are the fish using the ladder?" The only way to determine this is through the use of a fish counting device. The NSSA will lobby to have a fish counter installed and will continue to promote your goal of establishing a sustainable rainbow trout fishery on the Current River.

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 P7C 6T7



With a paid membership you will receive the North Shore Steelhead Report, the official publication of the North Shore Steelhead Association.

Each issue informs you of club meetings and projects along with stories of fishing trips and news of legislation on the local, provincial and national level that impacts the Lake Superior region and its resources.

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The NSSA welcomes your contributions, opinions and ideas.

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