2025-26 Winter TIDINGS

Bringing You Updates from SSWA

Fall Fun

This fall was busy, but we had a great time with three year-round staff and a committed volunteer (thanks Cameron!) able to complete surveys through mid-December. We started off the fall surveying all of the culverts in our watershed area, of which there are many. This survey does not need to happen every year, but every five–which is good as it is quite time consuming. However, these surveys are important so that we can assess if there are any problems with culverts or stream crossings that may be impacting river flow or restricting fish passage. Once we have collected information on all the culverts in the area, we determine which ones are concerning and relay that information to the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure as we are not able to repair them.

In mid-September we took a break from culvert hunting to assess the population of European Green Crabs in five of our estuaries. Fletcher Gibbons, our Coastal Projects Manager, had been concerned by the number of green crabs they had seen throughout the summer and wanted to get some accurate data on exactly what we were dealing with. We set minnow and fukui traps (fukui trap pictured) in our five largest estuaries and checked them after each day for two days. We had hoped to do this for a whole week but the circumstances conspired against us, and we were fairly content with the data that we got from the two days. Unfortunately, we found hundreds of green crabs in most of the estuaries. Cape Traverse was predominantly composed of native Rock Crabs, which was a blessing at the end of a long day. Otherwise, however, we recorded the age and sex of all green crabs and dealt with them humanely in line with DFO guidelines, as you are not permitted to release green crabs back into the estuaries. Over the two days, we caught over 2500 green crabs, which was more than enough to get a sense of how bad the problem was. This winter we are researching the best ways to start to deal with this.

Before starting our redd surveys in mid-November, we continued to monitor water quality, water level (a new protocol that we have begun, following such a droughty summer), Stream Cross Sections, and trail cameras, as well as checking up on streams and headwaters. It is necessary for us to maintain a solid understanding of the conditions throughout our watersheds, and surveys like this help us by providing data on important metrics, but also through keeping our eyes open to what is happening. Observing the watersheds we work in is a great way to notice differences and areas of concern, even if there are not necessarily numbers to back them up.

We finished up our fall/winter field season with redd surveys. Fish nests are called redds, and by collecting location data and size data on these redds we can learn a lot about not only where the fish are spawning and what stream habitats they prefer, but also how old they may be. We look for these depressions, usually about a foot in diameter, and the tailout, or the mounded gravel just downstream that was pushed out to create the depression. We had some of the highest numbers of redds we have had since we started surveying for them, which was very exciting. It is cool to see that the restoration work we spend the summer completing is making a difference.

Salty and Sweet: Good News for Salt Marsh Restoration

As you may recall, we are in the midst of a salt marsh restoration project in the DeSable estuary (background information can be found in the Fall 2024 Tidings). The biggest step forward in our efforts to restore the DeSable marsh this 2025 season involved installing brush mats within the tide path of our project site, and transplanting smooth cordgrass. The highlight of the 2024 season was installing 13 coir logs, which are large hot-dog-like structures composed of coconut fiber bound together with compostable twine. When we checked on them this spring, we discovered that the coir logs had done their job extremely well: a winding path of seawater had begun to form between them, and sediment was being deposited along the inside bends of those newly formed meanders. A further and unexpected triumph of the coir logs was the sediment being trapped within them becoming prime habitat for some of the salt-loving succulents of the marsh, including sea blite and pickleweed. These smaller succulents have helped increase sediment trapped by the coir logs, and are acting as the precursors to eventual smooth cordgrass colonization in a process called ‘facilitated succession’.

The sand bars forming between the coir logs remained relatively bare, due to the constant changing nature of the tides. It is a harsh environment, but prime real-estate for salt marsh plants like our smooth cordgrass to begin their colonization. Without any intervention, this process would take place over the course of 5-7 years, the end result being a new patch of grass establishing and continuing to spread throughout appropriate coastal areas. To give nature a little push, we identified a healthy patch of salt marsh within the DeSable estuary system and harvested small patches of grass within the expansive marsh. Smooth cordgrass is extremely hearty, so there's no harm being done to the marsh by harvesting these small donations to our planting site. The bare spots we have collected from are anticipated to be filled in with new grass shoots as early as this coming summer.

In total, we transplanted 18 plugs, measuring roughly 20cm by 20 cm. Each month following transplantation, we did an up-close survey of the plugs to evaluate how they were faring in the new environment. By the last survey of the season in August, there were no transplant casualties! The plugs seemed to be thriving, with some already starting to grow rhizomes underground to make new grass shoots in the available sediment, and some being well enough to flower (we'd like to think of this as a token of their appreciation for the roomy new living quarters).

Transplanting was not the only step forward for our restoration efforts for DeSable. To continue encouraging sedimentation within the project site so we could continue planting, we evaluated our options. Our most logical approach was to install more coir logs. While we found this effective for sedimentation in the previous year, it is a method with a hefty price tag. So, we decided to go for a more experimental option. In the research conducted in the summer of 2024 within the University of Prince Edward Island greenhouse facilities, substrate planting tests showed there wasn't a significant effect on smooth cordgrass growth using spruce branches fashioned into brush mats. Brush matting is a cost-effective sediment accumulation method primarily used in freshwater streams to build up sediment where the water is running one way. This method lacks evidence-based research in tidal environments, where the water is flowing two ways due to tidal action. Therefore, we decided to do some of our *own* evidence-based research and give it a try!

With permission from a very kind landowner in DeSable we harvested black spruce branches, the best material for brush matting. Back at the project site we installed the spruce branches in such a way that when the tide rises, the sediment can flow freely over top of the needles, and when the tide goes out, the needles catch and hang onto the sediment flowing by. In time, the goal is to have the sediment accumulate to form more real estate for salt marsh plant colonization.

We hope that springtime will bring us good tidings of strong transplants and hefty sediment accumulation so we can continue our restoration efforts. Wish us luck!

Photo Contest

Our **2026 photo contest** is open for submissions! This year's categories are: Land, Water, Plants, and Animals. Send in your snaps before March 31, 2026, or find some time in the next few weeks to take a few photos to submit if you don't have anything in mind. Find the rules here and don't hesitate to email sswawildlife@gmail.com with any questions. We hope to see all your wonderful entries coming in over the next month, like Ron Arvidson's Grand Prize photo from 2025 (right).

South Shore Snowshoe

Our annual South Shore Snowshoe event is fast approaching. On February 24th we will meet at the **Tryon River Trail on Rte 10 at 1:30** and go for a snowshoe around Barbara Green's field, which is managed in cooperation with the Island Nature Trust through their volunteer Conservation Guardian program. There will be hot chocolate and a bonfire, weather permitting. We hope to see you there!

Thanks and Reminders

In the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge that the land upon which we live and work is unceded Mi'kmaq territory. Epekwitk (Prince Edward Island), Mi'kma'ki, is covered by the historic Treaties of Peace and Friendship. We pay our respects to the Indigenous Mi'kmaq People who have occupied this Island for over 12,000 years; past, present and future.

Thanks as well to all of our members and supporters. We appreciate your participation in and support for the work that we do. Feel free to email with any questions for us about the articles in this newsletter or anything else to do with local environmental concerns at sswawildlife@gmail.com.

Our iNaturalist project is still running. If you are an iNaturalist user, please join us and upload photos of plants and animals you find! We can use this data to understand the ecosystems that make up our watershed and keep an eye out for invasive species. If you are interested in joining the iNaturalist community, we would recommend it. The app helps you to identify plants and animals which are then commented on by other members so that we can build our communal knowledge.

We would like to remind you that the 2 Billion Trees project is still running (see the Winter 2023-24 issue of *Tidings* for more information). Planting is underway and will continue for a total of six planting years up until 2031. Each year the goal is to plant approximately 300,000 trees. If you would like to apply, it can be done over the phone or online at this provincial webpage: PEI - 2 Billion Trees Landowner Application. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out: PEI 2 Billion Trees Coordinator, Hailey Blacquiere (hdblacquiere@gov.pe.ca or 902-916-1785) or PEI Watershed Alliance 2 Billion Trees Coordinator, Kassidy Matheson (peiwaprogramcoordinator@gmail.com or 902-940-9239).

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Wildlife Conservation Fund
Skills PEI: Post-Secondary Student Program
Jobs for Youth
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Department of Forest, Fish & Wildlife

Other:
PEI Watershed Alliance
Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund
Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund

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And for all other donations made to SSWA – so greatly appreciated.

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SOUTH SHORE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

Registered charity #81018-9407-RR0001

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

(NOTE: RENEWALS ARE NOT DUE UNTIL MARCH)

Name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Civic address: _____

Mailing address: _____ **Email:** _____

Membership fee **$ 10.00**

Donation **$ _____**

TOTAL **$ _____**

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE SOUTH SHORE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION!

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