PROTECTING WATER, WILDLIFE, & PUBLIC ACCESS SINCE 1982

INTERVALE

DOWNEAST SALMON FEDERATION

Spring 2016

Union River Dam Relicensing

Twenty-five years ago, the two dams on the Union River came up for federal relicensing. Concerned fishermen and residents formed the Union Salmon Association (USA) to lobby for fish passage over the dam. USA was successful—the dams' new license required a fish passage. However, after the license was issued, the operator at the time convinced the regulatory agency that they could get fish over the dam without the required fish passage, the agency gave its assent and no fish passage was built. Instead, the operator caught the fish and trucked them around the dam.

Two things happened. First, sea-run fish populations crashed. Second, because there were no fish, the population of Union River fisherfolk also crashed—no boys and girls born in the 1990s have grown up fishing on the banks of the Union River to take the places of their parents or grandparents as they've moved on.

The dams' license is again up for renewal and again we have a once in a generation opportunity to require fish passage over the dam. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is the licensing agency and, to be understated about it, their regulatory process is full of the proverbial red tape. Working with Maine Rivers, DSF has hired a consultant, Doug Watts, who specializes in the dam relicensing process. Doug's job is to keep on top of the process, submit comments on our behalf and maintain our legal standing in the administrative process.

We are also working with USA to organize residents living in or near the watershed. They'll be attending meetings, writing op-eds in the newspaper and letters to FERC in support of fish passage. This time, we're going to make it happen. Contact DSF if you'd like to be part of the action.

MEANDERS

"Ten percent of the big fish still remain. There are still some blue whales. There are still some krill in Antarctica. There are a few oysters in Chesapeake Bay. Half the coral reefs are still in pretty good shape, a jeweled belt around the middle of the planet. There's still time, but not a lot, to turn things around."
Sylvia Earle

Smokin' on Wheels

A while ago, somebody around here had this crazy idea of putting a fish smoker on wheels and taking it around the state to teach folks about sea-run fish. Not only the fish but also the threats to their habitat and what could be done to help the fish. Not to mention give them a taste of one of those sea-run fish freshly smoked. Well, this crazy idea turned into a great idea and as this article is being written, our smoker on wheels is under construction by a firm way south of the Mason-Dixon Line that knows all about smoking ribs—so we figured they'd do a good job building a smoker for fish.

The actual smoker will be mounted on the back of a trailer that is equipped with a full kitchen. We can head, gut, and clean the fish; brine them; and then smoke them, all in the trailer. The kitchen will be fully permitted and the fish guaranteed damn good. We'll sell the fish at

events, fish frys, and local food markets when presented with the opportunity.

Keep an eye on the event calendar on our website (mainesalmonrivers.org) for the dates and locations for the trailer. Come out for some smoked alewives, blueback herring, smelt—whatever is running up our streams this coming spring and summer.

The smoker was built with funds provided by the State of Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Broad Reach Fund (through the Maine Community Foundation) and Manomet. Thanks to all.

Smelt and Alewife Work

The Downeast Salmon Federation plans to continue its smelt observation work this spring throughout Hancock and Washington counties. If you enjoy dipping smelts regularly, or are eager to make population observations, please contact DSF at dsf@mainesalmonrivers.org for volunteer opportunities!

DSF has received funds to conduct research on river herring in the East Machias River and other locations in downeast Maine. One of the methods include an underwater video monitoring system that will be used to count alewives migrating through the recently repaired Pokey Dam fishway. The goal of the system is to evaluate how many river herring are successfully traveling to that point in the watershed, and beyond. Interested in lending a hand? Please contact dsf@mainesalmonrivers.org for volunteer opportunities.

Parr Project Enters its 5th Year

It is hard to believe, but we are entering the fifth year of the Parr Project at EMARC. The Project started off in earnest in 2012 with around 52,000 parr going into the East Machias River, reared using innovative techniques at the Peter Gray Hatchery at EMARC, with help and support from the North Atlantic Salmon Fund, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, and Peter Gray himself. Fast forward to 2016 and we are sitting on 345,000 Atlantic salmon eggs, and gearing up for another great year!

2016 has proven to be a rather warm winter. Due to these warm temperatures, we received our salmon eggs from Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery over a month earlier than in 2015. Now that the eggs are incubating in their natal river water, their development will slow down and synchronize with the development of wild salmon eggs in the river. Hatching from eyed egg to alevin typically occurs in the first part of March, with emergence of alevin from their substrate incubation boxes to their rearing tanks as fry in early May.

We have high hopes for a lot of smolt leaving the East Machias River this spring, and for the first time since this project started, we should start to see the first few adults returning to the river to spawn this fall. These numbers will likely be low to begin with, but, with any luck, we should gradually see the number of adult salmon returning to the East Machias River increase in the coming years. We are excited about this next season here at the hatchery, and we're looking forward to the community outreach and opportunities to interact with our local schools that come with it. Without community involvement, help from our local students, and financial support from our dedicated friends, this project would not be possible! To learn how you can help, or to learn more about this project, please visit our website at www.mainesalmonrivers.org.

Ben Severance

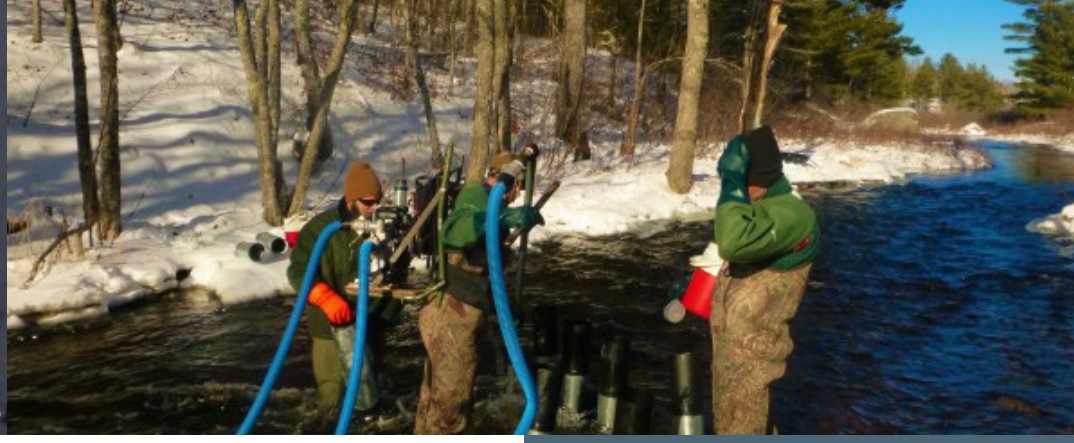
Staff and Board News

Michelle Wright joined DSF in January as our new bookkeeper. She has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration from the University of Maine at Machias and over 20 years of bookkeeping experience. She resides in Addison and enjoys camping and boating with her family.

DSF Board Director Gerry Zegers has recently been elected as President of the Maine Council of the Atlantic Salmon Federation.

We are thrilled to announce that Tora Johnson has joined the board of DSF. Tora is a faculty member of the University of Maine at Machias and brings a wealth of knowledge, having completed her doctorate in Natural Resource Policy.

Ben Severance



EMARC Wet Lab

In 2000, the Downeast Salmon Federation acquired an abandoned hydroelectric building on the East Machias River. Since then, we have invested over $1.2 million in renovating and remodeling it. Today, the East Machias Aquatic Resource Center (EMARC) houses a world-class hatchery (raising endangered Atlantic salmon), a community presentation area, offices, a conference room, library, and wet lab.

We intend to develop this facility into a regional hub of research, education, and community engagement in riverine fisheries and ecology for eastern Maine. There are no other similar research facilities in the region. We have formal agreements with the nearby University of Maine Machias and Washington Academy to partner with us. Students from both institutions will volunteer, work as interns and conduct research projects using our facilities—especially in our wet lab.

The wet lab will have water from the East Machias River piped into it so that students and scientists have set up experiments in the lab with "real" water; they can do their field research indoors.

The wet lab, an associated library and the elevator are the final remaining projects we need to complete for EMARC to be fully operational. For the wet lab we are working hard to raise the funding to purchase and install all the scientific instruments, lab benches, and supplies to make it fully functional. We intend make it all happen this year.

In the meantime, come down to East Machias and visit us. We're always excited to have visitors.

Pleasant River Restoration Efforts

It's that time of year again! On a rather brisk January day, 64,000 Atlantic salmon eggs were planted (in partnership with the Maine Department of Marine Resources)into the gravel of the upper Pleasant River. These eggs will incubate in the river and emerge naturally with the young salmon that were deposited by returning adults.

Eggs are once again being incubated at our Pleasant River Hatchery. This year there will be around 52,000 eggs at our facility. If you remember, in 2015 unfed fry and fed fry (held three weeks longer in the hatchery) were stocked throughout the Pleasant River Watershed. The fed fry were stocked in bigger water mainstem sections of the Pleasant located in the lower parts of the river system. An electrofishing survey last fall showed young of the year (yoy) populations at these lower sites above median densities (the median of population estimates from all previous years). Also interesting to note is at one of the sites the yoy density was the highest ever recorded! Stay tuned: more fed fry supplementation may be in order!

Salmon in the Schools

Each year, the Downeast Salmon Federation pays a visit to local schools with a very special delivery; 200 endangered Atlantic salmon eggs. The students care for the eggs until they hatch and grow to become fry. They then release their fry with the hope that in a few years' time, their salmon will return as adults to the very river they released them in. This is all part of Salmon in the Schools, a program run by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. DSF staff assume the role of facilitator to these young salmon enthusiasts. We give presentations to participating classrooms on the salmon lifecycle, the difference between incubating salmon in the hatchery and the wild, and the importance of good quality salmon habitat. We don't just talk to the students about salmon, we also get them doing hands on activities like a hooks and ladders game that shows them the trials and tribulations of being a migratory fish, and lets them play the role of fisheries manager. We demonstrate the importance of clean gravel to incubating eggs and alevin with a porosity and permeability activity, and we let them really get their hands dirty when we determine the quality of the water they release their fish into by doing a real macro invertebrate survey in the spring.

We will be visiting eight area schools this year, with more to come in the future. If you are involved with or know of a school you would like to see get involved in the program, give us a call and we can get the ball rolling!

*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
P.O. Box 201
Columbia Falls, Maine 04623

SMELT FRY

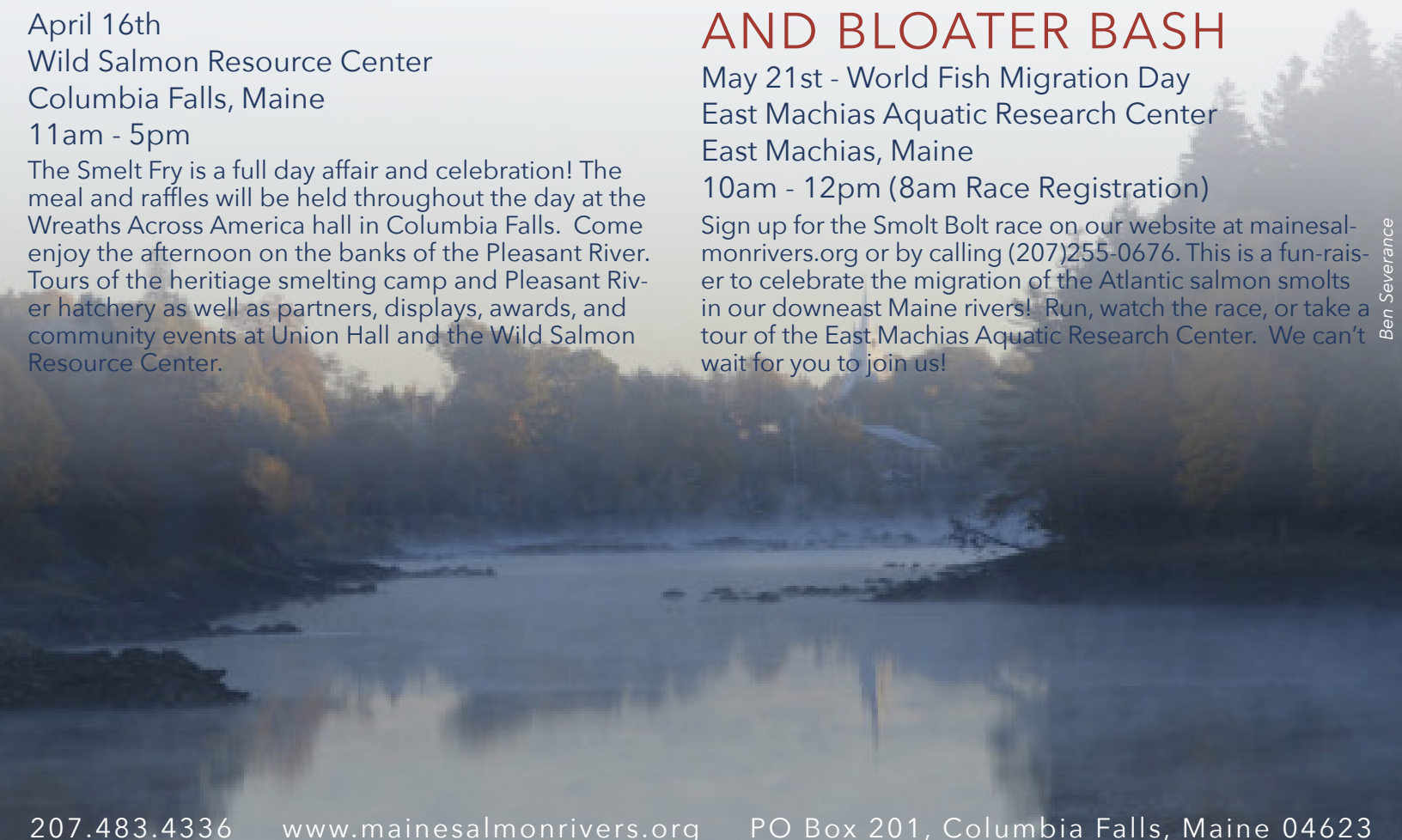
April 16th
Wild Salmon Resource Center
Columbia Falls, Maine
11am - 5pm

The Smelt Fry is a full day affair and celebration! The meal and raffles will be held throughout the day at the Wreaths Across America hall in Columbia Falls. Come enjoy the afternoon on the banks of the Pleasant River. Tours of the heritiage smelting camp and Pleasant River hatchery as well as partners, displays, awards, and community events at Union Hall and the Wild Salmon Resource Center.

SMOLT BOLT AND BLOATER BASH

May 21st - World Fish Migration Day
East Machias Aquatic Research Center
East Machias, Maine
10am - 12pm (8am Race Registration)

Sign up for the Smolt Bolt race on our website at mainesalmonrivers.org or by calling (207)255-0676. This is a fun-raiser to celebrate the migration of the Atlantic salmon smolts in our downeast Maine rivers! Run, watch the race, or take a tour of the East Machias Aquatic Research Center. We can't wait for you to join us!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