

Sackville Rivers Association
Final Report
Fish Friends Program, 2009

The work of Coordinator for Fish Friends 2009 began in early January with the production of resource binders for the ten schools participating in the program. Numerous materials were included on a CD in electronic format, including the ASF Fish Friends Manual. Other materials were printed out for the benefit of teachers, most of whom appreciated being able to “page through” hard copy instead of trying to deal with in on a computer display.

Three DVD movies from the Magic School Bus series were included with the binder, including “Goes Upstream”, which is on the life cycle of the salmon. This was probably the most appreciated component in the resource binder, after the “Scales and Tales” worksheets.

Three copies of “Eyewitness: Fish” were purchased because of the excellent portrayal it gives of the life cycle of the salmon in particular, and in the overview it provides for the variety of fish found in both fresh and salt water.

Ten aquariums were set up in the ten schools, and one in the SRA Office.

A PowerPoint slide show was used in most classes to provide the students with an overview of some of the lesser-known works of the SRA, as well as the Fish Friends program. This was especially useful in the case of the six classes whose teachers had not been involved in Fish Friends previously.

Ten lots of eyed eggs (250 – 300 each) were delivered on February 27. About 100 eggs were removed from those received for rearing in the Office aquarium, with their purpose being to serve as “backup” in case of any school which might encounter problems with their original stock of eggs.

One set of eggs was wiped out by contaminated water, which had been provided by one of the schools. A shipment of eggs to replace these was acquired through the cooperation of The Coldbrook and Mersey River Bio-Diversity stations, and a supply of “safe” water was provided for the school involved.

Aside from this tragic loss, the eggs received this year were of the highest quality used in the FF program in memory. I estimate that more than 90% of the eggs survived to the fry stage prior to their being released into the Little Sackville River.

Over the next two months, the main focus was on leading classes through observation activities of the egg, alevin, and fry stage of the salmon. Having a full-time co-worker – Ron Duggan – was a key element to the success of the classroom sessions as well as regular visitation to schools to check on tanks and trouble-shoot reports of suspected problems. Having someone who is familiar with the FF classes, school locations and routines, and the classroom setups – and who is able to step in to share the workload in general, and to take over when the Coordinator comes down with the flu for a month (as was the case with me) goes a long way to ensuring the success of the program.

Katimavik Volunteer Mike Shaw and SRA volunteer Gwen Hochheimer assisted me in setting up aquariums and chillers in January. Katimavik Volunteer Meighan Cote, photographer Victor Fraser, and Directors Larry Bell and Peter Bush were present and actively involved for some of the classroom learning sessions.

Eight of the ten schools were able to make trips to the Little Sackville River for the purpose of fish releases in late May – late June. In two of these cases, the fry were not actually released, (but were taken to the river by me a few days later) due to poor river conditions following heavy rains, but a variety of activities were offered so as to make this event as memorable as possible. These included discussions of the impact of severe weather on fry, the impact of predators on the newly-released fry, a Fry Versus Predators field game, and a trip to the fish ladder where gaspereau, white suckers, and even trout in the two-to-three pound range were available to be viewed after being taken by net from the fish trap.

SRA Office Staff Steve Caines and Colin O’Neil, as well as Summer Students Tim Kelly, Wil Brunner, Kate MacPhee, and Cyndi Leblanc assisted me in some of the Fry Releases and some of the Fish Ladder activities.

A ninth school – a long-time participant in Fish Friends under the direct supervision of the Atlantic Salmon Federation - was involved in a fry release by Ron Duggan and me after the teachers became aware of what SRA was offering in the way of a field trip. This went extremely well, was enthusiastically received by teachers, students, and eight adult chaperones, and has already resulted in an exchange of resources and the promise of future collaboration between that school and SRA.

Of the two schools under my jurisdiction that did not participate in fish releases, one had asked me specifically to handle this on their behalf. The other was an unfortunate situation where the teacher left for a job in another province in early June, leaving the fry behind. Fortunately, the fish were still in good health, and I was able to see to their release, but this emphasized the point that two-way communication between teachers and Coordinator are critical to the success of the program.

A highlight of the program was an initiative by Caudle Park Elementary, where a grade one / grade two split class and a grade four / grade five split class were involved. The two classes came up with a Fish Friends Buddies concept where one student from the younger class was partnered with one from the older class for the fish observations and the fish release, resulting in an enriching experience for both through these activities.

A spontaneous feature of the Fry Release – and one that garnered praise from students and adults – was Ron Duggan’s “Marching Song” used on the approach to and the departure from the river. Sung with a Drill Instructor cadence, it was personalized for each school, invoked a variety of Fish Friends and River Rangers memories, and unified the many members of each group into a single cooperative unit.

In total, there were 310 students and 50(+) adults (teachers and parent volunteers) involved in Fish Friends by way of the ten schools (15 classes) that participated.

Teachers and administrators were asked for their input by way of an evaluation questionnaire at the end of the program. Here is a sampling of some of the responses.

What was the highlight of the spring Fish Friends Program for you and your class?

The highlight of the program for me was seeing the students so enthralled in the observations of the salmon at the various stages. I think the highlight for the students would actually be the release trip when they get to experience and appreciate the environment that the salmon live in. I must also note that they LOVED the game you organized in the ball field where they pretended they were salmon swimming upstream (the correlation of not as many gr.1/2 making it as the 4/5 was perfect)!

In-class activities (slide shows, salmon observations, etc.)

A vast array of materials that provided great insight well beyond the normal classroom venue, information that certainly heightened my student's understanding of the topics of discussion.

Teacher / student materials (materials in binders, DVDs, etc.)

The videos were great, informational binder was a lot to go through...the student materials were age appropriate and interesting for them (they really loved the "fish scales and tales" activities that had games on the back to complete.

If your Principal or Vice Principal would like to make any comments, please add them here:

I thought it was a very positive experience for the students. It was beneficial because it made connections with local habitat to the local community in which the students live. (Peter Balcom – Caudle Park Elementary)

And:

The River Game on the ball field was great!!!! The children loved the running and the parents being the predators was so fun for the kids. I love how Walter got the picture of the survivors. I felt the timing of the game was perfect as they got to burn their energy before a recess break and then a washroom trip.

The parents enjoyed the trip and several started to want to know more about the Sackville River Association, how to help and this might be a great time to do brief public relations(PR) talk on the SRA either prior to the fish release talk or during the Fish ladder time. On our trip there were 11 parents all very interested in the program.

Respectfully submitted,

Walter Scott
Educational Coordinator
Sackville Rivers Association