

MNR battling lamprey to save trout

The battle to save lake trout from extinction in Lake Superior and the other Great Lakes due to overfishing and lampreys is one that will make its mark in the province's wildlife history, a government release noted last month.

In the September Resources Report from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Stan Munroe pointed out that the fight to save the fish began in 1829 when the Welland Canal was opened, providing an access to the Great Lakes for the land-locked sea lamprey.

Munroe, the Lake Huron Fisheries Co-ordinator at the Ministry's Owen Sound office, added that until the canal was constructed, the lamprey was confined to the waters below Niagara Falls, which the canal circumvented.

It took several years for the parasitic creatures to find their way through the canal locks, but by 1921 some were being found in Lake Erie. Less than 20 years later, the sea lamprey had also established itself in Lake Huron and Lake Michigan.

Eventually, favorable habitat conditions allowed the lamprey to spill over into Lake Superior, where they continued to enjoy their favorite prey, the lake trout.

Over the years, lamprey destroyed the lake trout commercial fishing industry in Lake Huron and Lake Michigan, and almost destroyed the entire lake trout population in both lakes, the report explained.

The battle to eradicate the lamprey took on international proportions with the formation of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission in 1956. In the early 1960s, "lampricide" was introduced, a chemical which was formulated to selectively kill lamprey during their vulnerable young period of development.

Today, lampricide is carefully sprayed upstream from known lamprey spawning sites. It then drifts downstream and sinks into the sandy stream banks where ammocetes--young lampreys--are most likely found.

The lampricide is very effective, the report noted. Up to 90 per cent of the creatures are eradicated in some streams, according to Dr. Doug Dodge, supervisor of the MNR's en-

vironmental dynamics section. On top of that, no adverse effects have ever been recorded on the fish, plants, or animals in the spraying area.

The introduction of lampricide coincided with the MNR's first trout restocking efforts. Research toward a Great Lakes restocking plan had demonstrated that a hybrid fish--lake trout and brook trout--would mature faster and spawn earlier than pure lake trout, thereby giving the fish population a chance to hold its own against the lamprey.

After 10 years of study, the fish known as a "splake" was introduced to the Great Lakes, the report said. Then, in 1977, unsatisfactory results and adverse public opinion brought the splake program to a halt. What followed was an intensive re-examination of the program.

Two years after shelving its splake restocking project, the MNR was ready to try again with the lake trout backcross, a hybrid that is about 75 per cent lake trout and 25 per cent brook trout selected to resolve the earlier problems.

Results from this project, which began in 1979 and has continued annually since then, have been much more encouraging compared to the earlier experiments with the splake, the report noted.

"For one thing, they are living longer," Monroe explained. "We have caught backcross that are six or seven years old and weigh over seven kilograms."

After nearly 25 years of study, experimentation, and false starts, actual proof now exists that a man-made hybrid of lake trout can reproduce in the wild.

Despite these efforts to both restock the Great Lakes with a lake trout hybrid and to control the sea lamprey population, the problem still won't be easily solved, the MNR report added, pointing out that solutions don't come easily in the world of fisheries research.

"But persevering souls like those involved in bringing back the lake trout will ensure that the search continues for new and innovative approaches to rebuilding and stabilizing depleted fish populations in our waterways," the report concluded.



It's initiation

These four Grade 9 students at the Lake Superior High School Terrace Bay campus were gloriously resplendent in their dresses and makeup, but it wasn't

their normal garb. As new arrivals at the school this year, they were required to take part in Initiation Day, which took place on Sept. 26.

The last roads of summer

By Mary Hubel

5:15 p.m. Sept. 15: On Prairie River Road; a few fluffy white clouds sail the brilliant blue sky. A varying breeze airs millions of fireweed seeds shaken loose from their drying pods. A whisky-jack floats over his feeding territory and doesn't know that I will drop bits of bread crusts there later when we go for our walk.

It is a walk with a difference this trip. We'll have our rifles on our shoulders looking for partridge (spruce hens), and a plastic bag in our pockets looking for mushrooms. This peaceful scene will yield its blessing, though, whether or not we take food from it.

The railroad tracks just to our left have been silent since we settled here at 3 o'clock; I find this odd--is it because of the labor troubles of the grain handlers in Thunder Bay? We remember trains roaring past every half hour or so, and their passing triggered a startling break in the constancy of the scene.

We used to say that Via Rail crossing at night looked like a diamond necklace on a black dress. We used to wave at the engineers and firemen of any train--I should say I did; from early childhood in Manitoba, trains fascinated me. I liked the sound of them, the power of them, even the smell of them, and believe me they smelled better with coal than with diesel!

5:45 p.m.: An eastbound freight blows his raucous horn as I wave at the lead diesel. Speaking of diesel, I was in northern Manitoba on the Pas-Churchill line in 1946 when diesel engines were being tested on the "cold weather" run by the Americans, who had a military base at Churchill.

Local railroaders from Wekusko to Gillam watched the experiment with mixed feelings. Being fiercely loyal to the Canadian railroad way of life, I think they secretly hoped 'The Growler' would freeze up, burn up, or fall off the tracks and be towed in utter disgrace back across our friendly border. You know what? It almost did!

6 p.m. Sept. 16: On the Caramat road; this old gravel pit has enough hard-packed areas to hold Mitzi's weight and we like the view. We marvel at the urgency with which Nature covers up man's mutilation of the land.

The little balsams and spruces are healthy and shapely, surrounded by graceful grasses, baby willows and, of course, fireweed and raspberry bushes. Textures, shapes, and colour create a harmonious tapestry that holds peace for the viewer.

Next time you are going on a country road, take along a small picture

frame, about 6" x 6", or cut one from cardboard, leaving about a 2" border. As you scan a seemingly bland landscape, hold the frame in front of you and look again, varying the distance by bending your arms a little.

Within that miniature frame I'm betting you will see still-life pictures worthy of the finest works of a master painter.

6:15 p.m. Sept. 17: Settled at Wild Goose Lake Camp on a cool, wet evening. We crept, swam, flew, and slithered around 70 kilometres of the Caramat road, if I may thus describe driving requirements on this unusual road. It is a very important link between Highways 17 and 11, and vital to the development of this portion of northwestern Ontario.

Unfortunately, responsibility is acknowledged by both the Ontario MNR and a big logging and pulp organization, and it seems the municipalities involved do not have much voice in its maintenance.

However, politics had no part in our travel plan, and we squealed with delight at the precipitous hills and sharp turns. We acknowledged with respect the condition of the road, while sharing it with massive trucks loaded with trees.

We were treated to sightings of blue heron, spruce hens, chipmunks and one white-tailed deer (at least we're sure there was a deer in front of that flashing, leaping blob of white at a turn in the road). So much for the hunting aspect of this jaunt!

See you next week.

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Invites interested citizens of Schreiber to submit their name, to fill vacancies on the Property Standards Committee. The Property Standards Committee hears appeals of orders served pursuant to the "Property Maintenance and Occupancy Standards By-Law". Applications will be received up to Friday, October 10 at 5:00 p.m.

A. J. GAUTHIER
Clerk-Treasurer
Township of Schreiber

P.O. Box 40
Schreiber, Ontario
P0T 2S0