

Habitat Enhancement Efforts in 2012

2012 was a great year in terms of environmental enhancement. We started early this year by draining the water from Hardy's Pond in May. The purpose was to reduce the amount of sediment in the pond, providing improved fish habitat and reducing temperatures in the shallow pond. The pond was gradually re-flooded during early July, with tremendous support from Ducks Unlimited staff.

We had a fantastic group of hard working students and supervisor/ assistant coordinator, Chris Mutch. We hired four students: Nicole Murtagh (3rd year as an employee), Luke Peters (2nd year), Nick Matheson (2nd year) and Janelle Cheverie (1st year). Through a joint initiative with the P.E.I. Wildlife Federation we obtained the services of Samantha Hughes (2nd year) and Evan Power (1st year). Through cooperation with other environmental groups, we also had help from Ryan Morrison and Madison Dunn for the first six weeks of the summer. Bruce Smith, the watershed coordinator, divided the season between working with students early in the summer and the watershed management plan later in the year

The first task of the spring was to assess previously planted trees for survival rates and condition. This provided data on survival of various species planted over the last 2 years. In general the survival was excellent, at over 90%. At some sites abundant snowshoe hare populations had snipped many branches, but most seedlings sprouted new branches and didn't die. Once the inventory was done, tree planting started and continued until mid July when the ground became too dry.

In early June, following classroom presentations about water, elementary students from L.M. Montgomery and Sherwood schools visited the watershed. Following a tour of nearby enhancement initiatives they planted trees to help restore natural habitat in an abandoned shale pit.

Another initiative was the building of bird nest boxes by the summer staff. Nest boxes for Kestrels, Barred Owls and tree swallows were built and erected, especially where the elementary students had planted trees. The Kestrel boxes will be attached to power poles early next spring.

Due to concern about Gasperaux passing through the fishway at Officers Pond, it was decided to catch about 2000 of these fish and move them above the fishway. The young fish are important for the food chain in the pond and stream ecology.

In-stream enhancement efforts consisted of four main activities:

- Blockages were removed. Many had appeared since last year as a result of sediment movement.
- 14 springs were cleaned, allowing easier flow of water into the stream and providing habitat for fish spawning.
- 162 Brush mats were created. These are mounds of branches which were fastened to the stream edge where sediment would naturally settle, trapping sediment from within the system.
- Silt traps were cleaned. The large holes in the bottom of the stream, silt traps, were emptied of the sediment that had settled into them over the last two years.

In the fall, the river was carefully surveyed to determine the presence of fish and possible spawning. While two schools of brook trout were sighted, little evidence of spawning was found. The frequent rain during autumn created much turbidity in the water preventing accurate counts.

We are making progress in restoring the watershed habitat, with the hopes that when extraction levels are reduced and the springs start flowing again we will see major improvements to the rivers ecology We can always use help so if you can spare some time next spring or summer and see one of the activities that intrigues you, please give any of the board of directors a call.