

STEELHEAD NEWS

A Publication of the Lake Superior Steelhead Association

www.steelheaders.org

May / June 2016: Issue 390



Barrier falls on the Split Rock in late April



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Lake Superior Steelhead Association

PO Box 16034

Duluth, MN 55816-0034

LSSA's Mission:

For these reasons and more, the Lake Superior Steelhead Association exists: to protect our rivers and fish; to help preserve Lake Superior and its bounty; to learn more about the resources we enjoy and foster discussion, research and sound fisheries management practices; to educate anglers and the public about all these things. The LSSA has taken all these tasks upon its shoulders. These issues are too important to leave to chance or the vagaries of bureaucracies and politics. Our mission is to protect and improve the cold water fishery of the Lake Superior region and to bring various groups of anglers together in an atmosphere of friendship, so they can work for their and the resources common good.

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Dennis Olson Receives Award

LSSA member Dennis Olson of Cambridge, MN was awarded the Outdoor News "Man of the Year" award in April of 2016 for his many conservation activities. Olsons tireless work to restore the flood damaged Blackhoof River has been chronicled in this newsletter on several occasions. Each summer following the June 2012 flood, Dennis has organized volunteer work crews to clear the river from logjams and restore access to spawning areas. In 2015, he was instrumental in working with MN Trout Unlimited and the Carlton Soil and Water Conservation District to obtain a Legacy Grant to remove the remaining log jams. We congratulate him.

Membership Notice

A quick note to bring you up to speed on the membership side of the LSSA. All memberships will be updated prior to the mailing of this newsletter. If your label says anything other than 2016A/B or 2017A, that means our records do not indicate your renewal for this year. Please look into this and let us know if our records are correct. If not, we will make the necessary corrections. If you are planning to move or have moved, please send us your new address. Bulk mail does not get forwarded automatically. Lots of great stuff happening so we want to keep everyone up to date. Finally, this newsletter will be the last one you receive without having renewed for 2016. Many thanks to all our members and have a great, and safe, summer. *Membership Committee.*

Update on Steelhead Genetics Project

The specifics of the Steelhead Genetics Project were presented at the Great Waters Fly Expo and anglers could sign up to participate or apply at the MN DNR French River Office. Nick

Peterson, MNDNR Migratory Fish Specialist who is running the study has just finished up entering the fish and angler data to summarize what they received so far. He has provided this synopsis as of 06/01/2016.

Total anglers on the 2016 SGP participant list: 67.

Total anglers who contacted Nick and received a MNDNR sampling permit: 50.

Total anglers who turned in samples: 18.

Total samples provided from North Shore: 166.

Breakdown by North Shore zone:

Lower Shore: 55

Middle Shore: 39

Upper Shore: 72

Nick reports that he knows of many anglers that have collected samples this spring but have not yet turned them in. He expects to have at least 50 more samples turned in before the end of the year. He will be sending the scales that he has on hand to St. Paul this week, June 1. MNDNR geneticist, Dr. Loren Miller, will probably run the samples this fall or winter and we should have results by next spring if all works out. Nick would like to encourage more anglers to participate next year, as this is a long term project and more scale samples that are provided improve the results. Also, he would really like some feedback from those that participated this year about what they liked, disliked, what could be improved on for next year, etc. Please contact him if you wish to participate at: nick.peterson@state.mn.us

"This project has been a very enjoyable experience for me and it has been a great opportunity to meet our North Shore steelhead anglers," says Nick. "We have a great group of anglers fishing our shore and we really appreciate their support with the Steelhead Genetics Project!"

On a similar note, Nick will be taking a crew of MNDNR staff on a "North Shore sampling tour" this spring to collect genetics samples from juvenile steelhead. They will be targeting all of the major rivers and most of the medium and small rivers on the North Shore. The age-0 samples will add a lot more power to our study design by increasing sample size for individual rivers, which will help to answer questions about hybridization. Previous research has indicated that hybrids of Kamloops and steelhead do not survive as well as pure STT x STT crosses in the wild, and that steelhead and Kamloops can hybridize in the wild and survive to be at least age-2. What we don't know is whether or not the hybrid offspring can survive to be adults, what the genetics of the adult population looks like after 40+ years of Kamloops stocking, and (if adult hybrids exist) if hybrids are

more abundant in certain rivers or parts of the shore. The young of year samples will be analyzed with the adult scale samples and preliminary results available by next spring. *Nick Peterson*

2016 Planking Party

The date of July 9th has been set for the 2016 planking party to be held at Brighton Beach in Duluth. Last year was the first time at this new location and it proved quite satisfactory. Same view, same good food, and good company. Bring layers to bundle up in if the wind is off the lake. A lawn chair is a good idea. People who are planning to attend should check the website at www.steelheaders.org for last minute weather related confirmation of the event and to RSVP on the website contact page asap. The event is open to all members and their guests. There is no charge, but of course donations are welcome.

2016 Brule Spey Day

The second annual Brule Spey Day is scheduled for Saturday, Oct 8th. The event will be held at McNeil's Cabin, same place as last year. This is on the west side of the river, accessed by heading north on Clevedon Rd to McNeil Road and then east to the river. We have a line-up of casting demonstrators that includes Bob Nasby, Dave Pinczkowski, Andy Selvig, Brian Bergeson and possibly a few more. We plan to start mid-morning and run 30 minute demonstrations. The LSSA will be providing a lunch, first come first serve, donations appreciated. So far we anticipate St, Croix, Temple Fork Outfitters, Scientific Anglers, Sage, Redington and Rio to be represented. After lunch, there will be some informal instruction and a chance practice on the water with the rods/lines. Keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for updates.

Knife River, Sucker Hole 1965



Post Card From the Past

From the Editor

Once again the spring run is behind us and although it seemed I fished as much as possible, it wasn't enough. I had fun as a participant in the Steelhead Genetics Project (scale sampling) and I sent in my fair share. I urge all of you to participate in this research. Besides the Kamloops hybridization issue, there are many other things which can be learned from this research, including the effectiveness of fry plantings above barriers.

Thanks to all of you who sent me photos for this issue. Please consider contributing an article or anything else. Please e-mail me with articles and photos at scott@scottthorpeflyfishing.com or text at 612-669-9601.

Upcoming Events

LSSA Planking Party

July 9, 2016

Brighton Beach, Duluth, MN

Brule River Spey Day

October 8, 2016

Sponsored by LSSA

McNeil's, McNeil Rd, Brule River, WI



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Lake Superior Steelhead Association
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Duluth, MN 55816-0034

May 19, 2016

Dear members of LSSA,

Another great group of young people have been initiated into the world of steelhead fishing. Thank you for all your continued efforts to make this partnership and opportunity a huge success. Your efforts to gather up donations and discounts of high quality equipment give these groups of young people a wonderful gift that they will be able to utilize for the rest of their lives. Please share our deepest thanks with your donors.

And a special thank you to the great mentors and teaching staff that you gathered as well. They are a key part in engaging the students both in the classroom as well as in the field. The knowledge and experience students gained will give them more confidence as they head to the river throughout their lives. Please let them know that their impact on these young people is life changing.

Finally, thank you for your support of Hartley Nature Center. We are grateful for our partnership and look forward to "hooking" a few more anglers in the springs to come.

With Sincere Thanks,

Brett Amundson
Director of Operations
Hartley Nature Center

Greg Fitz on Swinging for Steelhead

By Scott Thorpe

There are few fishing experiences that can be as frustrating as steelhead fishing. Let's face the facts. There are not that many steelhead, water conditions have to be just right, the best fishing weather can be miserably cold and steelhead just aren't very aggressive. So what makes an angler fly fish for them and on top of that, swing for them? I myself am no purist, and I fish with whichever technique seems to hold promise for the conditions, but with one caveat: I need to enjoy the technique. At some point, can the desire to enjoy the technique be more important than effectiveness? There are a handful of anglers fly fishing with swung flies on the Brule and the north shore. You see them below Bachelors on the Brule or at the lagoon of the Baptism. To try to understand this approach, I chatted over coffee a few months ago with one such angler, Greg Fitz from the Twin Cities.

Fitz grew up in Fergus Falls MN, nearly as far away from steelhead as possible and still be in Minnesota. In that part of the state, walleye are king and Fitz tossed Rapala's for them. He grew up reading Field and Stream and was aware of trout and fly fishing, but it was on an 8th grade trip to Yellowstone Park when he first saw anglers fly fishing on the Firehole. Unlike many of us who went thru a bait fishing stage as youth prior to learning to fly fish, Fitz jumped right into his trout fishing career with flies. There were no fly shops near Fergus Falls so he ordered tackle from Cabela's and taught himself to cast on his back lawn. A co-worker of his father had lived in Montana, and they organized annual trips out West. Like many, his interest was shelved after a move to the Twin Cities for college but eventually surfaced again after hanging out at Paul Mueller's Summit Fly Fishing Company on Grand Ave. in St. Paul.

He fly fished for browns in the SE corner of the state, and then began to fish for steelhead on the North Shore and the Brule, mostly fumbling around by his own admission. Too early, too late, rivers too high, rivers too low, too cold, you know the story. He fished two seasons on the Brule before his first success, losing two steelhead on the closing weekend of 2002, on a stonefly pattern. A quick succession of trying various techniques followed--running line slinky style, nymphing below a strike indicator-- before settling about seven years ago on fishing a swung fly with a double handed rod. What is remarkable about Fitz is his total dedication to this technique as it leads to many fishless days and as I can attest, it is certainly the most challenging way to catch steelhead.

When asked him if he isn't catching anything, is he tempted to revert to a more effective technique? Without a pause he claimed no. He explains that it's more that he has lost interest in other methods. He wants to catch steelhead, but he wants to catch them badly on the swung fly. He admits he brings along the other tackle, but starts out with his switch rod and finds that at the end of

the day, no matter what happens, he never digs out the other tackle. He loves the beauty of the casting, the quality of the tackle, the seductiveness of the flies. Everything about it is more compelling to him.

We talked about tackle. His ideal Brule set-up--and what he recommends-- is an 11' six weight switch rod capable of tossing 390 to 420 grain heads with T-8 or T-11 tips. He also fishes the new MOW tips, with 5' of floating and 5' of sinking. He spends less time fretting over sink tips and now spends more time thinking about how to control the depth of his fly by mending (or not) and changing the angle of his cast. Thinking about the depth of his fly and how to achieve it is critical and he is confident that the fish will move more than might be expected. If he is halfway down in the current, that's good enough, as he doesn't want his fly under the steelhead, but to swing just right above them. To achieve this on the Brule, this means using a weighted fly.

We pondered why steelhead move to a swung fly. Is it aggression, feeding instinct, something else? Fitz feels they strike the fly primarily as a



predatory response. Watching fellow anglers catch steelhead on Rapala's and Flatfish has convinced him that it is a predatory response that he needs to trigger. So does he strip the fly? Rather than strip, he prefers a steady but aggressive swing. He finds himself mending less and less, moving the fly more swiftly. During the step and cast routine, he cautions to try not to get robotic.

He theorizes that several factors can influence how likely a steelhead will move to his swung fly, those primarily being water temperature, sunlight and water clarity. Bluebird days discourage him, but cold water does not. He has caught a lot of steelhead in 34F water in late November on the swing. Prime times are as the light is fading, the last 3 hours of the day. He also doesn't have a problem fishing behind hardware anglers as he feels they rattle the fish, and maybe make them unsettled and thus more aggressive. We recalled the old Scottish trick of throwing your Labrador dog in the salmon pool and letting it swim about as this moves the stale salmon around and makes them aggressive.

As for favorite flies, he generally fishes flies in the 2" to 4" length ranges, usually not Intruder style, but more trout streamer style flies. The variable might be how much flash the fly features. He uses big flashy streamers when the water is stained or high and more sculpin styles when low or clearer. He wants a fly he can



tie in 5 minutes, as it's too painful to lose a fly that took an hour to create, so his box contains a lot of simple olive and black wooly buggers plus sculpin style flies, in flashy and dull versions. His original flies selections were probably too influenced by Pacific West Coast patterns, he admits. He observed that as Intruder style flies get sized down, they really become more similar to a wooly buggie profile. Now his thinking is more influenced by the Kevin Feenstra style sculpin profile.

I ran into Fitz on the Brule this spring. It was nearing the magical time when the sun dips below the horizon, the woods become still, the air starts to chill and you can see your breath. I was racing to

get a pool I had some luck swinging a day earlier. In fact, I'd actually caught one. As I stumbled along the bank, I found him fishing exactly my special run. Well, I felt at least vindicated that I had selected a good swinging run, even though I'd have to keep heading down river and it was getting late. Even so, I paused to chat and watched him cast. He made it look effortless, even as we carried on a conversation. Thus far, he had not had a hook-up, but the best time was approaching and he was working toward the sweet spot of the run so I hustled off to let him at it. It was a beautiful evening.



PLANKING PARTY

A man with a beard, wearing a tan cap and a green apron over a light-colored shirt, is planking fish on a wooden boardwalk. He is holding a knife and a bottle of oil. The boardwalk is covered with several pieces of fish. In the background, there are parked cars and a grassy area. The scene is outdoors, likely at a beach or park.

BRIGHTON BEACH

JULY 9TH, 5:00 PM

Members and their guests welcome.
No charge but donations appreciated.
RSVP to website www.steelheaders.org

Photo Gallery



Clockwise from above left. Scott Engle on the North Shore. Scott spent a while learning some tips on steelhead fishing from Vic Stark at the LSSA booth at the Great Waters Fly Expo and sent us this photo of his success.



Bill Strand on the Devil Track, Tim Kunkel on the Brule.

Tommie Neusse on the Split Rock, Dave Olson on the Blackhoof, Josh Mancell on the Brule..



Meeting Minutes

LSSA BOD/Membership Meeting
March 9, 2016 MINUTES

BOD Present: G. Siverson, K. Behn, C. Wilson, C. Wistrom, M. Pitan, J. Somrock and K. Bovee.

1. Gambling Report: All required forms and schedules presented for review, discussion and approval. Motion by G. Siverson to accept the report as presented. Motion seconded by J. Somrock and motion passed. Staff meeting at the Reef in the next week.

2. Banquet Update: Quickly approaching. April 16 at Mr. D's. Get

any and all to come. Great prize package.

3. Angler Update: As always, now it's up to the distribution side. Lots of good comments coming back so if we can get it distributed, folks should like it. At Marshall's Hardware and Barnes and Noble in Duluth.

4. Newsletter Update: March/April issue at Pro Print right now. S. Thorpe always looking for interesting items, good photos, etc for the newsletter.

5. Face Book: P. Sandstrom to look into getting control over the LSSA so we can update the site as needed.

6. Fly Expo: All ready. The metro gang is all lined up. Anyone wanting to spend some time at the booth should contact S. Thorpe.

7. Grant Update: Both Status updates, Phase I and II, have been presented to LSOHC and approved. Presently working on Reimb. #3 for Phase II. C. Wilson brought in the big watershed map and the entire board got to see where all the work is going on, temp probe placements, etc. Everyone liked the map.

8. Juvenile Relocation-2016: As far up as the DNR will allow, preferably all on the main stem-that is the Board's opinion at this time. DNR has talked about the Main West Branch also.

9. Mentoring: Good to go. Have eleven kids. A set of twin girls included. First class room session this coming Saturday, 10 am at Hartley nature Center.

10. Other Group's Update: None of the usual groups have met for quite some time. Wondering if a couple have fallen by the wayside.

11. Old/New/Other: Sounds like there may be a scale sample project this spring. Not sure on specific structure and how it will work out.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kevin J. Bovee, Secretary

SAVE THE DATE



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