

Community Action Transforms Manitoulin Island's Trout Streams

Landowners, farmers, anglers, cottagers and some committed members of the public on Manitoulin Island have gotten very serious about rehabilitating local streams to improve water quality and to provide healthy habitat for trout and other coldwater fish species.



Brook trout - Photo: Matt Garvin/MNR

Banding together under the umbrella of Manitoulin Streams, this community action group has in the past four years planted 27,000 trees and shrubs, creating vegetative buffers along nearly six linear kilometres of stream bank. In total, they've restored and enhanced 277,495 square kilometers of riparian habitat.

The group has also fenced a total of almost three kilometres of stream bank to prevent cattle from trampling banks and contaminating water. To provide alternative water sources, partners have installed a number of frost-free nose pumps to allow livestock access to water

that has been taken from streams.

Working in the streams, crews have carefully added boulders and spawning gravel, built islands and pools, and added nearly 1,295 in-stream structures such as rootwads, biologs, stumps and boulders to restore 50,326 square metres of fish habitat.

Seija Deschenes, Manitoulin Streams Initiative program coordinator, describes how one Blue Jay Creek project created a spawning frenzy at Site B-52. An old dam on the creek had created a stagnant pond that increased water temperatures and destroyed spawning opportunities. The dam also prevented fish from accessing some excellent spawning sites upstream – also the source of cold water from several springs.

Volunteers helped remove the dam, stabilized the banks, planted grass and 6,000 trees and further improved 250 metres of upstream spawning beds. Photos on the program's website now show spawning fish splashing in "redds," pockets in the gravel.

"There were so many redds in the streambed, they looked like polka dots," says Deschenes. "For the first time in 80 years, salmon and trout are able to spawn in



this portion of the creek."



Redds, polka-dot looking pockets created in the stream gravel by spawning trout and salmon - Photo: Manitoulin Streams

Studies also show an overwhelming growth in invertebrates (animals without backbones, such as aquatic insects) and other fish populations in the creek.

Deschenes, assisted by Marcus Mohr, oversees the scores of stream projects, meetings, educational events, proposals, volunteers and construction activities on the island – including essay contests.

One winner was 12-year old Brett Gauthier, a seventh-grader who, with his brother Garrett, helped rehabilitate a stream on his Uncle Bob's property. He wrote: *"This experience has given me the opportunity to learn the importance of our natural habitat and community volunteerism. I am proud to say I was a part of this Manitoulin Streams project, from the beginning, and hopefully until the end, which will be a few years from now when the first adult brook trout return to lay their eggs in Norton's Creek."*

Manitoulin Stream's [website <http://www.manitoulinstreams.com>](http://www.manitoulinstreams.com) includes numerous videos and before-and-after photos that showcase a series of radically improved stream banks and waterways.

The award-winning stream rehabilitation work is going on across the island. Projects have been carried out on Manitou, Mindemoya and Kagawong rivers, Bass, Blue Jay and Mill creeks and more than 180 other coldwater streams on Manitoulin Island. So far, program partners have worked with more than 23 different landowners to rehabilitate and restore coldwater stream habitat on their properties. Even college and university students are studying fish communities, invertebrates, aquatic food webs and water quality to measure changes in ecosystem health.

Manitoulin's coldwater streams are ideal spawning sites for rainbow trout and Chinook and Coho salmon. Other species, such as suckers, smelt, and round whitefish from Lake Huron, also spawn in the streams. Historically, poor land use practices and logging severely damaged the island's coldwater stream spawning and nursery habitat.

[Click here to view a map of the project area <javascript:popUp\('/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@greatlakes/documents/images/stdprod_087860.gif'\)>](#)

The Manitoulin Streams Success Story

- Manitoulin Streams is one of the largest coldwater stream restoration initiatives ever carried out in northern Ontario – and it's a winner.
- On March 20, 2010, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) honoured the Manitoulin Streams initiative with its prestigious Mary Pickford Trophy. The trophy, named after the late Canadian actress and avid angler Mary Pickford, is awarded yearly to the top OFAH-affiliated conservation group in Ontario.
- The award follows close on the heels of the group's receipt of a bi-national State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC) Success Story Award for efforts to rehabilitate and enhance Manitoulin Island's coldwater streams. The award is presented to organizations that head environmental projects to improve the integrity of the Great Lakes or local ecosystems. The U.S. and Canadian Consul Generals presented the award in Niagara Falls, Ontario on October 22, 2008.

Some of the major partners supporting the Manitoulin Streams initiative include:

- Anishinabek-Ontario Fisheries Resource Centre Stewardship Rangers
- Boreal College, Sudbury
- Environment Canada EcoAction Program
- Industry Canada FedNor
- LaCloche Manitoulin Business Assistance Corporation
- Laurentian University, Sudbury
- Little Current Fish and Game Club
- Manitoulin Transport
- Manitoulin Streams Partnership
- Municipality of Assiginack
- Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
- Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Private landowners

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