

The Salmon Run



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A Publication of the Saco River Salmon Club, P.O. Box 115, Saco, Maine 04072, 207.282.6985

From the President's Corner by Jack Parker

This spring's cool, rainy weather provided ideal conditions for salmon returns until the July heat wave shut the gate. Although the count in the Saco is now 32 fish, a few less than recent years, almost all these fish were stocked in 1999 as fry from our hatchery, living proof that our efforts over the years are paying off.

In prior years, most returns originated from US Fish and Wildlife smolts stocked in the lower Saco River by Florida Power and Light personnel. Smolts usually go to sea when stocked and return two years later. As US Fish and Wildlife stocked no smolts in 2002, this year returns depended almost entirely on survivors of our 1999 hatchery fry class. That was the first year we had facilities to feed the fry before stocking. When asked if he thought stocking feeding fry accounted for the jump in hatchery returns this year, our vice-president Dan Bonville replied, "I told you it would."

Recent performance has the Saco with the highest rate of smolt returns in the country. Indications now are that the same could be true for our hatchery fry. Returning adults transported by FPL from the Skelton dam fish elevator to upstream spawning habitat will add some wild fry each year. If USFW can continue to supply eggs for us to hatch, supplemented with some parr or smolts to stock, the future of salmon restoration in the Saco looks brighter than ever.

Continuous supply of eggs and fish from USFW hatcheries at Green Lake and Craig Brook is absolutely essential. Shrinking budgets there have made this uncertain. We thank Senators Snowe and Collins, Congressmen Allen and Michaud and their staffs for their efforts to increase funding for these vital facilities. Recently four SRSC directors attended a day of congressional briefings at Craig Brook and personally briefed Tom Allen about our club's mission and future views of the Saco salmon restoration.

Thanks to Dave Fenderson and his crew for steam cleaning much of the hatchery; Nick Sibilica and the Old Guide for arranging our participation in the Fly Fishing in Maine Conclave at Moosehead Lake; Ken Castner for long drives downeast to attend important AFS and ASC meetings; Tom Knoblach for improving our website; and RJ Mere for modernizing our membership and mailing database.

Au revoir to John Cadwallader, one of the original SRSC club founders, longtime president, treasurer, secretary, and general factotum, who's retiring to Vermont this month. John, you can't go until you've found replacements for all your 962 club duties! You'll be sorely missed!

September Social Meeting by Jack Parker

Our monthly social meetings will resume at 6:30pm, Tuesday, September 16 at the Trinity Episcopal Church on route 1 at Cleveland Street in Saco. I'll be pinch-hitting for Dan Bonville with a presentation of our July trip to northern Quebec's Leaf River. No potluck meal is planned for this meeting, but we'll brew the coffee and welcome y'all to bring your best deserts.

Update on the Bar Mills License Application By Mark Woodruff

On June 27, FPL Energy submitted its license application for the Bar Mills dam. The application was a two-volume document describing the Bar Mills hydroelectric project and, among other topics, the existing river conditions in the headpond, tailrace, and bypass. The document also made proposals aimed at improving river conditions and angler access.

I found that FPL Energy made a positive proposal regarding angler and boater access above and below the dam. There will be improvements to parking, trails, and canoe portage. The latter will be done in a manner that limits the size of the boats using the headpond.

There were three topics in the application that were earlier identified by Jack Parker, RJ Mere, and myself that still fell short of our expectations. I notified the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) as part of the application review. The first topic was FPL Energy's proposed water release of 25 cfs in the bypass on the Buxton side of the river. In my letter, I recommended increasing this to a minimum of 100 cfs because of further enhancements to habitat and angling opportunities in the bypass. The higher flows would also improve the bypass as a migratory pathway for anadromous fish.

Fish passage was another topic that I felt FERC needed to consider before issuing a license. FPL Energy was definitely on track by stating it will provide upstream fish passage according to the Saco River Fish Passage Assessment Plan. However, their

application would have been more complete if a preliminary design and cost estimates were provided. With this information, FERC would be able to evaluate the project's full environmental costs and impacts on operations.

Lastly, I had been concerned about the temperature data that FPL Energy collected in the headpond. It showed that to depths of over 20 feet water temperatures in the summer were the same. Admittedly, I don't have the background of the FPL or government fishery biologists, but it just seems that a river of that depth doesn't have to be a heat sink. Therefore, I questioned how this could be improved given that the headpond is managed as a migratory pathway.

In the coming months, FERC will formerly accept the application or find it deficient. After conducting an environmental analysis in 2004, FERC will makes it decision to renew the license by February 2005

Leaf River Revisited *By Jack Parker*

A basic rule of our fishing gang is "too many places to go, too little time" - our trips are only to new destinations. Nevertheless, on a recent Saturday morning, we six SRSC members were aloft over Quebec returning to the Ungava peninsula's Leaf River, a rock-strewn, salmonid-infested, ice-age remnant, 1,000 miles north of Montreal. Harvey and Victoria Patry, Jim Costello, and I fished there in 2001. Newcomers Paul Buckley and Frank Malone came to test our veracity about that trip. They soon became believers.

We fished for five days over a 50-mile stretch of river, catching speckles (brookies), lake trout, splake and Atlantic salmon (Leaf River is almost the northernmost limit of the latter in our



hemisphere.) The brookies were big and everywhere. Sometimes we found them in enormous schools and caught them one after another until the lakers and splake arrived and shredded them and our flies. Splake, naturally occurring hybrids of lakers and brookies, were new to us - colored like brookies but with lake trout features and voracity. Two bright salmon were a bonus for me.



Although the caribou migration had not begun we did capture some in our lenses along with black bear, and also a white wolf swimming across the river. Two musk oxen were seen in our



area but declined to appear for us. Our guide Lee propelled our jet-engine boat up a thirty-foot cascade at the head of the river into 100-mile long Lake Minto, home to a rare population of fresh water seals. We fished alone that afternoon in an angler's Eden.

Accommodations were first class, guides alert and helpful, and cook Alice kept us well fed and happy. One of us observed we've probably been spoiled forever. Hope not!

Sibilia Award Trip to Key West with Mike & Dan By RJ Mere

Mike Arsenault, Dan Bonville, and I clambered off the plane in Miami, Florida, on an early April day. We quickly got our rented vehicle and headed towards the Florida Keys. It took us three hours to reach Key West, all the while, Dan directed our attention



to various points of interest. Some were very interesting and some were very obscure. That's the pleasure and added bonus of traveling with Dan Bonville.

We arrived in Key West and checked into our hotel.

We met another angler (you can spot them a mile away, can't you?) who was soaked from head to toe. The hot sun blazed overhead. We asked him how he got so wet and he started to babble wildly about sailfish and tarpon. He was on his way to the bar and we didn't want to delay his appointed rounds with his well deserved libation for a day of hard fishing.

The next morning, and for the next two mornings, we met Captain Wally Albrecht at the dock where he kept his 27 foot boat. Captain started with a sharp comment like, "You guys going to move to the Gulf with all that gear or are you just planning to stay for a year?" It didn't get any better than that. As a matter of fact, Captain Wally was just warming up to us!

A few of the pictures tell the rest of the story. The photo in the right column is of my Redington 12 weight rod, snapped off with only the lower one third of the rod left. The albacore that broke the rod is still on and is being played with the stripping guide. Captain Wally really knew his stuff and worked hard to put us over some of the most exciting fishing that we have ever had. We caught albacore, tarpon, permit, and shark.

One poignant moment for me was when I called home to my wife to find out how things were going back in Maine. While a marimba band ticked out its infectious beat, there was a display of fashionable swimwear lounging around the pool shaded with swaying palm

trees. This was my view as my wife reported that six inches of snow covered the driveway. Gee, honey, sorry to hear that. . .

After three days with Captain Wally, we headed north for a quick



but uneventful day seeking bonefish. The weather was not cooperating with us for good fishing. We then headed for the Gulf side of Florida and spent some time fishing in the Everglades. Again, the scenery and local characters made up for the lack of fish caught. Besides, it sure beats shoveling six inches of snow!

Thanks for the generosity of the Board of Directors for selecting Mike and me for this year's trip and thanks to our generous benefactor.

Saco River Salmon Club Membership Form

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Dues are annual - January through December

Single \$15 Family \$25 Student \$5 Senior \$5 Life \$300

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Submit your short article for "The Salmon Run."

Send to RJ Mere, 9 York St., Kennebunk, ME, 04043 or email to rjmere@gwi.net