



Wheatley River Improvement Group

August, 2011

## State of the River

*A regular feature reporting on the health of our river.*

### Watching and Learning.



#### Summer CAMP

The [Communities Aquatic Monitoring Program](#) (CAMP) is a project of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. As a result of discussions with our Nitrate Pilot Study partners, Mike van den Heuvel, Canada Research Chair in Watershed Ecological Integrity at UPEI and research scientist with the Canadian Rivers Institute, arranged for WRIG to be part of the 2011 CAMP study. This will further our objective of building dependable baseline data for the watershed.

The PEI CAMP Coordinator, Stephanie Cormier, working with WRIG Secretary Tracy Gallant and other board members,

identified 3 CAMP monitoring sites in the river and estuary where a series of seining samples were taken over the summer to record chemical conditions and identify the local fauna. Parameters include water temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen as well fish and invertebrate species. Despite early challenges posed by nets jammed with algae (a notable research finding in itself), the project forged ahead. WRIG is fortunate to have our great friends at the Hunter-Clyde Watershed Group join us in this effort. We are all learning a lot about estuary ecology in the process.

## Riparian Health Assessments Continue

Wheatley River Improvement Group and the Hunter-Clyde Watershed Group have, for the 2nd field season, employed a student to continue in 2011 with Riparian Health Assessments for various sections of streams, tributaries and the estuaries in Wheatley River and Hunter-Clyde watersheds.

Christine MacLauchlan, 3rd year UPEI Biology student, has brought enthusiasm and energy to monitoring buffer-zone conditions in the watershed to pinpoint areas that could benefit from stream restoration work or tree planting. As well, Christine has located and identified invasive species, evaluated tree cover and bank conditions, watched for beaver activity and kept an eye out for anoxic events and sources of stream sediment loading. What is learned in the Wheatley River watershed stays in the Wheatley River watershed, since the data are shared only with WRIG, for the purpose of helping us focus on restoration and assisting landowners to practice good stewardship of the watercourse and buffer-zone.

### More, More, More...

In the continuing effort to turn anecdotal data into real science, WRIG's dedicated volunteer members have again rolled up their sleeves and put on their boots, getting down and dirty with various watershed work this summer. Several

have kept DEEF's Estuary Watch Program Data sheets in an effort to capture an accurate picture of the frequency and severity of anoxic events that infect the lower reaches of the river, estuary and Rustico Bay each summer.

### No Vacation for WRIG volunteers

WRIG members are also involved in still another monitoring program, partnering with Agriculture Canada. Parameters selected for this study include phosphate levels, light and dissolved oxygen. Other members are accompanying Christine MacLauchlan and contributing to the collection of data for the Riparian Health Assessment. One member has dedicated rainy day work space for the habitat improvement projects undertaken by our field crew. WRIG members also provide maintenance of the property at Rackham's Community Pond, space for use as headquarters and equipment storage, as well as direction and leadership for the summer field crew.

### Clearer Picture

Much of this work and monitoring will continue through the first week of September and some of it later into the fall. By season's end, we will all have a much clearer picture of the environmental conditions of our Wheatley River watershed.

## Letter from the Chair

### First it's summer. Then maybe not.

Many of us must be wondering if we have really had a summer at all. However, I think most of us would agree that these temperate conditions are more human friendly better than the heat waves scorching Central Canada this year. As I look around at the fields and forests, it makes me appreciate how many beautiful shades of green surround us. While the weather has not been very exciting for those that want to visit the beach, it has reduced, or at least slowed down the anoxic events in the Wheatley River that were so common last summer.

### Lots going on

It may appear that little is going on in the river, but I can assure everyone that the summer field crew has had a very successful summer and continues to improve conditions around and on the river. While the rain has made everything so beautiful, I know that many are very concerned about the recent fish kills that have devastated so many rivers on the Island. We are fortunate that we have not experienced this on our river this year and we can thank all landowners and farmers surrounding the river for helping prevent this from occurring here. While we have not had fish kills here this year, we must not become complacent. We simply CAN NOT allow this to happen to our river. Remember, the river is just the water we see, and what happens to the land surrounding our beautiful river, also affects the ground water we use in our homes.



### Busy board

Aside from the river work, members on the Board of Directors have also been busy with numerous projects and are actively involved in finding a new Coordinator for WRIG (announcement expected soon). I am pleased to say that we are also involved in a major project monitoring the water in the Oyster Bed Bridge estuary, and water flowing down the Wheatley River and Crooked Creek.

### Rackham's Pond

From what I have seen, Rackham's Pond has also been quite busy with people trying their hand at catching trout, and many have been quite successful. Please help us keep the Pond area tidy by placing all garbage in the bin provided in the parking area. The best practice is for everyone to try to leave a wildlife conservation area in better shape than they found it in.

### How to join us

From this Newsletter I think everyone can see that WRIG has been very busy this summer and I would encourage anyone interested in helping, to contact us. There is always a project that you can get involved in. Remember, the Wheatley River watershed is us. And we're available 24/7 at [www.wheatleyriver.ca](http://www.wheatleyriver.ca).

*Jim Kemp*

## Beautiful Barchois Beach & Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup

Saturday September 17<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am -

Everyone welcome to join WRIG and Hunter Clyde Watershed Group for a beach sweep at the Barchois Beach in Rustico.

Directions, Registration and more information can be found at

<http://shorelinecleanup.ca/en/cleanup/event/fall2011/barchois-beach>

## Report from the Field.

Our seasonal field crew has been hard at work all summer, starting with the planting of 420 trees over three different watershed properties. A mix of black spruce, ash, maple and eastern larch, all native



L to R: WRIG Beverly Ward, Denver Parkman, Eric Sylvester

species to Prince Edward Island, which will help bring shade over the river and streams. To begin the stream restoration, Wheatley River teamed up with Trout River Environmental Committee (TREC) to learn proper techniques. Mike MacDonald, the field crew supervisor with TREC, was an invaluable resource for our field crew and we continue to work closely with the TREC and the Hunter-Clyde Watershed Group.

Working with other watershed groups helps to ensure that proven techniques are used consistently in promoting the health of the water and wildlife up and down river.

uch of our time has been spent in the upper end of the Wheatley River, just below the Art Ford Cross Road. Daily activities include cleaning the stream of debris, fallen trees, logs, and garbage. Often we are also forced to cut down patches of alders, which tend to make the watercourse wider and shallower, in turn raising water temperature and making fish passage more difficult. Brush mats have also been installed as well, which will help to filter the water and collect silt.

Working with the Community Aquatic Monitoring Program (CAMP), we have assisted the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to monitor the health of three estuary sites within the watershed. During a monitoring session such variables as temperature, dissolved oxygen levels and salinity of the water are recorded. In addition to this information the team also seines the estuary to determine fish species and count the numbers of fish. The information gathered will help to assess the health of the water and over years will help to show patterns of change that may develop.

Having completed over 1.5 km of stream restoration work, it's mission accomplished for the targeted section of Wheatley River and as of this writing the field crew are currently working on a stream that runs into the Wheatley River in the same area. Should the field crew complete the stream before the end of their work term this would bring the total watershed restoration work for the summer up to 2 km!



Before



After

## Butterflies: More than Meets the Eye

Ann Wheatley reports: I recently had the pleasure of spending a few days with Christine McLaughlan, who has been hired this season to do riparian assessments in the Wheatley River and Hunter-Clyde watersheds. Although I was certainly interested in learning more about what's involved in the assessments, I did have an ulterior motive - to identify and collect butterflies. I recently signed up as a participant in the [Maritimes Butterfly Atlas](http://www.accdc.com/butterflyatlas.html) [www.accdc.com/butterflyatlas.html], a project that involves biologists and backyard naturalists in an effort to

collect good information about the species, numbers, distribution and status of butterflies throughout this region. That information should help in conservation efforts, and serve as a baseline for examining the effects of disturbances such as climate change on insect populations.

I had been watching the butterflies in my backyard for the twenty years that we've lived in Wheatley River and had created quite a list - depending on the year and the season, it included Pearl Crescents, Black Admirals, Tiger Swallowtails, Question Marks, Clouded Sulphurs, Northern Pearly-Eyes, airstreaks, Long-Dash Skippers - the names are almost as wonderful as the butterflies themselves.

Northern Pearly Eye Butterfly



Sadly for me, two of the days that Christine needed a partner were a little too damp for butterfly-spotting. I didn't end up capturing any butterflies but I did see a few - the most common being the Northern Pearly-Eye. From a distance it just looks brown, dull and nondescript. But up close, it has lovely scalloped wings, a series of cool spots with halos around them, and a flash of purplish-blue. Since they love shade, I often see these butterflies at the edges of our hedgerows - on the day I was out with Christine, we saw them next to the trees bordering the upper reaches of Crooked Creek, in Ebenezer.

After having spent one July afternoon canoeing the Wheatley River estuary with my spouse, Pierre-Yves, paddling through an over-abundance of sea lettuce the entire way, barely able to see our paddle blades through the murky water, I was badly in need of something to lift my spirits. My days spent tromping through creeks, woods and fields with Christine were, in this respect, good therapy. The streams feeding into the Wheatley River estuary are surrounded by an amazing array of plants, birds, insects and animals. In July, the elderberries were brilliant red, we fed on ripe raspberries and spotted wild gooseberries and a multitude of flowering plants. We saw 10-foot high spruce, pine and ash trees that had been planted by our field crews in previous years. It was all worth the hours slogging through the underbrush in oversized chest waders in the heat of the summer.

Ann Wheatley

meeting, David, along with Donald Matheson, Fred Cheverie and Daryl Guignon, made a presentation to the governing caucus. Shortly afterwards, Island watershed groups had the promise of increased and more secure funding. It was a "watershed" mark in watershed management in PEI, which saw an increase in the capacity of community-based groups to address the root causes of the degradation of our waters. Across Prince Edward Island, watershed groups such as ours are working hard to make a difference. Individuals forge ahead, carrying with them the passion shown by David Latimer. But without real commitment from our policy-makers, our work will have very little impact in the long term.

Ann Wheatley

## Sea Lettuce Harvesting

While results of the experimental sea lettuce harvesting in Cove Head Brackley Bay and Mill River this summer remain to be documented, we can report that this is what the harvesting operation looked like.



## Need Your Weather Eye.

Please keep an eye on the Wheatley River, the estuary and the bay. If you see an anoxic event taking place ( stinky, milky white areas or dead fish ),let us know either by email [Tracy@WheatleyRiver.ca](mailto:Tracy@WheatleyRiver.ca) by telephone 963-2394 or at [www.wheatleyriver.ca/welcome/state-of-the-river/](http://www.wheatleyriver.ca/welcome/state-of-the-river/).

## The Legacy of David Latimer

Prince Edward Island lost a true champion of the environment recently when David Latimer died. David was one of the founding members of the Covehead Brackley Bay Watershed Group and for years he was an outspoken advocate for a provincial alliance of watershed groups. He was one of the first people to recognize the need for collaboration and a strong voice to speak up about the issues that affect our water.

In a moving tribute to David, the Friends of Covehead have written, "*David's irascibility about the watershed problems, his constant prodding of officials who would see him coming down the halls of government with a sheaf of papers in hand, his quick wit, his boundless energy, and his constant caring . . . made him not only a leader but a man who left a true legacy for all of us to cherish.*"

David's passing, and the announcement shortly thereafter of three fish kills in western PEI, reminded me of a meeting I attended with him in 2007, in the aftermath of another particularly devastating series of fish kills. As a result of that

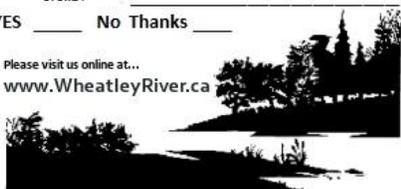
Please Consider Joining Our Membership

 Individual or Family \$10.00  
Corporate or Supporting \$50.00  
Simply clip this out and mail it to:

The Wheatley River Improvement Group  
# 215 Buffalo Road, Rustico  
Hunter River, PE  
CoA 1No 

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
Email - would you like to be notified about upcoming WRIG meetings and events? \_\_\_\_\_  
YES \_\_\_\_\_ No Thanks \_\_\_\_\_

Please visit us online at...  
[www.WheatleyRiver.ca](http://www.WheatleyRiver.ca)



WRIG Newsletter is edited by Eric C. Riordon