



NORTH SHORE  
**Steelhead**  
 REPORT

A North Shore Steelhead Association Publication  
 Volume 16 - Spring 2018

**Sharing the Love of Steelheading**

By Keith Ailey



Photo: (L-R) Phil Luckai, Keith Ailey & Colin Pendziwol enjoy a day on the river chasing steelhead.

experience reading water levels, water clarity and temperature trends to help make somewhat accurate presumptions, but for a steelhead rookie, this task can be overwhelming and many rely on word-of-mouth advice or simply following the crowd. Even if you know the fish are “in” and you see others hooking up, getting your bait to drift at the proper speed and depth in a flooded river is the next obstacle. Once that is achieved, hooking up on the bottom or on some submerged timber is an ongoing hindrance. Finally, if the angler is lucky enough to finally hook into a steelhead, there is the matter of bringing it to shore for a photo. Landing a steelhead is easier said than done as you battle high water and slippery rocks while weaving your long rod and light line around the overhanging trees. It is for good reason that many steelheaders count the number of fish hooked and consider landing anything near half that number a success.

I first met Phil and Colin as they entered high school and joined the cycling team I coached. Over the years that followed their graduation, our paths continued to cross due to our shared interests and mutual love for outdoor adventures including racing mountain bikes, Nordic skiing and even rock climbing. These boys are tough, intelligent, and dedicated, so when they asked about learning to float fish for steelhead, I knew they had the potential to learn quickly and pick up the complex techniques necessary to fool a steelhead into biting. Regardless, I had to give them the standard disclaimer that success on the river is a rare thing for those new to the sport.

We met down at the river early one morning last spring. It was cold and ice had formed overnight along the banks. Showing them how to rig up a float with a tapered shot pattern in the dim morning light with frozen fingers was the first of many challenges we would encounter that morning. Despite the cold temperatures and uncooperative trout the boys soon started to get the hang of drifting with the current and keeping the bait near bottom. By the time the sun started to warm both us and the water, both Colin and Phil had hooked into a steelhead! By noon we had landed and released several fish- not a bad start to a new sport for these two young anglers.

*About the author: Keith Ailey is a Visual Arts teacher at Superior Collegiate & Vocational Institute where he volunteers his time with the Outdoors Club and Travel Club as well as the cycling, skiing and XC running teams.*

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Jigging for walleye, dunking worms for smallmouth bass, or even walking out onto a frozen lake with a hand auger in search of stocked speckled trout are all pretty accessible and straight-forward forms of angling. When I take my young daughters and their friends out fishing, these are my usual choices for getting outside and having some fun with the kids. The methods are simple and the probability of success is relatively high. However, what about teens or adults who are looking for something more challenging and rewarding? Fly fishing or centre-pin angling for steelhead might just be the ultimate challenge and a good fit for experienced anglers looking to take their involvement in the sport of angling to the next level.

Steelhead have always mystified the average angler. Because they are migrating into their natal streams from Lake Superior to spawn, the timing must be just right in order to intercept them in the rivers. Seasoned anglers have



## Gord Ellis Inducted into Fishing Hall of Fame

A well-known Thunder Bay-based outdoors writer, angler and journalist has earned a major honour, taking his place in the Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame.

Gord Ellis was inducted into the hall at a ceremony that took place at the Northwest Sportsmen's Show in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Saturday. He was one of 13 inductees — 12 individuals and one organization — recognized by the hall for their "significant and lasting contributions" to the sport and heritage of freshwater fishing.

"It's a true honour to be in the Hall of Fame, as fishing is something I've loved to do my whole life," Ellis told CBC News on Sunday. "The fact I've been able to share that passion in my work, and maybe inspire someone else to take up the pursuit, has been a blessing."

In addition to being CBC Thunder Bay's outdoors columnist, Ellis has built a long career writing about, and sharing his knowledge of, fishing and the outdoors.

He's the senior editor of Ontario Out of Doors magazine, a member of the Outdoor Writers of Canada, and has received several awards for his writing. He's also a fishing guide and regular speaker at seminars.

He was nominated for the hall by former Thunder Bay resident Jason Dampier, who noted Ellis's use of various communication methods to introduce fishing to the public, as well as Ellis's focus on conservation, in his nomination letter.

*Article from CBC News · Posted: Mar 26, 2018 · cbc.ca*

*Above Photo: Gord Ellis (centre) with Ann Orth (left), another 2018 Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame inductee, and Dan Gapen (right) a previous inductee. Photo credit to Gord Ellis*

## Black Bay Fishery

For all who fish in Black Bay and tributaries, the sudden decline in the Rainbow Trout fishery is a continuous point of discussion. As much as the recovery of predators such as Walleye, Northern Pike and Smallmouth Bass in Black Bay is a fisheries success story, the consequences for the historically strong Rainbow Trout (RT) fishery have proven severe. It has become increasingly evident that juvenile RT are having a much harder time surviving among the myriad of toothy predators they face upon leaving their stream nurseries and entering the bay, as the number of adult Rainbow Trout returning to spawn in popular streams such as the Coldwater Creek, Wolf River and Black Sturgeon river have dwindled to incidental levels. The predators are here to stay, and will certainly add to the mix of angling opportunities in Black Bay; but what can we do to aid the recovery of Rainbow trout in the once storied streams of Black Bay?

Rainbow Trout are a very adaptive species, and there is hope that, over the long term, the population will move to older and larger juveniles that are more capable of evading predators and surviving to return as spawning adults. In the interim, we need to act to protect the small number of remaining adults in Black Bay streams, to ensure there is an adequate spawning population.

Our proposal is a simple one: in the City of Thunder Bay, the Neebing and MacIntyre Rivers have a size restriction of one fish over 26.5 inches in length. The institution of this regulation was successful in allowing over harvested populations in these streams to recover and reach levels not seen in a generation. We believe that extending this regulation to the tributaries of Black Bay will be a good first step in ensuring survival of the majority of adult Rainbow Trout that still remain, so that they can spawn multiple times and begin the re-population of Black Bay. A total recovery may require additional management strategies but, for now, we feel this first step will present the opportunity for Black Bay Rainbow Trout to begin their recovery.

With luck, nature will take care of the rest.



Tom Whalley, President,  
North Shore Steelhead Association

## 2018 Film Festival

We hope that you all enjoyed the 4th annual Fly Fishing Film Festival held on Feb 17th at the Thunder Bay Community Auditorium. Many thanks to Al Muir and his committee of Terry Kosolowski, Sean Murray, Jim Donaldson, Alan Sparks, and Wes Bender for a job well done. Also, thanks to Gord Ellis for being the Master of Ceremonies, Rebekka Redd for her introduction of the film "African Tiger" in which she was featured, and Tom Whalley for his introductions. Lastly, the NSSA thanks the Thunder Bay Community Auditorium and Acadia Broadcasting (Ray Dee) for the huge amount of advertising that was provided for the event.

This year's event continues to grow with over 500 people entertained by the F3T videos, vendor displays and even some local video content. To increase attendance and highlight North Western Ontario, the NSSA film committee announced "The Reel Video Contest". Interested videographers are encouraged to submit a short video featuring NWO fishing or adventure with the winning entry shown at the 2019 film night and receiving a \$1,000 prize. For more information and contest rules, visit our NSSA site. The Film Festival committee is already looking forward to next year, and hopes to see you all at the Thunder Bay Community Auditorium on Feb. 16th 2019.



## Birch Beach Creek

### Rock pool installation

The NSSA continues to explore the opportunity to eliminate a perched culvert on the small stream located 35km east of Thunder Bay locally known as Birch Beach Creek. Discussions have taken place with the Municipality of Shuniah, the CN Railroad, the MNR and the LRCA with the goal to create a downstream rock pool that will raise the water level and eliminate the perched culverts. The remediation of this martial barrier will re-establish connectivity within the stream and provide better access to in-stream habitat.

This spring temperature and flow monitors will be installed to gather some base line data on the stream prior to construction. There will also be a fish assessment done by the Upper Great Lakes Management Unit in the fall of this year.

This project is estimated to cost approximately 60,000 and to be done in the summer of 2019. It is hoped that a suitable funding agency can be found to reduce the cost to the NSSA.



Birch Beach Creek rock pool

### Riparian Project Update

In the fall of 2016 volunteers from the NSSA initiated a river bank replanting project on Birch Beach Creek. Approximately 120 cubic yards of topsoil was placed on the banks and 150 potted red osier dogwoods were planted. This project was low cost and done in a day. The results as shown in photo 2, taken in the summer of 2017 demonstrate how quickly positive change can be made.



Before photo of Birch Beach riparian project



After photo of Birch Beach riparian project

## Brook Trout Habitat Project for 2019: Tributary of McVicar's Creek

Prior to the construction of the County Park subdivision there were two tributaries of the McVicar Creek which were known to have a Brook Trout fishery. Today, it is believed that a small number of Brook Trout still reside within what remains of one of the tributaries.

This spring temperature and flow monitors will be installed to gather some base line data on the stream prior to any consideration of rehabilitation efforts. There will also be a fish assessment done by the Upper Great Lakes Management Unit in the fall of this year to confirm the presence of Brook Trout.

The NSSA has initiated a committee to investigate the possibility and usefulness of attempting to rehabilitate this tributary. The committee has initiated discussions about the project with the City of Thunder Bay, and the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority.

If you have photos of this area prior to construction or of fish taken the committee would welcome the resource.



Google Earth view of McVicar's Creek surrounding area



# 2017 Update on the Status of Adult Steelhead Populations in Western Lake Superior Tributaries

By Jon George (jgeorge@tbaytel.net)

A healthy Lake Superior steelhead population exhibits a wide diversity of life history characteristics such as stream life, lake life, spawning timing and migration patterns, and a repeat spawning rate of > 50% over one generation (four years). Having these characteristics enables a wild population to maximize recruitment of juveniles and maintain the integrity of localized adaptations (Swanson 1985, Clarkson and Jones 1997).

Environmental variables such as flow, water temperature and winter severity all play an important role in the survival of juvenile steelhead.

From 2009 to 2017, Lake Superior tributary streams and rivers have undergone a wide variety of environmental conditions including drought (2010), flooding, high flows (2012, 2013 and 2014) and very late spring spawning (2013 and 2014). In spite of these environmental variables, most adult steelhead populations in Thunder Bay and Nipigon areas appear healthy (Table 1) and express a wide variety of life history strategies. As an example the McIntyre River adult steelhead population has dramatically increased from an estimated 400 fish (2003) to over 3000 in 2016. This increase can be related to excellent environmental conditions (stream and lake life), restrictive harvest regulations (one fish over 69 cm.) and a very strong 2013 year class (number of juvenile steelhead surviving to adults) produced. Environmental conditions that favour high survival of young steelhead has also benefited the Nipigon Bay tributaries. Both the Jackpine and Cypress Rivers have multiple years of high survival to adults, abundant repeat spawners and low annual mortality.

Applying Swanson's repeat spawning index of >50% to the ten tributaries listed in Table 1, all but one stream have exceed this percentage over the past

four years. The exception is a small tributaries on Lake Shore Drive, Thunder Bay. Each of the Lake Superior basins, Thunder Bay, Black Bay and Nipigon Bay has one adult population estimate (Table 1). Most exceed 1000 adults, with the exception of the MacKenzie River (Thunder Bay) and Portage Creek (Black Bay).

## Literature Cited

Clarkson, J. and M.L. Jones. 1997. A method to estimate an Index of Mortality based on proportion of repeat spawners in rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) population.

Swanson, B. 1985. Pikes Creek/Lake Superior: population dynamics, fishery and management alternatives. Wisconsin DNR. Management Report 125, 29p.



Collecting data, Portage Creek

**Table 1. Repeat Spawning, Mortality and Population Size**

Tributary	Repeat Spawning*	Total Mortality	Harvest Rate**	Population Size***
Whitefish R. (Thunder Bay)	54%	46%	16%	
Neebing R. (Thunder Bay)	58%	42%	12%	1933
McIntyre R. (Thunder Bay)	63%	37%	7%	3209
McVicar Cr. (Thunder Bay)	67%	33%	3%	2484
Lake Shore Drive tribs. (Thunder Bay)	39%	61%	31%	
MacKenzie R. (Thunder Bay)	59%	41%	11%	284
Portage Cr. (Black Bay)	69%	31%	1%	289
Jackpine R. (Nipigon Bay)	75%	25%	LOW	
Cypress R. (Nipigon Bay)	69%	31%	1%	1600
Gravel R. (Nipigon Bay)	61%	39%	9%	

\* Four year average

\*\* Based on 30% natural mortality (Swanson 1985)

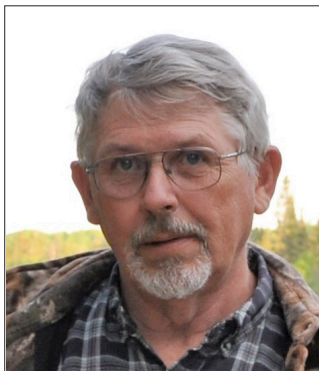
\*\*\* Adult spawning population size for 2016 based on 2017 recaptures (Petersen estimate)

**Note:** Population estimate on the Neebing River is only for the north branch. Fishing mortality rates on Jackpine River could not be obtained using the repeat spawning index but are considered to be very low (based on the high repeat spawning rate).

## In Memory of Larry Trent Doggett

May 7, 1953 – December 16, 2017

The NSSA will miss one of our hardest working volunteers. Larry served on the Dinner Auction committee for over 20 years and tirelessly helped to grow the event to its highest level. Rest in Peace Larry.



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



**NORTH SHORE**  
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### North Shore Steelhead Report

is a publication of the North Shore Steelhead Association

### Graphic Design

Korkola Design Communications Inc.

### Printing

Lakehead Printing

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

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