End of Program Report to the Board of Directors
Sackville Rivers Association
River Rangers 2014

TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

ECHO FOUNDATION

River Rangers 2014

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For me, the most significant factor related to both River Rangers and Fish Friends is the overwhelming amount of work that is expected of teachers. I retired from teaching almost ten years ago, and I was very conscious of this trend at the time, and through my years working on River Rangers and Fish Friends, things have become progressively worse.

A teacher who commits to taking a class through a River Rangers Program is committed to schedule one 45 – 60 minute introductory presentation, enough time for students to assemble their own Bug Dial, a 45-60 minute session on aquatic insects, and a two-and-a-half hour field trip. These need to be done in that order, and the field trip needs to be carried out by the end of October (because the typical colder weather makes aquatic insects scarce, and can be harsh on students who get their hands wet in the river during one or more of the learning stations).

September and October are extremely busy months. The students and teachers are new to each other. There are fire drills and bus evacuation exercises. There are also professional development days, book fairs, student photos, school assemblies, Thanksgiving, Halloween, Terry Fox runs, fund raisers, field trip preparations (letters home; chaperones; criminal record checks, etc.)… and if the teacher becomes ill at any point, scheduling opportunities are further limited.

Of whatever “free” time is available, each time one teacher books a class session for RR, that date and time becomes unavailable to the rest of the teachers, and limits their options.

This year, there were six classes involved; three at Bedford South, two at Newbridge Academy, and one at Caudle Park. I handled all classroom sessions for these classes (about 140 students). I was able to combine the two classes for some of the Newbridge activities, and for one of the sessions at Bedford South.

I tried to get all classes through their field trips by October 1. Three were scheduled for the last week in September, with the first one rained out (but was able to reschedule for October), and the second due to high river water. The third teacher cancelled her field trip (a lovely sunny and warm day with ideal conditions) with almost no notice. Neither of the latter teachers attempted to re-schedule, abandoning the program and denying their students a field trip and the follow-up classroom sessions. A fourth class – Caudle Park – participated in their scheduled field trip on the Friday of that week.

One of the three Bedford South teachers was able to successfully re-schedule, and the two groups at Newbridge Academy combined for their field trip (in spite of a steady flow of precipitation that lasted all morning).

A single aquarium was set up in each school, and stocked with fish from the Little Sackville River. This was a poor year for electrofishing. I was fortunate to have the

enthusiastic assistance of Tyler Deacon (one of the teachers from Newbridge Academy). He made himself available for three sessions.

We did collect numerous American eels, creek chub, and white suckers. A single ninespine stickleback was taken, but it died within the day. A few banded killifish were collected, and all were eaten by larger fish. (Tyler Deacon made a video recording of a creek chub caught in the act.)

Other fish species, that have been available (like common shiners, brown bullheads, and smallmouth bass) in previous years, could not be found.

For the three field trip sessions, Damon Conrad (overworked SRA Office manager) was available for the single electrofishing demonstration (Caudle Park)

Damon also manned the Aquatic Insects learning station for all three field trips. (First time experience for him!) Mike Mackasey was available to lead the Water Quality learning station, and his wealth of experience from previous years made a big difference. I looked after the Habitat learning station for the field trips.

The field trips involved four teachers, one education program assistant, and 22 adult chaperones. Kim Stairs-Freeze (Bedford South) has managed to recruit 10+ adults for her field trips each year (of the six years she has worked with me), an amazing accomplishment that allowed the learning station leaders to engage many adults in addition to the 140+ students.

I was able to follow up the field trips with a 60-minute “Fish Identification and Adaptation” activity (but due to the lack of some species noted above, had to use photos instead of the real thing).

All fish have been returned to the river. Aquariums have been emptied, cleaned, sterilized, and stored for future use.

As in previous years, I did submit an end-of-program questionnaire to the three teachers who participated through the full program. Only two out of the three teachers responded to this. Their comments are shown in Appendix A. All submissions are shown without any editing, additions, or deletions.

Respectively submitted,

Walter Scott
Education Coordinator for River Rangers 2014

Appendix A
End-of Program Questionnaire
River Rangers 2014

1. What was the highlight of the Fall River Rangers Program to you and your class?

Both the grade 5 and 5/6 class participated in the River Rangers Program. The highlight was most certainly the fieldtrip to the fish ladder and trip to the Sackville River to do PH tests, Bug dial, and fish ID.

One of the highlights of this program was that students had an opportunity to observe and care for the fish and eel in the aquarium. The students took their responsibilities seriously and were eager to clean the tank, feed the fish, and do the ammonia and pH testing. They observed and asked a variety of good questions.

The field trip was another highlight. It was wonderful to see the hands on science. The children were curious and engaged.

The class enjoyed the information and sessions that Mr. Scott provided, particularly the information about eels shared during the fish ID activity.

2. What improvements or changes would you like to see made to the program for another year?

Bringing in some aquatic insects and invertebrates in small containers could add to the discussion about aquatic insects and invertebrates. You could use these to generate curiosity and questions about the topic prior to or following work with the bug dials. (Walter comments: This is a great idea, and will be used in further RR field trips.)

Wouldn't change a thing

3. Effectiveness / frequency of communications from Walter Scott:

Walter is amazing when it comes to communicating.

Communication was very good. A variety of information about the program and tank maintenance was provided through e-mail. E-mails made it easy to arrange for Mr. Scott to do activities with our class and to schedule a class trip. We had some difficulties balancing pH levels in the tank and Mr. Scott was always quick to respond to our questions or concerns. He provided a lot of extra help.

4. Aquarium maintenance and support from Walter Scott

As noted, Mr. Scott was very helpful. He went above and beyond when we needed assistance. His commitment and dedication to this program is obvious.

Walter's support is phenomenal.

5. In-class activities (slide shows, Fish ID, etc.):

The in-class activities were very well done and extremely entertaining.

The in-class slide show provided a very good introduction to the program and some basic concepts related to habitat. The stories of personal fish experiences were interesting to students. They really responded to humour like the singing bass. The children seemed to enjoy the fish ID activity.

6. The Field Trip (location, use of your time, learning stations, etc.)

The location of the trip was very good – it had shallow water, picnic tables, and shade. In past years, I have found the location by the Lions Club to also be good. Three learning stations seemed to be a good number and offered a variety of activities. The time allotted for each station was just right. Students were also interested in the demonstration of electro fishing.

The in-class activities were very well done and extremely entertaining.

7. What cross-curriculum activities did your students do that were related to River Rangers? (i.e. research, art, language arts, etc.):

Our science program included a variety of related activities about habitat. The binder of materials was helpful and I created additional activities. Students have done some writing relating to the program and have created a “good copy” of their ideas using the Tagxedo program on the Internet. We are in the process of creating a book about our learning, including photos.

8. Any other thoughts:

This really is a wonderful program. It promotes a number of Grade 4 science outcomes related to habitat. It also raises student awareness about the impact they have and can have within their community. It fosters environmental stewardship.
I have continued to learn and the principal has shared that he has also learned.

It can be a bit challenging to arrange a September trip when volunteers require background checks and can need a fair amount of lead-time to make arrangements to help out. I'm not sure how much we could do to get around this.

Thank you for providing this enriching learning opportunity to my students.

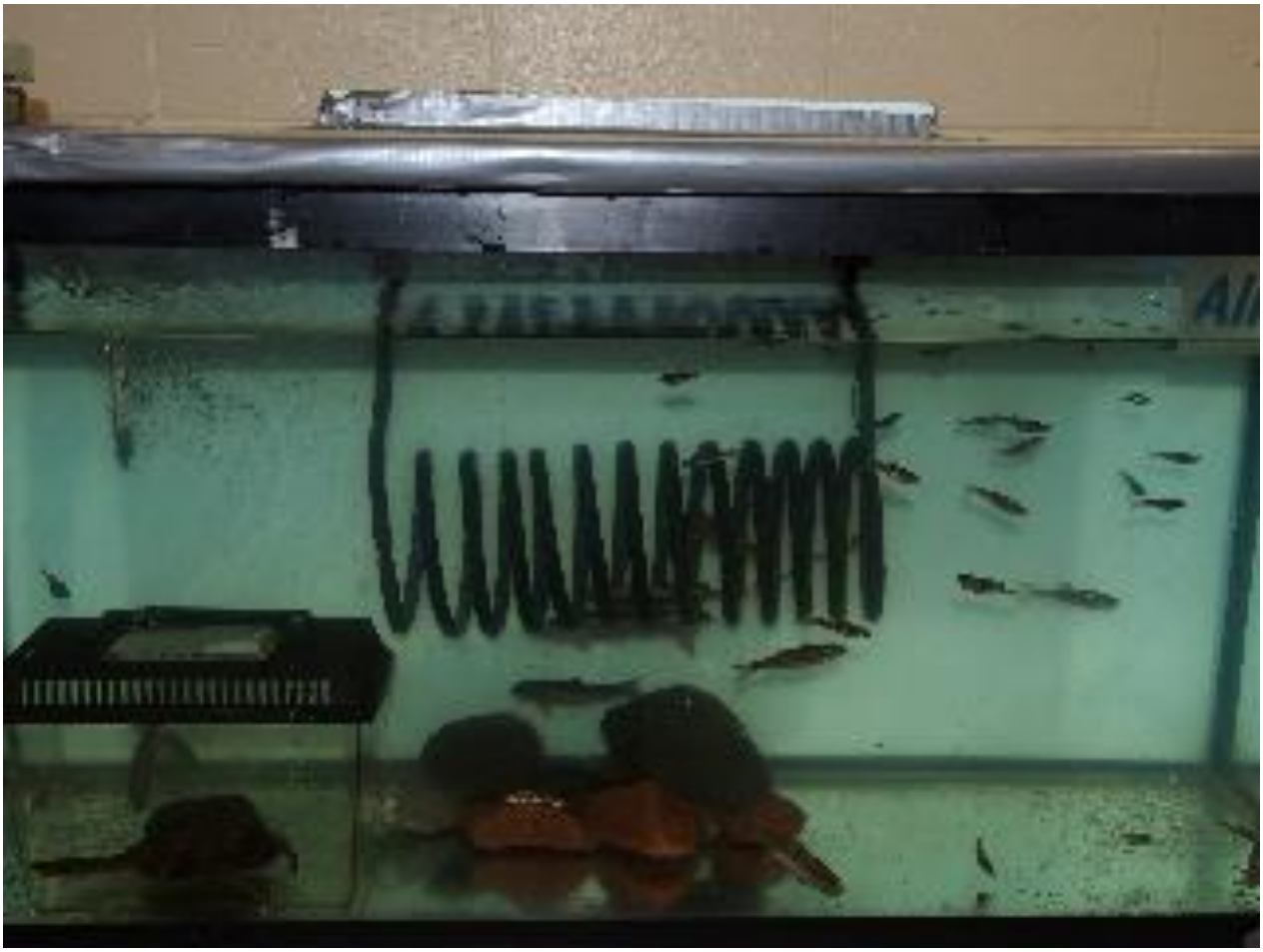
Mike Mackasey at the Water Quality Station

Students at the macro invertebrate (or water bugs) station

Walter Scott demonstrating what can be found in the river

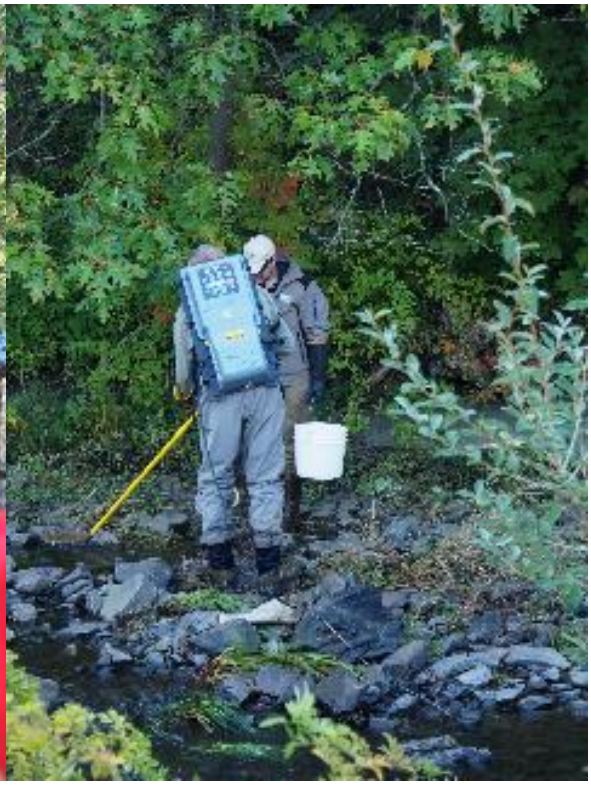
Students at the river on a field trip

Students checking their classroom aquarium



In-classroom aquarium

Smallmouth bass caught at the Fishway



Electrofishing demonstration