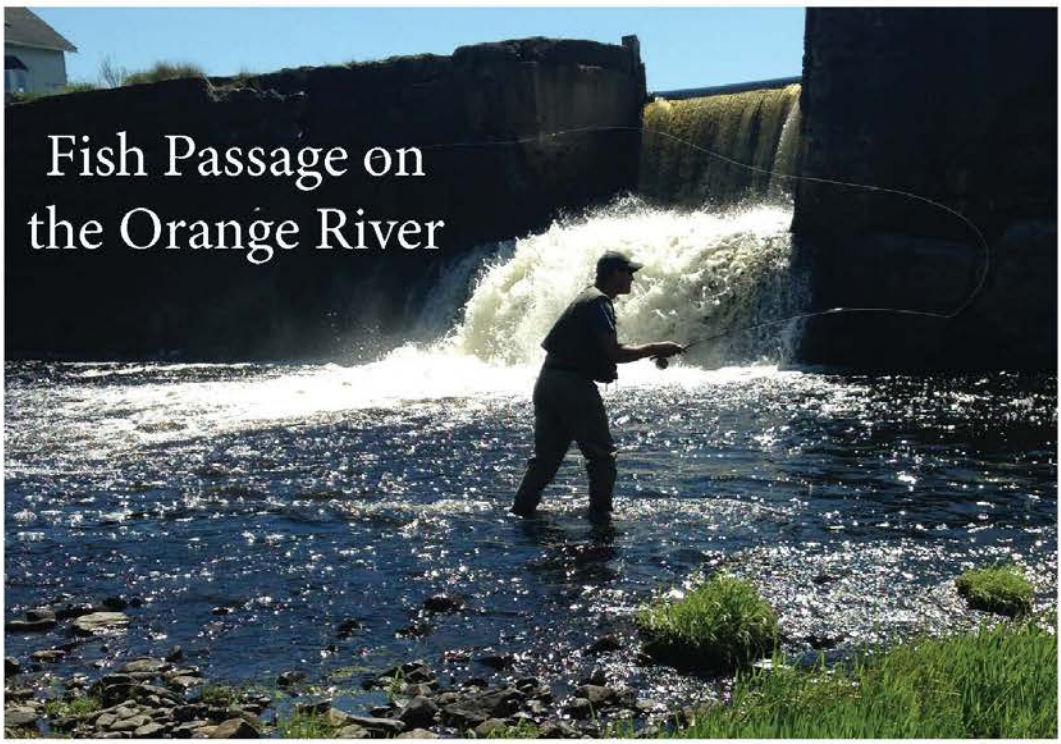
PROTECTING RIVERS AND WILD ATLANTIC SALMON SINCE 1982

INTERVALE

DOWNEAST SALMON FEDERATION

Summer 2016



Fish Passage on the Orange River

DSF recently acquired a historic mill site and home in Whiting and plans are underway to renovate this notable home and improve the heritage fishery in the center of this beautiful New England village. There is considerable potential for this prominent corner in the center of Whiting and the river that runs through it. Fish passage restoration in the Orange River will rejuvenate river herring populations (alewife and blueback) and other sea-run fish such as shad, Atlantic salmon, eels, lamprey, and brook trout. A healthy fishery will revitalize the ecosystem and provide a source of recreation and income for local fishermen.

The idea of creating fish passage on the Orange River is not new. An 1869 report from the Commissioners of Fisheries states: "*This small river was once well peopled with salmon and alewives, and shad are mentioned in an act for protection in 1828. Three dams built near the head of tide, completely destroyed the salmon, and the alewives were so reduced that not more than a dozen were taken yearly. In 1861 a movement was begun by W. S. Peavey, Esq., and others of Whiting, to restore the fish. Fishways were that year built over the dams, and 31 alewives were placed in the lakes at the head of the river. The numbers of fish have since been yearly as follows: From 1862-1864, very few; in 1865 and '66 increasing; in 1867 very abundant, crowding the fishways all day long.*" These fishways have long since disappeared and so have the migratory fish and the benefits they once provided.

Our next step is to hire an engineering team to work with DSF biologists and our partners to complete a feasibility study on the dam to explore any and all costs related to providing adequate fish passage. As we're still seeking funding for this study, this phase of the process could take time to complete. If you have any questions or would like to contribute to the project, please call (207)598-8474 or email dwayne@mainesalmonrivers.org.

MEANDERS

"Choosing to save a river is more often an act of passion than of careful calculation. You make the choice because the river has touched your life in an intimate and irreversible way, because you are unwilling to accept its loss."
–David Bolling

Fry Stocking and Smolt Trapping

Spring is an exciting time of year for us fisheries folks at DSF. It is during the spring season that we stock fry from our Pleasant River and East Machias hatcheries, and in partnership with the Maine Department of Marine Resources, conduct our annual smolt trapping survey on the East Machias River.

This spring, DSF stocked 58,000 salmon fry. Some of those fry were stocked in the early spring, but the majority were kept in the hatchery for a few more weeks so they could feed and grow, in the hopes that stocking these larger fry would result in better survival in some of the larger mainstem parts of the river.

Smolt trapping offered some great news in 2016! After the initial numbers were crunched, we estimated over 1,800 smolts left the East Machias River this spring. This is the highest population of smolt we have seen since we began smolt trapping the East Machias River! We are also finding that stocking parr is producing double the amount of smolts when compared to unfed fry stocking in other Downeast rivers. Stay tuned for more in the next newsletter issue, or visit our website for more information!

Volunteer with DSF

With all we have going on here at the Downeast Salmon Federation we are looking for extra hands to help out. Volunteering is a terrific way to get to know us better while being directly involved in fisheries conservation. Whether you have experience in education, computers, technology, angling, history, biology, or carpentry, there are plenty of opportunities to pitch in.

If you are interested in volunteering, you can find a volunteer form on our website at mainesalmonrivers.org under the "Support DSF" section of the main menu. Volunteer forms are also available at both EMARC and the Wild Salmon Resource Center. Contact our Membership and Development Coordinator with any questions about volunteering by emailing heather@mainesalmonrivers.org or calling (207) 255-0676.

There are a wide range of opportunities to help with fish stocking, hatchery work, fin clipping, stewardship, technology, and much more. Please get in touch with us if you'd like to get involved. We always appreciate the help of our volunteers!

Boat for Sale!

At 15' by 4'8", this expertly crafted wherry is a stunner. Asking $8,000 or best offer. All proceeds benefit DSF. For all inquiries please email heather@mainesalmonrivers.org or call (207) 255-0676.

Alewife Monitoring

During an early warm spell in the last week of April word started coming in that they were here. Schools of alewives were returning to eastern Maine. Led on by warm winds and thawed streams, harvesters and monitors began the spring rite of fish counting.

DSF entered the fray with a new full-time Alewife Ambassador, a seasonal hire in collaboration with the DMR, and three camera "counters" that started recording the movement of alewives and blueback herring up the Denny's River into Meddybemps Lake, through the newly constructed Pokey Dam fishway on the East Machias, and into Donnell Pond in Franklin. We will combine this video data with human counting, photography, and physical sampling to help better understand the needs and potential of the region's river herring runs.

We stayed in close contact with counters in Surry, Penobscot, and Pembroke. DSF staff visited runs with school groups from around Washington and Hancock counties. On these trips some children

held their first living alewife as the kids helped pass fish up unseasonably low streams.

Though fish have only just started to slow down on the Pleasant, Union, and Machias Rivers, counters are already reporting a downstream flood of tiny young-of-the-year fish, beginning the first leg of their own long journeys.

The Parr Project Enters the Fifth Year

As we enter the summer of 2016, we are now part-way through the 5th year of the Parr Project. In the past five years, we have managed to stock nearly half a million parr, raised to the standards of the late Peter Gray. If you have followed DSF through the lifespan of this project, you have no doubt heard that name a lot. Starting back in the 1970's, Peter pioneered the recovery of the River Tyne in Scotland. His methods, adopted here in East Machias, Maine 40 years later, offer hope to the almost non-existent salmon of the East Machias River, and the state of Maine.

Many discoveries have been made over the past five years. First of all, our community really cares about salmon. This project has not been a small undertaking, and were it not for the community staying involved in the effort, we would not be looking forward to the next five to ten years of operation. Second, we can raise an extraordinary amount of fish in this small hatchery, and it is making a difference. This past spring, on the heels of releasing nearly 200,000 healthy parr into the river, we saw our largest run of smolt migrating from the river to the ocean since the beginning of this project. There are more juvenile salmon in the East Machias River than there have been in decades. Third, there are a lot of passionate and committed people working in the salmon recovery program.

This project happens not only because of our organization's members, donors, and our community members, but also due to our collaborators from the state, federal and NGO communities involved in salmon recovery here in the US and abroad. These organizations offer support by delivering (not to mention rearing) our eggs and offering stocking trucks in the fall (the US Fish and Wildlife Service). They also aid by assessing data collected through this project and offering supervision and support for electrofishing surveys and smolt trapping (Maine DMR), as well as lending DSF two smolt traps to help assess the project's success (NOAA Fisheries). This project would not have gotten off the ground in the first place without our collaboration with the Atlantic Salmon Federation and the North Atlantic Salmon Fund, and we look forward to working with these great organizations moving forward. We are looking forward to the next 5+ years of the Parr Project, and seeing Atlantic salmon, the king of game fish, start returning to our rivers in Downeast Maine in the years to come.

Director Receives Visionary Award

Each year the Gulf of Maine Council recognizes efforts by individuals, groups or organizations that seek to protect, enhance, and restore the ecosystem of the Gulf of Maine region and to safeguard and improve the well being of the communities that depend on its resources. Our own Executive Director, Dwayne Shaw, was nominated and received one of three prestigious Maine Visionary awards. The Visionary Award recognizes the recipient's innovation, creativity, and commitment to protecting our marine environment.

Dwayne Shaw was recognized for his tenure with the Downeast Salmon Federation, which he joined in 1989, and where he has served as Executive Director since 2001. Dwayne has overseen the growth of the Downeast Salmon Federation into a powerhouse for fisheries restoration in eastern Maine. His accomplishments include the removal of dams on both the Pleasant and East Machias Rivers and the conversion of the previous hydroelectric facilities located there into river-specific wild Atlantic salmon hatcheries, research centers and administrative offices.

Dwayne has championed a holistic approach to salmon restoration, aquatic ecosystems and a host of anadromous fisheries. Through his work with DSF, considerable funding has been raised for habitat restoration (particularly for fish passage) and he has been instrumental in establishing powerful coalitions, including state and federal agencies, fisheries groups, and the Passamaquoddy tribe. These groups are currently working together to ensure fish passage advocacy, with particular regard to the relicensing of the hydroelectric facility on the Union River. Due to his directorship, the Downeast Salmon Federation is a founding partner in the Downeast Fisheries Partnership and has established sites along the Downeast Fisheries Trail.

DSF Launches Major River Conservation Campaign

There's little so frustrating as seeing a big opportunity pass you by because you don't have the time or resources to go after it. We have an extraordinary opportunity to protect a substantial chunk of the riparian corridors of the major salmon rivers in Washington Country. The frustration is that it would require at least one person working flat out to make this happen. Unfortunately, DSF doesn't have a person to spare—but it will soon.

The five main salmon rivers in Washington Country are the Dennys, East Machias, Machias, Pleasant, and the Narraguagus. These are among the wildest, least degraded rivers—and the most beautiful—remaining in the lower 48. They drain a vast (1.4 million acre) forest that has been and continues to be logged, but is otherwise largely undeveloped. The rivers don't encounter development until they approach the coast where most of the region's towns and villages are sited. They then flow into the Gulf of Maine feeding exceptionally rich tidal estuaries and bays that support high quality wildlife habitat and nationally significant bird-nesting sites and fisheries critical to the cultural and economic life of the local communities.

In recent years, large blocks of land in the rivers' upper watersheds, as well as smaller, residential-sized parcels lower down river, have been coming onto the market at very attractive prices. While nationally, there is great interest in conserving land here—the biological and aesthetic values are so great—DSF hasn't had anyone teeing-up deals that national groups could run with. It takes a tremendous amount of work tracking the market, building relationships with landowners, brokering deals, and putting packages together that would excite a national organization or major donor enough to put millions of dollars into. It takes serious boots on the ground to make these kind of deals happen.

Not wanting to miss these opportunities—land prices won't stay low forever—DSF launched a three year campaign to conserve 35 miles of river frontage. To run the campaign, we needed a director for our Downeast Rivers Land Trust who could devote him or herself full-time to the effort. In early June, the U.S. Endowment for Forest and Communities awarded DSF a substantial grant to fund the new position.

Job announcements are out, resumes are coming in, and sometime in the next several months we'll have someone who will be making a direct and major impact on the rivers, fish, and communities of eastern Maine.

Help us make it happen: If you are interested in the job, or know someone who might be, check out the job announcement on our website and pass it along.

Staff and Board News

DSF would like to thank Paul Hermann for his numerous years of service on the board. Paul has been a staunch advocate of the Parr Project throughout the years, donating his time to help educate others on the Project and the history of sport fishing in downeast Maine. Paul has also donated his reels for the benefit of the project and given many of his own items away to the Downeast Salmon Federation to be used at EMARC. Paul is helping to create a fly fishing collection in the renovated EMARC building to illustrate the history of the King of Sport Fish in Maine.

Sheila Tatangelo resigned from the DSF Board of Directors in 2016. Sheila served on the DSF Board from 2001 to 2016. During her 15 year tenure she provided enthusiastic support of our mission - particularly our land trust - as well as serving on the Policies Committee. Sheila continues her support as a volunteer when able, and her presence on the Board is missed.

*In-ter-vale n. [a blending of INTERVAL + VALE] [Americanism, Chiefly New England] low, flat land between hills or along a river. Webster's New World Dictionary

DOWNEAST SALMON FEDERATION
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Until the end of October, DSF will have a physical presence at the literal crossroads of Downeast Maine. Partnering with the Union River Salmon Association, Union River Watershed Coalition, and the Frenchman Bay Conservancy we have leased a downtown field office on the banks of the Union River. With the 109 year-old, 70-foot high Leonard Lake dam currently being evaluated by FERC for relicensing, we decided to spend some time this summer focusing on the Union River watershed and offering a location for river and fish minded folk to gather and envision what the river and community could (hopefully will) be like with healthier, more productive fisheries. The highly visible location will also give DSF and our partners exposure to lots of new faces.

Our current hours for the Union River Office are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10am - 3pm. We look forward to seeing you down by the river.

Smokehouse Tour

In its inaugural spring the smoker served smoked alewives and smelts to visitors on the banks of the East Machias, Orange, and Orland rivers. Students at the Bay School in Blue Hill prepared and feasted on fish after visiting and helping spawners make it up low water into Wights and Pierces ponds. Just a little further East, students from the banks of Patten Stream - also known as the Surry Elementary School - prepared more fish for the racks in the smokehouse. For much of the spring the students in Surry had followed the progress of alewives up and over the stream's brand new stone fishway.

These school programs and celebrations have linked students and community members to their spring runs and to the run's traditional place in the culture of Downeast Maine. Keep an eye out for the summer and fall smoker schedule.

WILD RIVERS MATCHING GIFT CHALLENGE

From now until the end of the summer, you have the opportunity to double your donation. An anonymous donor will be matching gifts over $100 on a 1:1 basis until we reach our goal of raising $20,000 for river and fisheries conservation. This means that your $100 contribution will be matched with an additional $100, or a gift of $2,500 will result in a total of $5,000. Help us take advantage of this opportunity to double your donation by making a special gift this summer!