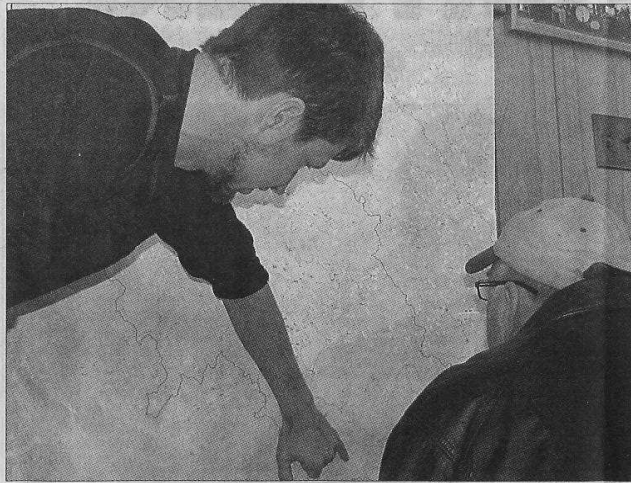


Expert says liming needed to restore salmon stocks



ADAM JACOBS PHOTO

Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute wildlife biologist Brad Toms discusses the Mersey watershed with someone following a recent meeting in Mahone Bay.

By ADAM JACOBS
ajacobs@southshorenw.ca

MAHONE BAY — There is no guarantee there will be any liming done in Lunenburg or Queens any time soon despite ongoing research citing its importance.

It wasn't too long ago that Lunenburg and Queens had a viable and thriving salmon fishery. The Gold, LaHave and Medway rivers were once a large part of that.

Times have changed. The rivers, while still somewhat active, are a shadow of their former selves when it comes to fostering salmon populations.

It's been determined one of the main reasons for the population decrease is high acid content of the water.

To reduce some of that acid, the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute, on a contract from Environment Canada,

has been researching a liming project.

"It should be said this report is going to be a tool," research institute wildlife biologist Brad Toms said recently. "We're not going to be liming and Environment Canada isn't going to be liming."

On March 8, officials from the institute and the federal government met with local fishermen at the Mahone Bay Legion in an effort to enlist their knowledge and to discuss the project.

Tom Clair, a research scientist with Environment Canada, said the federal department's priorities are changing and this will likely be the last such study it funds regarding watersheds.

"So this study is more important than ever," he told the 30 or so people in attendance. "Once the study is completed and the information is in hand, it's up to you, those of you who have connections with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and with provincial [Department] of Natural Resources to use this information."

He stressed while Environment Can-

ada has funded the study, it will be up to other departments to implement the liming process.

The study began in 2008.

It's the job of the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute to determine exactly where the lime should go.

"We have identified 11 potential watersheds to test," Mr. Toms said. "The information gathered there will determine which sites have the best potential for future liming."

Although generally pristine and free of point source pollution, surface waters in the acidic Medway, LaHave, and Gold

River watersheds have a low buffering capacity and have collected inputs of acid precipitation from the long-range transport of air pollution.

Although acid-rain amounts have decreased by an estimated 50 per cent since 1980, the soil and watersheds haven't regenerated.

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Tom Clair
Environment Canada

crumbly [on the South Shore]," Mr. Clair said. "You have granite and you have slate. There's not a whole lot of acid buffering in that."

The idea is to dump lime into the water, which in turn would lessen the acidity and create a more conducive environment for salmon.

If done properly, Mr. Clair said dumping 2,000 kilograms of lime per hectare would have a lasting effect of 25 years on the watershed and surrounding areas.

It's not an exact science, he admits, but it has been successful in the past, most recently in the West Sheet Harbour area.

Should the waters of the South Shore ever be restored to their prominence regarding the salmon population, it likely won't be because of natural causes.

"The soils and watersheds in Nova Scotia just won't recover without help," he said.

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