

Indian Bay Ecosystem News

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Mission: "We believe that all of us together have a shared responsibility to conserve and enhance our wilderness heritage, that our forests, rivers and streams form the life blood of our cultural and economic identity, and that this priceless gift must be preserved, protected and passed on as our legacy to generations yet unborn."

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Welcome to the first issue of Indian Bay Ecosystem News. This newsletter will be used to share information with the community about the activities of the Indian Bay Ecosystem Corp. (IBEC), and other users and managers of the Indian Bay watershed. Keep yourself informed on the latest research findings, enforcement reports, new and proposed regulations and more! In this issue:

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What Exactly Do We Do? History and Activities of the Indian Bay Ecosystem Corp.

History

The Indian Bay watershed ecosystem is a freshwater system encompassing more than 17 ponds, surrounding lands and the waters that run into these ponds, into Indian Bay River and then into Indian Bay, the estuary where fresh and saltwater meet in Bonavista Bay. IBEC began when community members became concerned about pollution, habitat and fish stock declines, particularly Indian Bay's trophy-sized brook trout, renowned across Newfoundland and beyond. With the help of local Development Associations and other agencies they set up a non-profit corporation in 1988 to work towards stopping the declines.

Habitat clean-up and restoration

IBEC began by removing garbage from the ecosystem. More than 5000 bags of garbage were gathered and trucked out, as well equipment left behind by Bowaters. Signs were put up and a public education campaign launched to encourage not to litter. Dams were removed that were stopping fish migration and bridges that had fallen into streams, or in danger of collapse, were repaired. Bridges were reconstructed at Skippers, Anchors Brook and Bear Cave brooks in the summer of 2004 by a crew of local workers, with funding from Atlantic Canada Opportunity Agency under the Strategic Community Investment Fund (fisheries) and materials provided by the provincial Department of Natural Resources.

Research and information

Gathering information about the Indian Bay watershed has been a major focus. Sound management decisions can only be made using the best available information. IBEC's research program has concentrated primarily on freshwater fisheries, including brook trout, salmon, unaniche, the endangered killifish and most recently char. These studies are available for review in the IBEC office. In addition to gathering valuable information students from our area have gained experience and gone on to complete university undergraduate and graduate degrees while studying close to home.

Fisheries management

Through IBEC DFO fisheries managers have listened to local input and, at the request of IBEC, implemented special fisheries management regulations in Indian Bay waters.

The group has input into inland fisheries management province-wide as members of both trout and salmon advisory committees for Newfoundland and Labrador. Research and monitoring of trout populations indicates that average fish sizes have been increasing as a result of these efforts.



Enforcement

Beginning in 2003, through an agreement with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, IBEC staff Clayton Matthews and Nat Dyke were trained as Compliance Monitors. IBEC Monitors can issue both warnings and charges for fisheries violations.

Forestry and land use planning

After over ten years of work on research, habitat and fisheries management improvements IBEC turned its attention to the other users of the ecosystem that impact the health of the watershed environment. A Crown Land Use Plan was developed to concentrate cabin development in designated areas, leaving other areas of the watershed protected from development. IBEC also met with logging companies to discuss their plans and negotiated for extended buffers around all ponds in the cutting area and for the protection of designated pristine study areas. Others measures have been put in place with the designation of the watershed as Indian Bay water supply area. See page 4 for a forestry update.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Indian Bay Ecosystem Corp (IBEC) Annual General Meeting

Thursday April 14th 7 pm

IBEC office, Indian Bay

Everyone is welcome!

Become a member and vote for your local Board of Directors.
Discuss the new Trout Management Plan for Insular Newfoundland.

Indian Bay Centre for Cooperative Ecosystem Studies

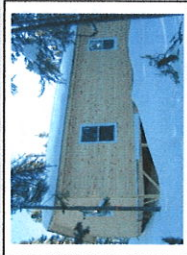
IBEC has developed close working relationships with several universities, including Memorial, Dalhousie and Lakehead, to name a few, to conduct research projects that help to improve the management of the watershed and its resources. IBEC has hosted 12 graduate students and 130 undergraduates, many from the local area. Student theses have examined important issues related to brook trout, anadromous and resident salmon, and other species. Studies have been conducted from the IBEC field station at No. 2 Pond.

Plans are now underway to build more laboratory facilities, accommodation and an interpretation centre, to create a nationally important field research centre (the Indian Bay Centre for Cooperative Ecosystem Studies, or ICCES). The new Centre will allow a broader research focus on the ecosystem as a whole, with studies relating not just to fisheries but also to land-based species and their habitats, invertebrates, plants, anthropology and other subjects.

A business plan for the Centre was completed in 2004. Construction began in the fall with the construction of a new laboratory on No. 2 Pond and a trail between the existing field research centre and the new lab.



Local crew constructing the facility



New No. 2 laboratory

The next stage is to build chalets next to the laboratory to house visiting university professors and students. The goal is to create a world class long-term research and educational facility that will result in better resource management and a stronger local voice in conservation, while creating jobs and protecting the Indian Bay watershed, an area of significant social and cultural importance to our communities.

Atlantic Salmon Report

Of 186 scheduled salmon rivers in the Province stock assessment programs are conducted on only 20. In 2004 returns increased in 14 of 18 rivers where a change could be seen. Middle Brook, near Gambo, is considered the indicator stream for Indian Bay. Returns in Middle Brook increased (27% for large and 88% for small salmon) from 2003 to 2004. Increases in 2003 and 2004 follow four years of declines. Middle Brook returns rose to 1600 total fish (small and large) in 2004, still down from nearly 3000 fish returning in 1998. Throughout the Province returns remain far lower (less than one-third) of what they were in the 1970s.

According to catch statistics catches in Indian Bay Brook over the past decade have fallen from a peak of 1,349 salmon in 1996 (retained and released) to a low of 230 in 2003, rising to 343 in 2004. Number of rod days (reported angler fishing days) also declined from 2,829 in 1994 to 1,110 in 2004. The majority of salmon caught in Indian Bay waters are less than 63 cm in length. Large salmon catches have declined from a peak of 27 in 1996 to 4 in 2003 and 2004.

Arrests associated with commercial poaching operations in the St. Brendan's area are thought to have contributed to 2004 increases in Middle Brook/Terra Nova region, along with improved smolt production and ocean survival. DFO reports that reducing illegal fishing can make a big difference. Harry's River, where a stock was in danger of extinction, has seen increased returns after local volunteers launched an education and publicity campaign about the situation. Community groups have also encouraged stricter penalties in the courts.

Forestry

Two major companies have cutting rights in the Indian Bay ecosystem – Corner Brook Pulp & Paper (CP&P) and Abitibi Consolidated.

Abitibi has been logging in the western portion of the watershed, having moved past Hungry Brook along the southern portion of Fourth Pond, towards Southern Pond. Abitibi harvesting has extended to the boundary of CP&P's license, which include both Southern, Little and Big Wings Ponds. Roads have been built that extend towards both of these ponds. Through negotiations with IBEC, CP&P has agreed in a written

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to leave a 150 m managed buffer around Little Wings Pond and to remove Southern and Big Wings from their 5 year harvest plan, leaving these areas pristine for study purposes. Areas between and to the west of Southern and Little Wings were scheduled for harvest in the current 5 year plan but will not likely be harvested, according to company representative Matt Churchill, until after 2006. Maps showing roads and areas scheduled for harvest can be viewed at the IBEC office.

Trout

Analysis of data collected by IBEC Field Technicians show that fishing efforts in the watershed has declined significantly since the early 1990s, from 20,000 hours annually down to 4-5,000. Data also indicate a substantial size increase over the past 10 yrs, from an average of 22 cm to 30 cm. Some ponds have seen greater increases than others. The % of the catch that is ovaniche has also increased, most of which are released. 20-30% of fish caught have not yet reached maturity.

New fisheries management regulations provide the ability for DFO, upon the request of organizations such as IBEC, to utilize special management measures such as separate management by species (e.g. ovaniche) or by length limit. Minimum size limits have been proposed as one way to address the harvest of immature fish that have not yet spawned. **Fisheries management changes will be discussed at the April 14th AGM. Join us!**



Resource Bulletins

Moose

Research suggests that moose populations in the region have declined considerably. A 2003 census suggests the moose population had fallen to 56% of previous levels in Area 23. Hunter success rates have also fallen, with only 55% of those with moose licenses in 2004 reporting a successful hunt.

Poaching is seen to be a major factor in moose declines in Area 23. An investigation into a recent poaching incident in the Indian Bay area is ongoing. An article in the Gander Beacon announced last week that as result of the poaching problem licenses in Bonavista North will be reduced from 800 to 600 in 2005.

Conservation officer Barry White emphasizes that the public must take responsibility for addressing the poaching problem. Despite increased enforcement presence in the Indian Bay watershed enforcement staff cannot be everywhere all the time and are faced with difficult investigations. Residents can help by calling Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 or Gambo conservation office at 674-4625 with information about illegal kills/hunting.

Violations in the Indian Bay Watershed

2004: 7 warning tickets, 4 summary offence tickets, 3 court informations for big game, and 38 complaints
2003: 3 warnings, 2 summary offences (ATVs on bogs), 35 complaints