



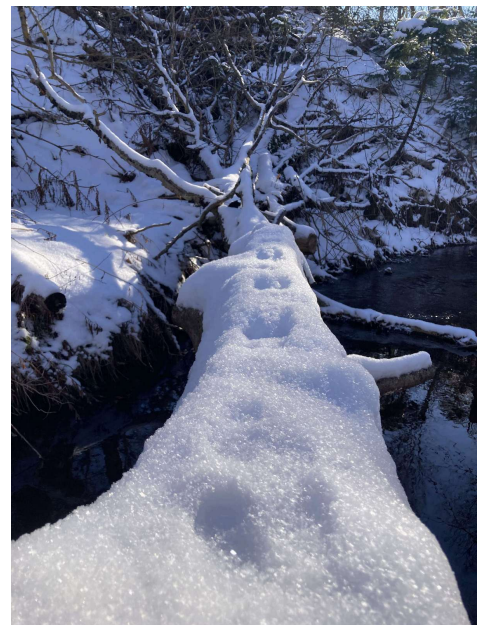
2024-25 Winter TIDINGS

Bringing You Updates from SSWA



Fall and Winter Goings On

While the majority of SSWA's work takes place during the summer months, there is still much to do through the off-season. Some of these tasks are mundane—going through our gear and making repairs or replacements, following up on grants that support our work (see the end of this newsletter for a full list, and our gratitude)—while others involve going out into the field. We enjoy the reasons to get out of the office, and also understand the importance of monitoring the environmental conditions in all seasons. We continue to monitor our trail cameras for wildlife, and conduct surveys for fish and stream health throughout the fall and early winter. This time of year though, there is not much to do outside and we, like much of the wildlife, hunker down indoors.



One of the ways that we monitor wildlife behaviour is through trail cameras. We have several installed within SSWA boundaries that we check once a month during the warmer months, and leave for a couple months at a time through the winter. We see more animal activity and a greater variety of animals through the summer and fall, but we still capture snowshoe hare, bluejays, and coyotes and others throughout the cold and snowy months.

In addition to this stationary monitoring, we conduct in-stream surveys. Some of these surveys are the same as those we run in the spring. We assess stream health, riparian (river bank) structure and stability, and invasive species presence and abundance. These types of surveys give us a complete picture of what is going on in the stream system and allow us to make informed decisions about how best to direct our summer work. The information about invasive species is also shared with the PEI Invasive Species Council which focuses on monitoring the presence and range of different invasive species on the island, as well as providing best management practices and tools to aid in the removal of such species.

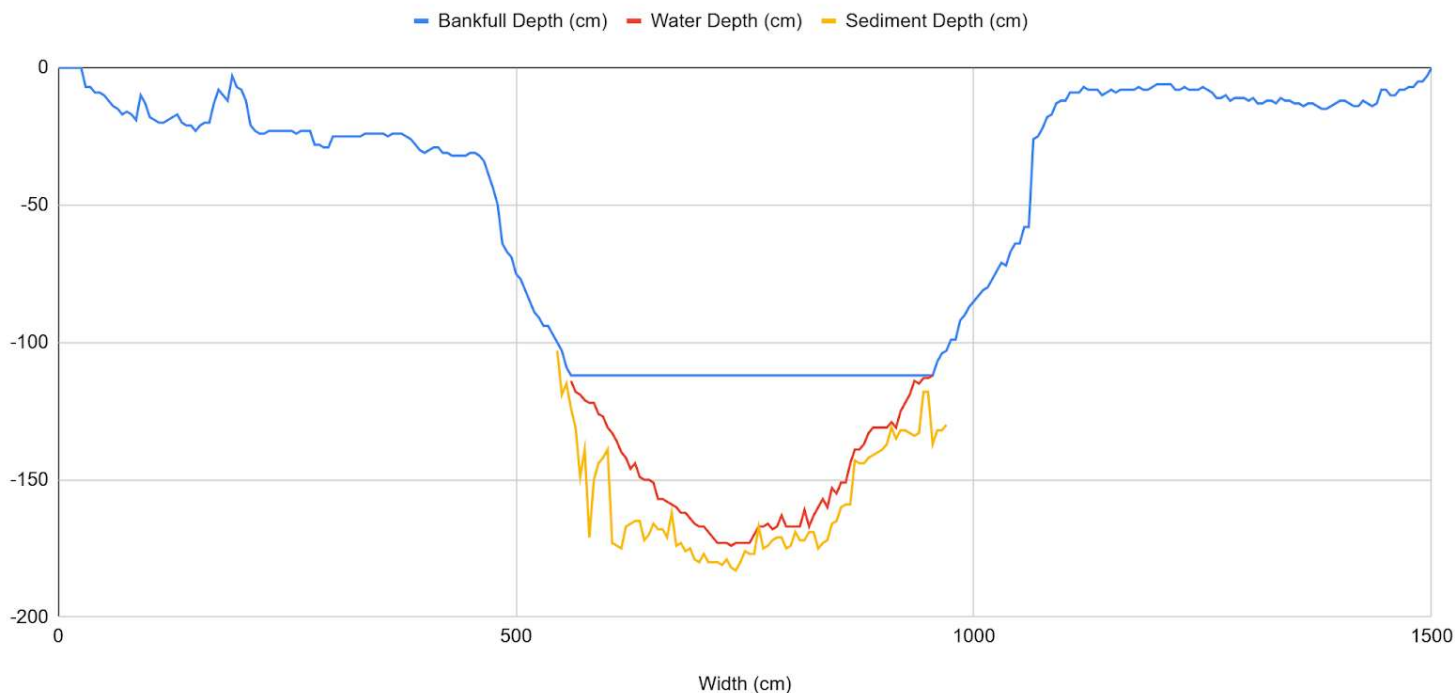


Other surveys are unique to the fall. Rapid Geomorphic Assessment (RGA) Cross-Sections are a newer addition to these surveys. We installed two last year to test them out, and this year we implemented one cross section on each of the major branches of our rivers. These cross sections are also used to monitor stream and riparian health through tracking two different characteristics from year to year. The first, and main, characteristic that we are tracking is sediment depth in the stream bed; how deep it is and how the distribution of sediment on the streambed changes from year to year. The second aspect that these cross sections track is how the stream itself meanders through the floodplain over time. This

change in the location of the stream within its floodplain takes decades to occur, but hopefully the data that we have started to gather will show change years down the line. In order to take one of these cross sections, depth, water depth, and sediment depth measurements must be made over the entire floodplain. They can then be graphed to show a profile of the floodplain and streambed.



RGA Cross Section 2024



The other important survey that we conduct in the late fall is locating and marking fish spawning sites. We walk the lower to middle portions of the stream systems and look for fish nests, or redds. Where the conditions are good, meaning that there is exposed gravel on the stream bed, the water is moving but not too fast, and the water is not too deep or too shallow (it's a bit of a goldilocks situation), there may be several redds all together. This means the area is a good spawning site and we tend to keep an eye on these areas and make a point of ensuring that the stream is in good condition. This is the only survey that absolutely needs to be conducted in the fall as this is the spawning time for brook trout and salmon. Rainbow trout, which are an invasive species, spawn in the spring and so their spawning sites do not show up in our redd surveys. The timing is very important.

All of these surveys give us a better understanding of the general state of our watershed systems. It is also critical to observe how the waterways and watersheds are functioning in the fall and winter. There may be environmental issues that we only observe in the off season, but more importantly understanding of the ecosystem is reliant on assessment and monitoring through all seasons, not just the summer. We enjoy the snowy winter walks, and frosty fall mornings as much as the warm, sunny summer.

Tree Swallow Monitoring

One of the big projects this summer was monitoring nests of tree swallows. This project was done with four other watersheds and the help of Forests, Fish, and Wildlife PEI, most notably Matt Ginn. Over the winter we built special monitoring boxes with hinged tops for monitoring, and we got the crew together for a winter activity to decorate the boxes. Once the ground had thawed, we placed these boxes at different locations around our five watersheds where we had observed tree swallows nesting. Then we had to wait.



In mid May, the tree swallows start to nest. Once they have assessed a good nesting location (ideally in one of our boxes) they can build their nest in only a few days. They don't start laying eggs until June, so we monitored the nests a couple of times each week to ensure that we could estimate the day when they started and finished laying eggs. Tree swallows normally lay one egg each day and have clutches of 4-6 eggs so it is feasible to estimate their final day of laying eggs. Then the eggs incubate for about a week and a half, and three weeks from their hatch date they are ready to fledge. There are certain times of their process when we try not to disturb the tree swallows with monitoring, and other times where we must check them fairly often.

Just before the babies were ready to fledge, we met up with Matt Ginn to band some of the birds. This is so we can tell if we get any returning birds to our nest boxes or any of the nest boxes monitored by other watershed groups. Banding was a very fun way to culminate this project, and we all learned a lot from the process and the provincial experts.



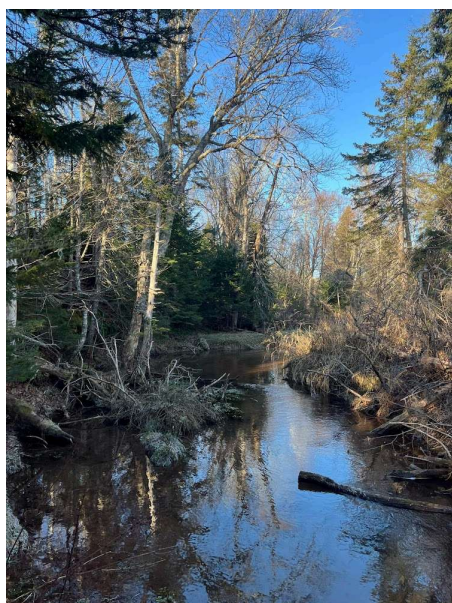


South Shore Snowshoe

Thanks to all who came out to the annual South Shore Snowshoe on February 23. It was held at the Tryon River Trail, which is managed in cooperation with the Island Nature Trust through their volunteer Conservation Guardian program. We had a great snowshoe across the road, down around the field and back to a bonfire and hot chocolate. This is our third time doing this event in February, and it is a great way to connect with the community and the natural world through the off season.

iNaturalist

As part of our wildlife monitoring efforts SSWA is gathering information about the species of plants and animals found throughout our watershed boundaries on [iNaturalist](#). This is a website and app which utilizes citizen science (data collected by community members like you) to collect data on plant and animal abundances around the world. We are running a [project](#) through iNaturalist that you can join if you make an account with iNaturalist. If you already have an account you can select Projects and then search for the South Shore Watershed Assoc. to find us. We would love to grow this community! Please email with any questions (sswawildlife@gmail.com).



Thanks and Reminders

In the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge that the land upon which we live and work is unceded Mi'kmaq territory. Epekwitk (Prince Edward Island), Mi'kma'ki, is covered by the historic Treaties of Peace and Friendship. We pay our respects to the Indigenous Mi'kmaq People who have occupied this Island for over 12,000 years; past, present and future.

Thanks as well to all of our members and supporters. We appreciate your participation in and support for the work that we do. Feel free to email with any questions for us about the articles in this newsletter or anything else to do with local environmental concerns at sswa@sswa.ca or sswawildlife@gmail.com.

We would like to remind you that the 2 Billion Trees project is still running (see the [Winter 2023-24](#) issue of *Tidings* for more information). Planting will begin in the spring of 2025 and will continue for a total of six planting years up until 2031. Each year the goal is to plant approximately 300,000 trees. If you would like to apply, it can be done over the phone or online at this provincial webpage: PEI - 2 Billion Trees Landowner Application. Expect a response within 4-6 weeks, followed by a scheduled field visit to assess your property. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out: PEI 2 Billion Trees Coordinator, Hailey Blacquiere (hdblacquiere@gov.pe.ca or 902-916-1785) or PEI Watershed Alliance 2 Billion Trees Coordinator, Kassidy Matheson (peiwaprogramcoordinator@gmail.com or 902-940-9239).

We gratefully acknowledge the grants received from the following government and other funding agencies:

PEI Watershed Management Fund
Skills PEI: Post-Secondary Student Program
Jobs for Youth
Canada Summer Jobs
Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund
Aquatic Ecosystems Restoration Fund
PEI Watershed Alliance



Department of Fisheries and Oceans
Wildlife Conservation Fund

Our deep appreciation to these corporate and major donors, 2023-2024:

ADL
Albert McAllister
Celia Ferguson
Crapaud Exhibition Association
Eric C. Robinson
Hampton Beach Property Owners Association

Irene Sherren
Kevin Murphy
Louise Peckford
William Peckford
Meadowbrook Art Studio
Municipality of Crapaud
Richard Meenink

And for all other donations made to SSWA – so greatly appreciated.

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Written by Romy Munkres

SOUTH SHORE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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(NOTE: RENEWALS ARE NOT DUE UNTIL MARCH)

Name: _____ **Phone:** _____

Civic address: _____

Mailing address: _____ **Email:** _____

Membership fee \$ 10.00

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TOTAL \$ _____

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE SOUTH SHORE WATERSHED ASSOCIATION!



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