



2020 Field Work Report - Pandemic Edition

This was certainly a different year for the staff and board of the Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed Association. COVID-19 presented new challenges, but these were faced head-on with creative ways to accomplish tasks. This year the office was restricted to access by the field supervisor and minimal access by others as required. Social distancing was practiced any time more than one individual was in the office, and sanitization measures were in place for touched surfaces. While completing field work, the crew was dedicated to following the public health guidelines, keeping the recommended 2 m distance and sanitizing hands and equipment after use. Where possible, each member of the crew had their own designated equipment that was not shared, e.g. hand saws, pruners, first aid supplies. Board meetings were accomplished through Zoom this year, including the public Annual General Meeting.

Despite these challenges, we are pleased with the work we were able to accomplish this year. Twelve brush mats were built/enhanced, 13.65 km of stream was cleared with handsaws, and 374 waypoints were taken for general stream assessments. Through cleanup activities 1,070 kg of waste was removed from 34.13 km of shoreline around the Tracadie Bay, 23.66 km of roadside was cleaned up, and 1,300 kg of garbage was removed from old dump sites bordering streams. The crew continued trail work at the donated woodlot, laying down wood chips and establishing a more well-defined trail.

Water monitoring activities included the use of depth loggers, temperature loggers, dissolved oxygen loggers, weirs, and headwater surveys throughout the watershed. Redd surveys and crop mapping surveys also took place this year. Further culvert assessments took place at seven sites this year to prioritize a list for replacement or removal. A problematic culvert on an unused farm road was also removed this summer, which should improve fish passage along a branch with high quality habitat connecting to the Winter River.



Summer field crew:

Cydney MacSwain
Evan Cahill
Jessica McBride
Katherine Abrey
Samantha MacSwain

Supervisors or Interns:

Brittany Steele
Raena Parent
Sarah McBride

Watershed Coordinator:

Sarah Wheatley

Partial crew photo with physical distancing (Left to right): Raena, Katherine, Sarah M, Sam, and Brittany in their waders.

You can donate to support our work at [WinterTracadie.ca/donate](https://www.wintertracadie.ca/donate)

Improving Riparian Zones Through Tree Planting

Your Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed Association began planting trees and shrubs in the summer of 2009 and has done so every year until 2019. We took a break during 2020, because of all the uncertainties related to the pandemic. So far, we've planted over 26,000, and that's enough to cover over 13 hectares (29 acres) at a 6 foot by 6 foot spacing. Of course, we don't plant trees in plantations. Rather, we plant them individually in riparian zones along the edges of streams to improve habitat and ecological diversity, re-establish Acadian forest species, establish hedgerows, protect the City of Charlottetown's wellfields, and prevent erosion.

The Winter River and Tracadie Bay Watershed Management Plan includes a section on forest enhancement. We use it as a guide to make landowners aware of the benefits of better forestry practices, to target environmentally sensitive areas, and to manage overly mature short-lived stands like those found along sections of the Winter River Trail. Since the vast majority of properties we work on are privately-owned, we work hand-in-hand with landowners to identify areas to plant. In most cases we complete projects using funding we have secured, so the work is done at no cost to them.

The J. Frank Gaudet Forest Nursery, operated by the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action grows a variety of hardwood and softwood trees and provides us with most of our yearly supply, with occasional large or rare trees from the Macphail Woods Nursery in Orwell. The most popular hardwood species are red oak, yellow birch, sugar maple, willow, and our native ash species, white and black. Softwood species we've planted include hemlock, larch, red spruce, and white pine.

Our own experience and advice from others have taught us that each species has its own requirements when it comes to planting location and habitat. Mimicking nature by putting the right species in the right place is the best guarantee of success.

In the spring of the year, we plan our planting program and place our orders for trees. Work crews transport the seedlings to the sites and plant them, making sure they're protected against the harsh weather and hungry rodents. Every year, we visit as many planting sites as we can to check on survival and growth, make sure rodent guards are doing their job, and to prune where necessary.

Over the years, we've welcomed students from local schools (elementary to university) as well as staff from local companies and shown them how to plant and care for seedlings. Outreach and education are important to us.

Watershed management involves a lot more than improving fish habitat. We've adopted a holistic approach, one that involves improving living conditions for all animal and plant species that call the watershed home. Tree planting is a very important part of this effort, and we'll continue to work in cooperation with landowners to restore a healthy, balanced ecosystem.



Our former staff planting trees (from left to right): Carley carrying a tray of trees across the river to a planting site; Vanessa planting a pine; Hilary, Shawn, and Ben celebrating the last tree planted of the field season.

Water Act comes into force in June

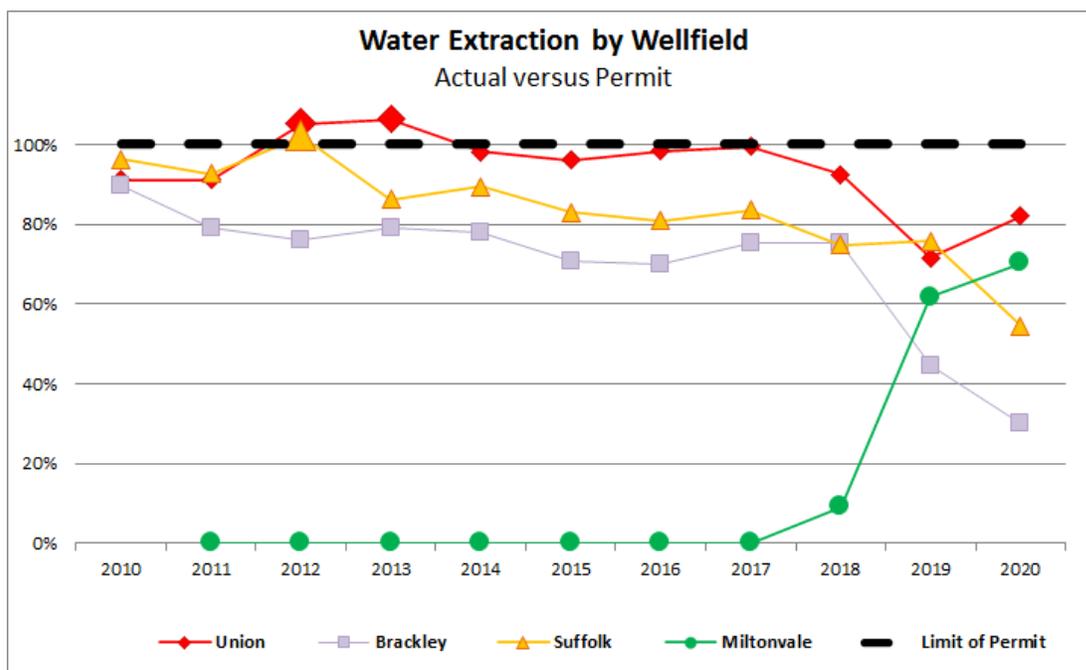
It's been a long road since the province first established a moratorium on high-capacity wells for agricultural purposes in 2002, filled with innumerable discussions, committees, commissions, reports, and public consultations. But finally, after nearly two decades of work, the province's long-awaited *Water Act* will finally come into effect on June 26th 2021.

The *Water Act* gives the provincial government legal responsibility for all water resources in the province and gives it tools with which to manage, protect, and enhance water. This includes specific things like the ability to order a person to immediately stop an activity that is damaging a water resource, and to repair the damage they have caused, all at their own cost. Government can also create "Water Management Areas" which allow the government to create rules to target the specific needs of an area, including aquatic ecosystem protection and municipal water supplies. While no Water Management Areas have been created yet, given the significant impacts that the City of Charlottetown's wellfields have caused in the Winter River-Tracadie Bay watershed, there is a decent chance that we could see one of these plans in the future. Sarah and the Board are keeping a close eye on any developments in this regard and will work with the province to ensure that the ecological integrity of the watershed is protected in whatever plans emerge.

Since the Legislative Assembly passed the *Water Act* in 2017, government has been developing detailed regulations which give more specific details on how water use will be regulated. These rules cover things like well construction, water supply systems, wastewater treatment systems, and sewage systems. The latest of these, the *Water Withdrawal Regulations*, have been in the news quite a bit in recent weeks and months, in large part because they deal with the thorny topic of high-capacity wells. The province has said it intends to develop additional regulations, even after the *Act* comes into effect on June 26th, so we likely have not heard the end of these important discussions.

So what does all of this mean for our watershed?

While high capacity wells for agriculture have garnered most of the political and media attention, our main concern in the Winter River is with municipal high capacity wells; i.e. how much water the City of Charlottetown withdraws from its wellfields in Brackley and Suffolk. So far, it's not clear that the new Act and regulations will do all that much to help control or reduce the City's water use. Charlottetown has at times extracted more water than allowed under its existing permits. In other words, the



province has not always enforced its existing rules. It's not entirely clear how putting more rules in place will help the watershed if those rules continue to be ignored.

Through the coordinator (Sarah) and the Board, the watershed association has contributed feedback to the provincial government on many occasions throughout the long process of creating the *Water Act*. Our submissions can be found on our website under "About Us" and "Documents". We will continue to press the province for better rules and stricter enforcement to protect our watershed!

For more information on the Water Act and regulations, see also the province's website:

<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/environment-energy-and-climate-action/water-act>

Upcoming Event

Annual General Meeting at the Tracadie Cross Community Centre, Wednesday May 26 at 7pm. Guest Speaker Shawn Schofield will discuss "Agriculture and Environment Unit and Their Role in Government."

Registration in advance is mandatory.

Contact Sarah to book your spot, using any of the methods listed below.

Note: If public health guidelines change, we will switch to a Zoom meeting.

Contact Us

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Instagram	instagram.com/wrtbwa

Help us out by following our social media pages. Having more visible supporters helps us get more grant funding.

We would like to thank our funding partners for their support of our work in 2020.

Canada

- Canada Revenue Agency: Temporary Wage Subsidy
- Employment & Social Development Canada: Canada Summer Jobs
- Environment & Climate Change Canada: EcoAction Community Funding Program
- Environment & Climate Change Canada: Atlantic Ecosystems Initiatives
- Fisheries & Oceans Canada: Coastal Restoration Fund



- Innovation PEI
- Jobs for Youth
- Post Secondary Program
- Rural Jobs Initiative
- Watershed Management Fund

Other grants:

- City of Charlottetown
- Colleges & Institutes Canada: Clean Tech Internship
- PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund
- RDÉE Î.P.-É. Inc.: PERCÉ Program
- Private Donations from local individuals



WINTER RIVER - TRACADIE BAY
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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