



How COVID-19 Is Affecting the Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed Association

The restrictions on movement and gatherings of people due to COVID-19 affected the Winter River – Tracadie Bay Watershed Association immediately. We had to cancel scheduled meetings including our regular Board of Directors' March meeting. By the end of March, we had Zoom in place and since then all of our Board meetings have been conducted remotely. Having a preference to conduct our Annual General Meeting (AGM) in person, we have postponed the AGM to the fall.

The first order of business once the Board of Directors could meet again was focused on what funding we would have for the upcoming summer field season and how to staff the allowable activities in the Watershed. We still have been unable to confirm all of our funding, but indicators point to having much reduced funding for this year. Therefore, we have decided to go ahead with limited summer projects, knowing we will have to adapt our project plans as our funders confirm their level of financial support. Due to limiting summer projects we have also reduced the size of our staff.

To work safely this summer, the guidelines provided by Public Health have been implemented for all operations. This means that staff are completing a COVID-19 health questionnaire daily, as well as ensuring that their assigned tools and cleaning supplies are brought to work each day. In fact, following all the health and safety practices due to COVID-19 is a strict job requirement for all staff this year. The implementation of the health and safety practices is an added cost for the Association, at a time when our funding is reduced.

Social distancing and the limit on the size of gatherings are the reasons the annual Lady's Slipper hike was cancelled. Due to the same restrictions, staff meetings are held outdoors and use of the office is strictly controlled. Of course, sanitizing common surfaces is conducted diligently, including in the office and in vehicles when a maximum of two staff members travel together.

This summer not all of the usual watershed projects are being conducted. If a project is being continued this summer, then it is being carried out in a different manner, as adequate physical distance must always be maintained. Thus, staff work will be in the more open spaces of the watershed, such as beaches, and skip projects that require multiple staff members to work very closely together. Additionally, the usual carpooling systems that we used for staff travelling around the watershed have not been possible this summer. So, you may not have seen the staff in the usual places in the watershed this summer, and where staff are working you may have seen more than the usual number of vehicles.

Although COVID-19 has impacted the Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed Association in a number of ways, the Board of Directors is confident that the staff will continue to positively impact the health of the land and water resources of our watershed.



Sister, Sister!

When the sisters of two of our existing staff members applied for jobs this year, we thought hiring them was a great opportunity to be able to follow social distancing rules while still having some crew members who could work closely together.

L to R: Jessica McBride, Sarah McBride, Cydney MacSwain, Samantha MacSwain.

Trent MacSwain – Conservation Officer

Before the 2017 field season, we interviewed a strapping young lad, a recent graduate of Morell High School, by the name of Trent MacSwain. Knowing that watershed field work sometimes requires old-fashioned brute strength, we offered him a job. Besides, he gave us the impression that he'd fit in just fine with our summer crew. He soon proved us right.

According to Trent, "My summer experience with the watershed group helped me decide on the Wildlife Conservation Program at Holland College. The money came in handy and the strong recommendation I got from the Watershed Coordinator helped me get accepted to the program." He worked that first summer as a field crew member, did his course work in the fall and winter semesters, and applied to work with us again in 2018 as a labourer and chainsaw operator.

"I learned a lot from working with the Watershed Association. I learned to work with other people from different backgrounds and with different interests than me. I liked the variety in the jobs we did: from planting trees, to improving fish passage, to collecting garbage, and everything in between. I saw things I liked and some I didn't. It bothered me when users of the watershed were careless, throwing things away without thinking what impact it might have on the environment."

After successfully completing the Wildlife Conservation Program at Holland College, Trent set his sights on the Atlantic Police Academy. He'd told us that he wanted to become a Conservation Officer. "My experience with Winter River – Tracadie Bay definitely influenced my career path. I'd always had an interest in the outdoors but actually seeing what a watershed group does, and how important they are, made it easier to decide what I wanted to do in life."

So, Trent came back to us for one final summer season in 2019 and filled the role of Assistant Supervisor. As expected, he did a great job. "I really appreciated the opportunity to supervise and it taught me a lot about the people skills you need to be a good boss. Again, I was able to get a good recommendation from the Watershed Coordinator." He graduated from the Police Academy in December.

This past April, Trent was hired on as the province's newest Conservation Officer. "It's my dream job," he says proudly. We have no doubt that Trent will make us all proud, and we were fortunate indeed to help this fine young man get off to a good start in his chosen field.

Watershed groups do much more than protect and enhance our environment. They offer top-quality work experiences that support people on their chosen career path. The Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed Association is very proud of all its "graduates"!



Photos (top to bottom): Sam, Trent, Matt with trees; Matt & Trent after purple loosestrife cleanup; Trent sharpening chainsaw by truck; just having fun.

2019 Field Work

Summer field crew: Evan Cahill, Sam MacSwain, Sarah McBride, Shamus Koughan, and Trent MacSwain.

Supervisors or Interns: Brittany Steele, Chayla Exner, Vanessa Jackson.

Watershed Coordinator: Sarah Wheatley

It was a busy year for the Winter River—Tracadie Bay Watershed Association (WRTBWA). The crew planted trees, undertook stream restoration work, and monitored water quality throughout the watershed. Staff also built brush mats, collected garbage from roadsides and shorelines, and started work on a nature trail.

Other routine activities included crop mapping and culvert surveys. WRTBWA keeps a multiyear database of the crops grown in the fields visible from the road throughout the watershed. With this information, predictions can be made for potential erosion or runoff problem areas. Culvert surveys are a tool used to assess fish passability for a variety of different sized culverts. These surveys also took factors like availability of quality habitat into account. With information gathered last fall, the culverts were ranked in order of priority for replacement or removal.

In the 2019 field season, water quality data was collected from equipment deployed across the watershed. Water depth and temperature were measured in 13 freshwater locations, and three dissolved oxygen loggers were positioned in the estuary to monitor for anoxic events. Surveys were performed throughout the year to locate problems like erosion, high nitrate levels, and stream blockages.

There were nine community outreach events held last year, including hiking, fundraising, and volunteer events. The annual Lady Slipper Hike and Snowshoe events had good attendance and provided a great opportunity to connect with members of the community. Members from local companies and school groups also came out to help the WRTBWA crew plant trees and clean up shoreline waste.

You can donate to support our work at
WinterTracadie.ca/donate



Photos (top to bottom): Evan learning about culvert surveys; staff and volunteers after shoreline cleanup at Glenaladale Estate; safety improvements to property owned by WRTBWA; staff helping DFO with fish sampling in seine net; Chayla deploying water monitoring equipment from canoe.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday September 16

Our delayed Annual General Meeting will be held from 7pm to 9 pm via the video conferencing service Zoom.

If you are interested in joining, please contact our watershed coordinator to receive the link and instructions on how to connect with us using this service.

Contact Us

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Instagram	instagram.com/wrtbwa

Help us out by following our social media pages, this helps us get more grant funding.

We would like to thank our funding partners for their support of our work in 2019.

Canada

- Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada: Youth Employment & Skills Program
- Employment & Social Development Canada: Canada Summer Jobs
- Environment & Climate Change Canada: EcoAction Community Funding Program
- Fisheries & Oceans Canada: Coastal Restoration Fund



- Greening Spaces Program
- Graduate Mentorship Program
- Watershed Management Fund

Other grants:

- City of Charlottetown
- Colleges & Institutes Canada: Clean Tech Internship
- Canadian Parks & Recreation Association: Green Jobs Initiative
- PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund
- RDÉE Î.P.-É. Inc.: PERCÉ Program
- Private Donations from local individuals & businesses



WINTER RIVER - TRACADIE BAY
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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