

STEELHEAD NEWS

A Publication of the Lake Superior Steelhead Association

www.steelheaders.org

July/Aug 2018: Issue 400



Duluth, MN
Permit No. 41

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Lake Superior Steelhead Association

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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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From the Editor

While up guiding in Alaska this summer, I was stunned to receive an email notifying me of the passing of Cedric Knuckey.

I first met Cedric in 1980. We were both working for Ellerbe, a large architecture/engineering firm in Minneapolis. I was a young architect and I was told to go coordinate some mechanical issues on a building in design with this guy named Cedric. My supervisor warned me that Cedric can be kind of gruff. I went up to another floor and found his work station. Sure enough, pinned to his cubicle wall was a graphic featuring a smoking gun with the statement "Go ahead, make my day." Also pinned up was a taped together panoramic photo of a beautiful tannin stained steelhead pool. "Hey, that's Scotty's Run on the Cypress River," I blurted out. Cedric turned around in his chair and stared at me in disbelief. Scotty's is a long hike upriver, and not many Americans fished there. I told him that I knew it well as we discovered that we were both steelhead fanatics. That spring, I ran into him again on the Brule, and we began fishing together. Besides my brother, Cedric became my main fishing partner and we shared many adventures chasing steelhead around the Great Lakes. Of course, I became a customer of his rod building business and came to own a collection of his fine custom fly rods. He and I did a lot of exploring, and he showed me many very special places. I give him credit for teaching

me much of what I know about steelhead and where to find them. Cedric's circle of fishing friends was expansive, and in the last decade, I fished less and less with him. But I know every time I hike into some of the secret spots he shared with me, I will remember the many times we fished together. Thanks, Cedric.

This issue features another article by our new co-editor, Nik Wilson. In this article, Nik interviews Rod Ridgewell, another old timer on the North Shore, former LSSA officer and a mentor to many steelheaders. Thanks Rod and Nik. Thanks also to Hal Tarse for his article about a red-letter day, the kind we all dream about.

This is issue 400 of the Steelhead News and it is the last as my tenure as editor. I hope you have all enjoyed the publication. I am going to continue to write articles. Please welcome our new editor, Jason Kopp and his co-editors, Dave Olson and Nik Wilson. Please send them articles and photos as you did for me and we will continue to have an entertaining and informative newsletter.

Email Jason at wildernessbob2063@hotmail.com. Nik Wilson: Nikolas.Wilson@coyotes.usd.edu. Dave Olson: dolson@c-ischools.org.

Upcoming Events

Brule Spey Day
September 8, 2018
McNeil's on the Brule, Brule River, WI



News and Notes

Compiled by Scott Thorpe

Cedric A. Knuckey

January 3, 1949 – July 21, 2018

Cedric Knuckey, a longtime friend and member of the LSSA, passed away on 21 July. Cedric was born and raised in Duluth and grew up fishing for steelhead and brook trout along Minnesota's North Shore. His family owned 40 acres on French River Road in Normanna Township. Cedric started steelhead fishing in 1963. After attending UM Duluth, he worked as a mechanical designer for various engineering companies in the Twin Cities area and in Alaska. While working in Fairbanks in the 1970's, he started a fishing rod building company, Interior Alaska Custom Built Rods. After returning to Minnesota in the early 80's, Cedric continued his rod shop at his home in Inver Grove Heights, serving customers around the world. By his own estimation, he has built more than 4000 rods. Each year, Cedric donated premium custom-built fly rods to various conservation organizations, including the North Shore Steelhead Association, the LSSA and the Brule River Sportmen's Club for auctioning at fundraisers. In 2013, Cedric was recognized as guest of honor at the LSSA's 40th Annual Banquet.

Cedric was an expert drift-style steelhead angler. He fished along Ontario's North Shore for more than forty years, in addition to regular trips to Lake Michigan tributaries. He fished Alaska regularly, where he also guided part-time for a few seasons. Always generous with his steelhead savvy, Cedric will be missed by his many angling companions. He is survived by his wife Diane, his brothers Jim and John and his step-children Gregory and Richard.



Cedric in his rod building shop. Left, on the Root River, Racine WI. Below, fishing the lower Split Rock. Mark "Doc" Nelson beyond. Photos from Scott Swanson.



Rod Ridgewell talks Habitat

By Nik Wilson

Rodney Ridgewell has fished the North Shore since the 1940s. Throughout the years, he's noticed how the habitat of the Knife and Brule rivers play a significant role in the return rates of its young fish.

According to Ridgewell, the Knife's beaver dams and cormorants pose great threats to its young fish population.

"I think the [Knife] river got really choked with beaver dams and that stopped some of the areas from fish getting into them ... Beavers really hurt the river a lot and I don't think they were controlled like they should have been earlier in years back. But, when the lake trout population came back all they [lake trout] did was sit in front of the rivers and they eat all the smolt coming back, same with the cormorants. They eat a lot of fish, and when the 1-year olds come back, they're only three to four inches long and all they are is fish food. Unless the fish stay in the river for a couple years, they don't have much of a chance for ever returning," Ridgewell said.

Sufficient river habitat is crucial for young fish. One important aspect is

the water temperature.

"If the water isn't cold enough and, a river like the Knife is so open that the main channel pretty much dries up, so you have to have the little ones living in tributaries that are cold enough and have enough protection for those fish to live. If they live two years in the river before they smolt, there's a much better chance of them coming back. And today, most of the habitat is gone, so they're leaving as 1-year olds and they'll never come back," Ridgewell said.

This situation is problematic because fish are leaving the Knife River when they are too young.

"Countrywide, your best steelhead fishing is where the fish have good habitat for 2 years. If they aren't 2-year olds, they don't have much of a chance. If they leave the rivers as 1-year olds, very very few come back. Even 2-year olds, you know the percentage of fish compared to fish that come out as a 2-year old, not many of them come back, percentage-wise."

According to the MN DNR research published in *Lake Superior Angler*,

only one out of 600 smolt steelhead between 0 and 1 year old actually return to spawn as adults. However, one out of 10 steelhead between the ages of 2 and 3 years old return to the river to spawn.

While one-year-old fish often leave the Knife River, the Brule's habitat provides a more ideal living condition.

"So, the big thing is stream habitat, that I can think of. That's why the Brule is so good. It has good habitat, so those fish can stay in for two years before they leave. Compared to the Knife, which gets 400 to 1,000 fish, the Brule gets 6,000 to 10,000," Ridgewell said.

The habitats of the Knife and Brule are starkly different. One of the main differences is that the Brule, because it is spring fed, has more water than the Knife during the fall.

"A lot of it is gradient. Our North Shore streams are steep and run over bedrock. We either get too much water or not enough, but the Brule has less gradient and has many springs. It's just a much different type of system. The Brule is more like a west coast river, a British Columbia river, where the fish run in in the fall. Steelhead would rather come in the fall, and we did get some fall runs years ago, but now on the North Shore, there's very few fish coming in in the fall because there's no water."

While Ridgewell doubts the fishing in the Knife River will ever be as good as it was in the 1950s and 60s, he believes efforts should be focused to improve the Knife's habitat.

"It'll never be the same as it was in the early days, but if we keep it catch and release and try to improve the habitat where it's possible, I think that's all we can do," Ridgewell said.



Rod Ridgewell mentoring a young angler in 2014. Photo by Kevin Bovee.



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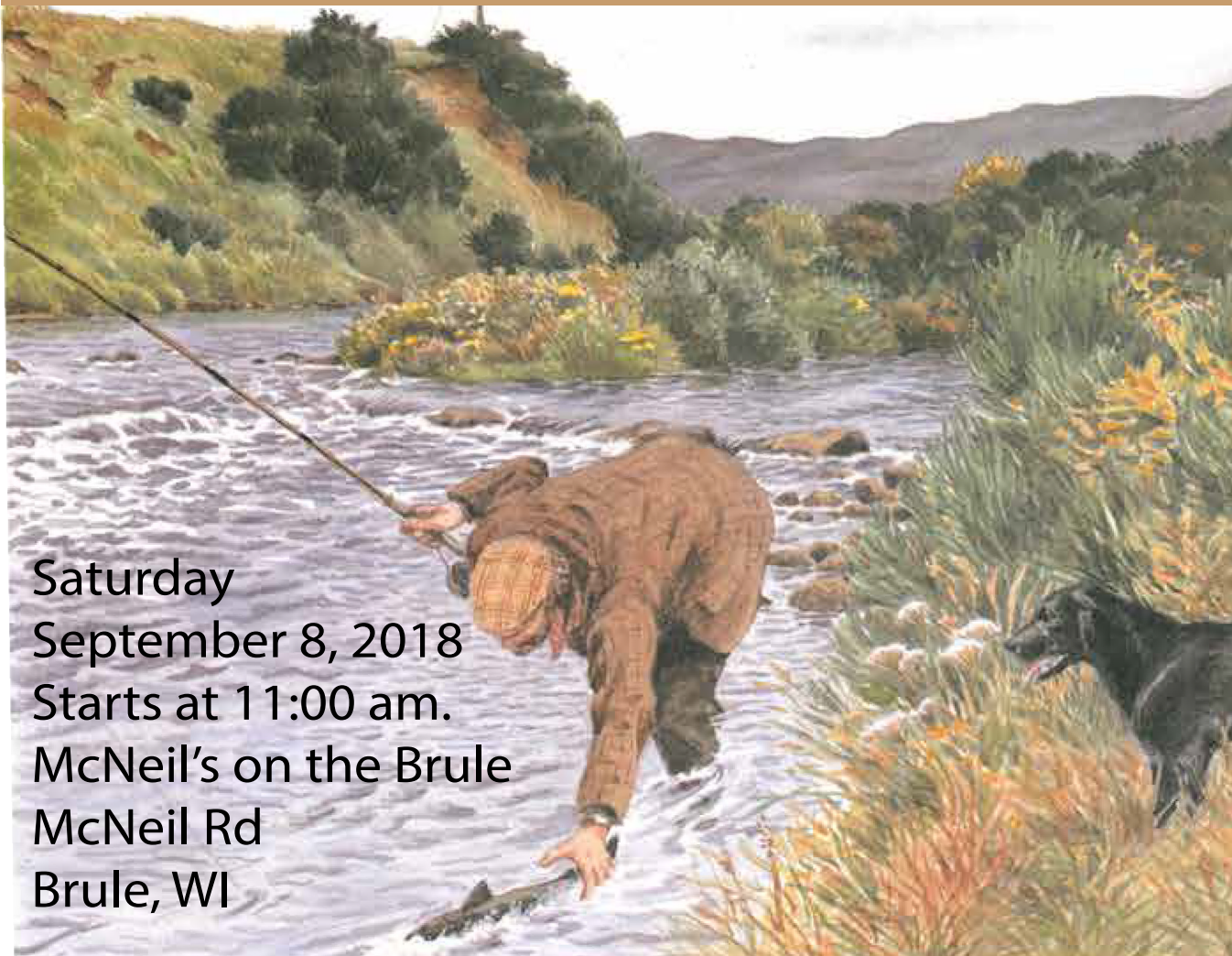
STOP INVASIVE SPECIES

- Inspect and clean your gear when moving fishing locations
- Avoid felt or porous-soled waders
- Use a soft brush to clean waders and boot seams
- Rinse waders, hip boots and gear with hot water, or soak in 5% salt (2 cup/3 gal) or 2% bleach solution for 30 minutes followed by a tap water rinse AND/OR
- Dry out waders and gear completely (5 days)

CONTACT Lake County SWCD at (218) 834-8370 with additional questions about invasive species infestations along the North Shore.



4TH ANNUAL BRULE SPEY DAY



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Occasional Steelhead Angler

By Hal Tearse

As a trout fisherman, mostly in Montana, the lure of big steelhead has been with me for many years. In fact my early experiences with steelhead fishing 20 years ago left me discouraged and skeptical. Twenty years ago for the opener in Wisconsin on the Brule we ended up being run off the road into the snow bank by a pick up truck heading the other way and oblivious to others on the road. Opening fishing is apparently a time of celebration in Wisconsin.

Fast forward to last year and two days with Carl Haensel on the North Shore. I have known Carl for many years and have fished with him in recent years for smallies. After a couple trips with Carl I thought steelhead were worth a try again. In early April 2017, we hiked up and down many rivers for two days in pursuit of the elusive steelhead and finally I managed to catch five fish. Most were in the 18-inch range and the “big one” was not landed. Why is it that the big one always gets away?

Carl is part billy goat and I did my best to keep up with him. I must say hiking in wading boots is a skill in itself and I have promised myself to get better hiking/wading boots. Carl is a fantastic guide and works hard to make the experience as good as possible. He knows the North Shore rivers and has a great feel for the current conditions and the fish.

With newfound enthusiasm for steelhead fishing, I booked two dates in 2018, early April. Of course the late spring and a late scheduled business trip to St. Louis, MO required a re-booking into the middle of April. I worried about being too late but Carl assured me that it would be ok this year.

As is my habit, I left the Twin cities at 6 am for the trip north and met Carl at McQuade Harbor between Two Harbors and Duluth. Arrival at 9 am



Author Hal Tearse cradles a steelhead, Photo by Carl Haensel.

and off we go to find steelhead. Any good steelhead fisherman knows that early bird gets the fish on the north shore but I was hoping that even with a late start we could find a few fish that were still willing to bite. As luck would have it, we ventured into the Cross river and began to cast a bead head nymph fly to drift along just along the bottom with a very small strike indicator on the surface. After the appropriate time of casting and drifting I managed to hook and land a 27 ½ inch healthy steelhead. On the board as we say. Unfortunately that was the only fish of the day as we fished several rivers that afternoon. Considering my past history with steelhead fishing I am feeling like this is ok. One big fish is good.

The next morning we are up at 5 am and heading out to the rivers. We look at a couple spots but decide on the very secret river as Carl has a feeling it will be good. We enter the river from the north side and work the pools up towards the large pool about 200 yards upstream. A couple nice fish were landed and my spirits are good. As we approach the big pool there are two stately gentlemen fishing it, one from each side. We politely retreat and wait for them to move on which they did about 30 minutes later having not caught any fish. We moved in and approached the pool from a different angle in hopes of picking up a couple fish. We were not disappointed in the least.

In the course of the next 90 minutes I

Photo Gallery

managed to land and release 9 fish between 21 and 25 inches. Beautiful fish and great fighters with multiple runs and jumps out of the water to try and shake the hook. Carl was busy manning the net as I caught fish after fish. After the first few it dawned on me that this is one of those times we all wait for. A time when the planets are aligned and the fish are on the take. After I caught the 8th fish I turned my rod over to Carl for a few casts and of course he hooked and landed a 20" inch fish. With the rod back in my hand I also caught another fish and lost one more.

It is now approaching noon and we decide that it time to move on down the river. A few casts at the pools below saw no action. Carl asked me what I wanted to do next. I thought for a minute and decided that after an epic morning of steelhead fishing, it made no sense to change rivers and continue to fish. It likely would not get any better and possibly would result in no action all afternoon. As I often tell guides, when the fishing sucks do something else. In this case the fishing was exceptional and at some point enough already. Great memories of a magical morning in such a beautiful spot on the river.

As a city guy with a 5 hour drive ahead of him, and filled with the memories of a morning like none other, I decided that this was a day to remember and time to move on.

We drove up to the Palisades and enjoyed the incredible view and shortly there after I head back to the Twin Cities with a memory that I will hold onto for a long time.

It is important to acknowledge the expertise of my guide, Carl Haensel, and the good fortune of the fishing gods. I would like to think those many trips of futility finally paid off with a glorious morning with the elusive steelhead.

For non-locals I highly recommend spending a couple days in late April or early May each year chasing the big fish. Having a great guide is also important and increases your odds of success. Tight lines



Top, Swinging down Clarence's Run on the Brule, photo by Mike Pitman. Above left, Maria Manion with steelhead. Above right, Ivo Rozendaal with a Lake Superior coaster. Left, April 26th on the Arrowhead. Photos by Scott Thorpe

Meeting Minutes

LSSA BOD/Membership Meeting
April 11, 2018
MINUTES

BOD Present: M. Pitan, C. Wistrom, D. Dahl, J. Somrock, R. Fjoser, K. Behn, G. Siverson & K. Bovee. Others present: P. Sandstrom & C. Wilson.

1. Gambling Report: All required monthly forms were presented for review, discussion and approval. Motion by Siverson to accept the report as presented. Motion seconded by Behn and motion passed. See Old/New/Other for expenditure.

2. Treasurer's Report: Looks good right now. Have some expenses yet to pay but will be done right after the banquet, as normal.

3. Banquet Update: This coming Saturday. Looking for head counts from the entire BOD and all others. Get your friends to come-prize package looks great.

4. Newsletter Update: The next issue will come out just before Scott Thorpe heads to Alaska for a couple months. Then it is time to get the new gang started.

5. Grants Update: PH II-In a very quiet time for it right now. Not much for reimbursement yet and the summer's work has not begun. PH III-We made the legislative process for passage but now it's up to the MN legislature to pass the bill and then up to the Governor to sign the legislation. This phase will commence on July 1, 2018 and run for up to five years. PH IV-The LSSA would like to apply for PH IV of our grant so that work could continue on the lower two thirds of Reach 4. PH III mentioned above covers approximately 2200 feet of Reach 4, which would leave approx. 4700 feet to be completed. Application deadline for PH IV is May 31, 2018. It will be most advantageous if we could continue work on Reach 4 without interruption. Motion was made by Wistrom to apply for PH IV

in the next funding period. Motion seconded by Somrock and motion passed unanimously. LCCMR Grant-the LSSA misunderstood the general parameters for the awarding procedure and had presented a draft proposal to the LCCMR administrators for feedback. The response was not what we had envisioned, and the unanimous decision of the board was to let this application die on the vine. MN DNR Coastal Grant-Pitan gave a very brief update on it. We haven't heard much at all.

6. S. Kuiti Letter: Reply due back by April 16.

7. Old/New/Other Business: New: The River Restoration program scheduled in October of 2018 has sent out a solicitation notice for nonprofit sponsorships. For a nonprofit level sponsorship, the LSSA would get its logo on the website and one registration for the symposium. Motion was made by Wistrom to donate \$ 500 to the Laurentian RC&D for the club's sponsorship in the upcoming symposium. Motion was seconded by Dahl and motion was passed. Other New: The Whaley's up at Knife River sent some information to the LSSA BOD in regard to some property that Lake County was thinking of putting up for sale. Said property is in the Knife River watershed but not directly on the river. As pointed out, what happens within the watershed can affect the river itself-clear cutting, development, etc. The LSSA felt that keeping this property in the public domain would be in the best interest of the river and coldwater fishery. Motion was made by Siverson to keep this property in the public domain. Motion seconded by Somrock and motion passed. Old: The committee for the WI LSMP is taking a month or two off and the DNR will attempt to put together the comments to date in some kind of document for the committee to review by early summer. Other Old: The 2018 relocation effort

will only be directed to the Hat Creek tributary (Trib 9 according to DNR designation). Since the DNR genetics study saw very little Kamloops introgression in the SH population in the Main West Branch, the LSSA board thought it best to not plant any 1+ steelhead in the Main West Branch. That leaves approx. 1000+ young steelhead to be clipped and stocked in the upper reaches of the Knife River. Other: Sandstrom reported that the Arrowhead Fly Fishers had a great wireless microphone that would be slick for the LSSA to have, especially for the Spey Day event. We spend approx. \$ 250 to rent a unit each year. Sandstrom to look into costs, etc.

Meeting Adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kevin J. Bovee, Secretary

LSSA BOD/Membership Meeting
May 7, 2018
MINUTES:

BOD Present: M. Pitan, G. Siverson & K. Bovee. Others Present: C. Wilson

NOTE: We did not have a quorum so funds were not allocated.

1. Gambling Report: Hard copies of the gambling were distributed for review, discussion and approval. Motion by Siverson to accept the report as presented. Motion seconded by Pitan and motion passed. Bovee to send electronic copies to remainder of board. Bovee also presented letter of 4-18-18 from MGCB to the board in regard to LSSA response to findings from the recently completed audit. Nothing major.

2. Banquet Update: The banquet went well. Revenue slightly less than last year but we also had at least eight folks say they were going to attend and then did not. This is the most frustrating part of the whole affair.

3. S.Kuiti Issue: Issue tabled until the June BOD meeting. Pitan to draft letter

- to go out after board approval in June.
4. Grant Update: PH III-the legislature has only a couple weeks to complete work, which includes approving officially the LSOHC recommendations. PH IV-submission of budget/AP, etc. due by end of May. PH II-Reach 9/12 site visited during spring melt and all looked great.
 5. Knife River Clean Up: Scheduled for June 2, 2018. Meet at the Knife River Rec. Center at 8:30. Bovee to bring trailer.
 6. Citizen's State Hatchery Committee: LSSA will write a letter of support to institute at the state level a citizen's committee to look into the hatchery system in the state. All existing hatcheries, recently closed (French River) and possible new ones (Mille Lacs).
 7. Spring Beaver Program: Have about two weeks left (slightly less) in the season.

Meeting Adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kevin J. Bovee, Secretary

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