

The Thames River Angler

Newsletter of the



1st Quarter / March 2011

Catch – Measure – Tag – Sample & Release!



Randy Bailey and Lawson Jones work quickly to measure, tag and remove a scale sample for laboratory testing. The whole procedure takes less than a minute to perform and the steelhead is carefully released. Read more about this further on in this newsletter!

Inside this issue:

President's Report: Komoka Creek – Drainage Improvement of a Trout Stream?

Committee Updates

Salmonid Monitoring: Year 2

Annual General Meeting

Springbank Dam Updates

The TRAA's Quarter Century – the Planning of a Fitting Event or Just a Quiet Nod to Our Legacy?

Presidents Report

— **Randy Bailey**

This coming Saturday, March 12th will see the TRAA playing host to a veritable who's who with regard to those involved and/or interested in the latest developments surrounding the area of Komoka Creek above, adjacent and below Lansdowne estates.

The day will start with an organized tour of the TRAA trout hatchery facilities and perhaps a stream-walk to showcase some of the work that the TRAA has done in the immediate area of Komoka Creek. If our guests are interested, we may also try to catch up with the Steelhead Monitoring team which will be working instream with electro-fishing equipment.

The next stop for this group will be the site of the proposed drainage plans for Komoka Creek near Lansdowne Estates. The proposed plans will be reviewed and discussed with the goal to share with the group what the TRAA has been doing and to share our vision of a plan that encompasses drainage concerns within a comprehensive habitat restoration initiative. We feel that given the flexibility and cooperation of those in attendance, this is an opportunity for a blueprint for future, similar projects.

Those invited to this gathering are not limited to but include the following:

- Jack Imhof, National Biologist, Trout Unlimited Canada
- Andrea Hicks, Community Stream Steward Program Coordinator, Ontario Federation of Anglers & Hunters
- Pud Hunter, Area Biologist, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
- Dave Richards, Water Resources Coordinator, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
- Don Fairbairn, Stewardship Council, Ontario Federation of Anglers & Hunters
- Mike DeVos, Professional Engineer, Spriet Associates London Ltd.
- Jim Reeve, Drainage Superintendent, County of Middlesex Center
- Representative(s), Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

It is important that a workable plan be developed so that timelines and associated budgets can be put in place. The TRAA will be offering to take the lead on the fund raising initiatives based on the outcome of this meeting and the subsequent plan.



We won't get fooled again – this is the type of work we hope to avoid in the future by having these meetings and formulating workable, win-win plans. This indiscriminate destruction was created during the removal of beaver dams last year on Komoka Creek. Ironically, this is part of the section on which we'll be focussing our discussions on Saturday, March 12th.

Trout Committee

— **Stephen Jones & Dave Jeffries**

This past fall's batch of brown trout eggs were successfully hatched and have matured to the point where they are now feeding actively in the circular growth tank. A release date and a donor stream have yet to be determined so the Trout Committee is open to suggestions. When making recommendations, please keep in mind that we are restricted to the Thames River watershed. Other restrictions such as VHS disease control and habitat suitability may also come into play.

Another allotment of rainbow trout eggs will be making its way into the TRAA hatchery this spring. If you are interested in becoming part of the trout hatchery rotation, now is a good time to let the Trout Committee know so that they can hook you up with an experienced "trout-sitter".

The electrical glitch that manifested itself over the past few months in the flickering of the lights from the shed to the trout hatchery finally resulted in a complete failure. It was traced back to a faulty breaker and the "TRAA" circuit was reconnected to a working breaker in the same panel. This new breaker has been marked in the case it gets tripped for other reasons. Those members in the hatchery rotation who do not know the location of this breaker are advised to ask a veteran committee member as to its whereabouts.

If you've been following the action around the Trout Committee, you'll know that we took our first swing at brook trout egg incubation. Eggs were collected by TRAA members and UTRCA staff through electro-fishing outings in area streams. Eggs and milt were successfully gathered and placed in the TRAA hatchery, however they did not "take" and the process was halted. We will be sitting down with both the MNR and UTRCA to review our procedure(s) to try to understand what we can do to improve our success rate. Plans are in place to proceed with another attempt this fall.

Those of you who are familiar with the ongoing operation of the trout hatchery are aware that the baffle-box located "downstream" of the egg incubation trays was getting old and was starting to leak. A new fry box has been commissioned and constructed to the same specifications as the original. It will be installed in time for the March 12th hatchery tour (see the President's Report) and will be well in advance of the springtime allocation of rainbow trout eggs.



A trout's-eye view of the circular growth tank in the TRAA trout hatchery.

TRAA Volunteerism and Involvement

It is well documented that volunteer organizations' success is based on a relatively low rate of involvement by its membership. Most members simply want to support the organization through their yearly contribution of membership fees and the fact that they add one more voice to the organization's "clout" in the community. It has been determined that if a given organization has active involvement by 10% of its membership, they are doing well.

Would anyone like to guess at the rate of active volunteerism in the TRAA? The TRAA is pretty successful in what it does so you might guess 10%, being as that's the benchmark, but you'd be wrong.

Active volunteerism within the TRAA over the years has consistently run at around 25%!

What's our secret? Is it marketing, leadership, perks or really good entertainment value? Well we'd like to think it might be all of those things but when it comes right down to it, it's easy to get involved with something you're passionate about.

Simply stated, we all truly care about the Thames River watershed. That makes it easy to step up when we're needed.

Rehabilitation Committee

— ***Paul Holmes***

A good number of deadfalls were removed along the stretch of Komoka Creek from the TRAA trout hatchery to County Road 14 on February 20th. The main thrust of this activity was to allow easier access for the Salmonid Monitoring team. It was becoming nearly impassable for those with electro-fishing equipment as well as those following up with the long-handled nets. In addition, many of these deadfalls featured “sweepers” which are branches that rake the water surface, gathering debris.



Cutting and removal of wild grape vines continues to be spearheaded by Victor Fulcher. This initiative has moved quickly along various stretches of Komoka Creek’s banksides. Wild grape is a destructive and parasitic entity that is responsible for a large number of dead and dying trees along area streams. While the excessive snow and cold have curtailed the activities of the wild grape demolition crew, the coming weeks should allow renewed hacking of the vines!

This coming summer will see the repair and improvement of existing habitat structures such as deflectors, lunger structures and erosion control in Komoka Creek. While much of this work requires smaller work parties of 3 to 6 people, multiple projects can be ongoing if the commitment is there.

In addition, there will be an outreach to various “Friends of ...” groups to assist them with their in-stream work.

Warmwater Committee

— ***Victor Fulcher & Bryon Mott***

This committee has had a rough go of it this year due mostly to changes in policies outside of TRAA control. One of the Warmwater Committee’s most popular events was the annual bass transfer that took place around the opening day of bass season. Members fished for bass on private ponds or gravel pits and all those caught were placed in the TRAA transfer tank. They were then moved to a public body of water such as Sharon Creek Reservoir for release. In speaking with the OMNR we were notified that moving forward, only those ponds or gravel pits slated for decommissioning were eligible to have their fish transferred. Numerous calls were placed to area gravel pit owners without success and so the transfers have ceased.



Concerns over the fate of the ponds in Komoka Provincial Park have resulted in bittersweet outcomes. The positive outcome is the draft plan for the park was altered to include fishing as an acceptable activity in the pond area. The original document had fishing as being prohibited. The revised plan has been signed off on by the Minister of Natural Resources. One concern that remains is the eutrophication or “filling in” of the pond by rampant weed growth. The nature of the pond is conducive to weed growth and not only makes angling difficult but also slowly fills in the pond as they die off. Our experience with this is limited, however it appears that any mitigation of weed growth would be an ongoing and possibly intrusive process. The Warmwater Committee would appreciate any ideas or resources for a solution brought to their attention.

Springbank Dam Update

— **Randy Bailey & Paul Noble**

It is certainly interesting as to how much is still happening around a structure that has been inactive for 5 years, even if most folks don't even care any more. The disappointment is that the priority of the situation seems to have become as dormant as the dam itself, at least to the general public. If you remember, it was a non-issue during the municipal elections. While most of the candidates for council answered the TRAA's two questions in one form or another, the mayoral candidates essentially ignored them. The most recent London Free Press article was full of hope and speculation as to an out-of-court settlement between the City of London (CoL) and those taken to court by the city but the news had little or no reaction from London's citizenry. So what does the TRAA, as an organization, do to keep this the "front-burner" issue it should be?

We believe the lines of communication should be maintained with as many of the stakeholders and agencies as possible. At one time, the Science & Engineering Technical Committee (SETC) facilitated this communication and provided a forum for discussion. Unfortunately it has been too long since the SETC has convened and while the TRAA agrees with those who believe it should be resurrected, it appears as though this may be later than sooner. Recently, the TRAA's motives regarding our discussions with some of these stakeholders were questioned by some of our SETC partners. While they weren't speaking for the SETC group as a whole, it still created quite a kerfuffle! The TRAA's motives are simple and consistent in that we're committed to keeping the lines of communication open with *everyone* involved with the Springbank dam situation. The TRAA has felt that maintaining open and honest communication is a vital component in keeping the issue at the forefront and the pressure on. We also strive to be as transparent as we're able, reporting regularly to all the other stakeholders, including our SETC partners. The TRAA believes in the mandate of the SETC and we are committed to remaining a full and active partner. To that end, the TRAA continues to petition that Sherry Pineo of the OMNR revisit the possibility of reconvening the SETC.

During our meeting with Pat Donnelly of the CoL in early February, he stated that the results of the 2010 Post Construction Monitoring by Dr. Chris Bunt would not be discussed at their Nature London speaking engagement on February 18th. Imagine the surprise and disappointment felt by those in attendance when Dr. Chris Bunt released the 2010 attraction and passage numbers as well as a "teaser" summary explaining the anomalies. While we did not voice our displeasure at the meeting out of respect for the host organization, we have voiced our displeasure concerning this release of information prior to the full report being released to the general public. Pat did respond but his explanation only served to make some more confused while most remained disappointed. We believe that there should have been better control maintained over what was presented at the Nature London meeting and that the information from the 2010 Post Construction Monitoring that was presented was not vital to the presentation that evening.

We are still lagging behind on the numbers of signatures required on the official petition to decommission Springbank Dam. TRAA members must to continue to put forth a concerted effort to collect more signatures. All TRAA members are urged to please do your part and get a copy or two completed with signatures. We need to keep the pressure on the CoL with regard to the monitoring results and ensure that Phase II of the project commences.

BEFORE



Hideous does not begin to describe this money pit.

AFTER



*Oh look – a river!
What a view ...*

Salmonid Monitoring on Komoka Creek – Year 2

— **Randy Bailey & Paul Noble**

TRAA members and personnel from the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) will be commencing Year 2 of our Salmonid Tagging and Monitoring Program Saturday March 5th for four consecutive weekends.

Some of the specific objectives of this program include:

- 1) Quantitatively describe the population dynamics such as stock recruitment relation, population size, year class strength, growth rates pre and post maturity, exploitation and natural mortality & survival rates, as well as life history characteristics such as rates of repeat spawning, smolting history, stream residency, lake residency prior to first spawn, longevity etc. of the wild steelhead population in Komoka Creek.
- 2) Compare changes in the population dynamics and life history characteristics between pre- (open to exploitation) and post- (closed to exploitation) protection periods.
- 3) Use the annual tagging and subsequent recapture to validate age and life history interpretation from scales.
- 4) Use the Komoka Creek data set to evaluate the effects of environmental fluctuations on year class strength (index stream with limited exploitation).
- 5) Show the value of reducing exploitation on a wild steelhead population.
- 6) Show the value of angler – OMNR partnerships for collecting low cost yet reliable fisheries data.

We will once again be tagging, scale sampling and measuring migratory rainbow trout returning to Komoka Creek. All volunteers are welcome as there is plenty of work to be done during each outing. Fish will be netted by volunteers after being momentarily stunned (the fish, not the volunteers) by the electro-fishing device. John Schwindt of the UTRCA is usually the fellow operating the electro-fishing wand, sweeping it into likely-looking holding areas and pulsing a localized electric current to safely immobilize the fish for capture.

Waders are necessary for those netting and working with the holding tubs. These waders need to be in good condition (NO LEAKS) and preferably not breathable because electro-fishing obviously involves electricity!

Those wishing to be involved with this exciting initiative are invited to meet at the hatchery before the 9:00 a.m. start time beginning on Saturday, March 5th.



Electro-fishing with nets at the ready in a fishy-looking stretch of the creek.

You may have seen the following update on the TRAA Web site, www.anglers.org regarding one of the rainbow trout that we tagged on Komoka Creek:

TRAA TAGGED TROUT #38452 CAUGHT

One of our tagged rainbow trout was caught this year and the tag was turned in to the MNR. The mystery was solved on Tuesday, September 7th. Green tag #38452, steelhead, female was tagged March 20, 2010 in Komoka Creek. This fish was 635mm and aged at 2 stream, 3 lake years, second time spawner or “2.3 R-2”. This fish was one of 19 tagged by the TRAA in our first year of monitoring. The fish was caught July 20, 2010 three miles south and three miles east of Erieau. Thanks to the angler who turned in the tag.



Inserting the tag thread into the dorsal fin of a rainbow trout. Could this be the one that was caught southeast of Erieau?

TRAA Annual General Meeting

— ***Everybody!***

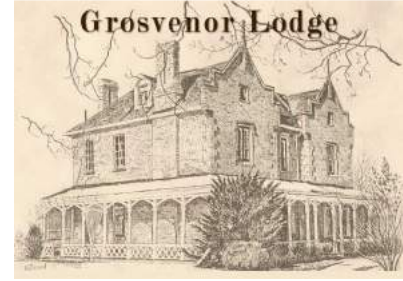
It looks like another year has evaporated and blown by us in no time. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is also fast approaching and we need you there to nominate, be nominated, volunteer and cast your votes! The date of this year's AGM is Wednesday, March 9, 2011 and the venue is, as usual, Grosvenor Lodge. Be there by 8:00 p.m.!

The following positions will be voted upon:

President	Vice President	
Chairman	Secretary	Treasurer

The following Committee Chair positions will also need to be confirmed or filled:

Trout	Warmwater
Rehabilitation	Public Relations
Social (now includes Email & Telephone)	
Membership (now included in Treasurer's duties)	



1017 Western Road, London



Randy Bailey shows that he has what it takes to run for another term in office!

TRAA 25th Anniversary

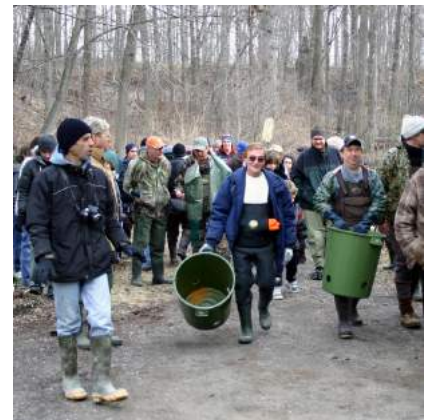
— ***Paul Noble***

This year marks twenty five years since the inception of the Thames River Anglers Association. There has been a lot to be proud of happen over this quarter century of aquatic environmentalism and it's important that we mark this milestone with a celebration befitting all of the good work the TRAA has done in this community.

What form should the celebration take? Where should it happen? It's probably best that it happens during the summer months so that an outdoor "shindig" can occur, but when exactly? There are other questions as well that can only be asked once the preparations are underway.

Most importantly, a TRAA member dedicated to this celebration needs to step up and manage this project. This was mentioned at the February General Meeting and so far I have not heard from a single person who is interested in being involved with such an undertaking.

As unlikely as it sounds, maybe everyone just feels that when you become a certain age, it's simply easier to let the milestones slide by with as little fanfare as possible.



I'm sure that this crowd of TRAA volunteers would love to celebrate 25 years of days like this one!