

# Nova Outdoors®



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Membership  
See Page 13

**VOLUME 15, NO. 2**  
**SPRING 2006**

**A Walk In The Woods**

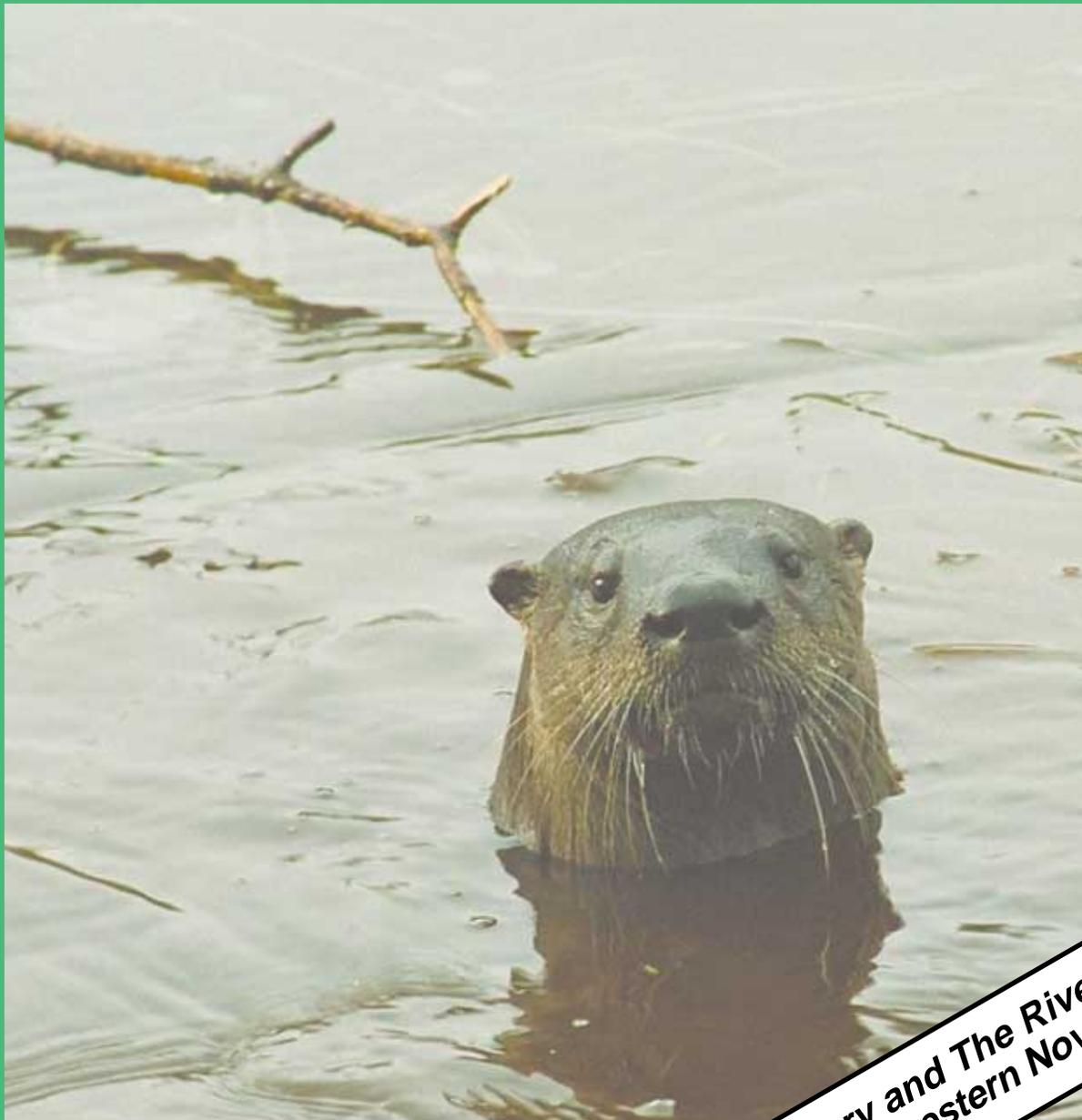
**The Nova Scotia  
Black Bear**

**Woodsprooing  
Your Child**

**Random Casts**

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**OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NOVA SCOTIA FEDERATION  
OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS**



**Mercury and The River Otter  
In Southwestern Nova Scotia**

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# NOVA OUTDOORS

## SPRING 2006

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Nova Scotia Federation of  
Anglers & Hunters

*Cover photo: River Otter, provided by Sarah Spencer*

*To place your ad in the next issue (Summer, 2006) of Nova Outdoors,  
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Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters at (902) 477-8898.*

# Nova Outdoors

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Nova Scotia Federation  
of Anglers and Hunters



Nova Scotia Federation of  
Anglers & Hunters

Vol. 15, No. 2  
Spring 2006  
**STATEMENT  
OF PURPOSE**

The Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters is interested in all aspects of the out-of-doors and is dedicated to the fostering of sound management and wise use of the renewable resources of the Province. We want to ensure that their economic, recreational and aesthetic values may continue for the benefit of this and all future generations.

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## President's Report



Nova Scotia Federation of  
Anglers & Hunters

It's Monday February 20, and the time is 8:00 a.m. My pen is in my right hand and my head is being supported by my left. I am exhausted. My eyes are puffy and my muscles ache. I need a rest, but I haven't felt more content in a long time. I spent this past weekend at the Gaelic College in St. Anne's Cape Breton attending our 2006 winter Becoming an Outdoors Woman. I volunteer for a number of causes but this program is one of my favourites.

As I have mentioned before I sit on the B.O.W. organizing committee as well as instruct various classes.

This past weekend Julie Towns and I instructed the Cooking Wild Edibles class, while Merryll Bustin helped me with the Introduction to Firearms & Hunting. Sunday morning I gave Terri Peace a hand with her Winter Treasures class.

The women range in age from 18 to 80 years. They come from various backgrounds and lifestyles. Each woman has her own personal reason for being there. Some are addressing issues and facing fears, some come to learn, while others just need a weekend away to experience good clean fun in the outdoors.

I can't express in words just how truly rewarding it is for me to be a part of someone's life altering experience; and believe me, there have been many.

This B.O.W. was lacking snow in places, but there remained just enough for all of our classes to carry on successfully. Other classes offered were cross-country skiing, ice fishing, winter emergencies, nature in winter and winter camping. The winter camping class had 10 very determined women who braved the bitter cold, windy, snowy weather and slept outside all night in their tents.

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God knows I love the outdoors and all that it has to offer, but I chose my nice warm bunk in MacKenzie Hall.

This weekend was especially wonderful for me because I got to share it with my 23 year old daughter Ashley Alisa.

I could write a book on my B.O.W. experiences alone. I always leave having learned something new myself.

When you have two ladies who are vegetarians enter your cooking wild edibles/wild game class with much trepidation, and leave giving you praise, you know that you've done something right. I had one lady tell everyone that any woman who can field dress a bear with a French manicure was #1 in her book.

Saturday evening we had a few Cape Breton fiddlers and a piano player come in to share some good 'ol Island music. I'm not joking when I say I need a lot of work on my Irish jig!

Before I go I just want to reinforce the importance we as hunters and anglers have in our deliverance. We need to care enough to take responsibility in all we say and do, not only in the field but while in the company of others. In order for us to receive respect, we need to give it. Believe me, first impressions are everlasting.

Our next B.O.W. Program is going to be in the Annapolis Valley, Sept. 15-17, 2006. For more info, you may contact Krista McLarty at (902) 424-8614, fax: (902) 424-3173 or on-line at BOWNS@gov.ns.ca. ✪

*Until next time,  
Yours in conservation,  
Darlene Caldwell*

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# Executive Director's Voice



By Tony Rodgers

It's taken 11 long years to hear a little bit of good news about the infamous gun legislation still known by its bill number C-68 and it only took a conservative win in parliament to make it happen.

In the past while, new Justice Minister and Attorney General for Canada, Hon. Vic Toews, Public Security Minister Hon. Stockwell Day, and Yorkton-Melville Saskatchewan MP Garry Breitkreuz, have formed an inter-governmental committee to examine how the government can keep its promise to rid the country of long gun registration.

All responsible gun owners know that we need some form of firearm control in the country. We need to ensure we have safe people handling firearms, that firearms are stored safely and transported responsibly when they are taken out for use. So don't expect that the whole thing is going to go away.

What I have advocated for years is that we need a clean piece of paper, sharp pencil and some common sense not clouded by emotion and hearsay to start writing legislation that will protect the public from the misuse of firearms, and protect the rights of the law-abiding firearm users to own and enjoy their firearms in a responsible manner.

Having convoluted gun laws that have frightened many people out of the shooting sport, especially hunters, has got to be reversed. This can only be done by people who are familiar with the issue and not influenced by politics and lies.

We have to have gun laws that will encourage people to come back into the sport. Hundreds of gun dealers and their talents as gun smiths have been lost to society because of this legislation, and the government must help make it easy for these dealers and smiths to get back into the system.

Further justification for the need for change (that's justification to the general public not to people on the firearms community) will come when the auditor general makes her re-

port soon on the Canadian Firearms Center, and more information is exposed in parliament when it opens April 3rd.

The big question now is how can government make these changes without having a majority in government? And the short is, with great difficulty.

Not having been invited to the table with the three parliamentarians I would only guess that the dismantling will have to take place from inside of the legislation.

I hope that the first step will be to take the hurt out of the law. This bill was poorly written right from the get go back in 1995, and was full of powers given to bureaucrats and the minister to make changes that didn't have to be brought before parliament in order to happen. The writers of this legislation only assumed that it would be people in favor of the law that would access this option, and didn't count on the opposition someday having a kick at this cat.

Changing pieces of the act that would deflect the pain associated with the act, it would be a break for all gun owners. For example, in the law where it says a person must carry their firearms licence with them to show enforcement officers they're legal to carry - change that to will produce their licence at a time in the future. This way the gun owner will not end up with a ticket and fine for not having a piece of paper on them.

Drop the cost of licence renewal, drop all associated cost with the registry. This is something that the Liberals should have done themselves, because by their thinking the Canadian public wanted this law, and by my thinking if they did then let them pay for it themselves and not require me to pay for something I know doesn't work.

The new government should call for a complete amnesty on all sections of the bill to protect those Canadians who chose not to license themselves or register their firearms until a new acceptable public safety oriented gun bill is brought forward.

The Ministers should also stop spending money on the prosecutions on person presently

deal with gun violation that are not associated with some other crime. If the crime is robbery with the use of a firearm then proceed with the charges. However, if the person is being taken to court because the crown is trying to take away his short barreled handguns under section 6-12 of the act, drop those cases until the new rules are drawn up.

This sounds like a death of a thousand cuts in order to get rid of the bill actually is about 73 cuts and it's a long process to make the law friendly for hunters to use, but I can't see how else they can do it without going back to parliament and without a majority that's a challenge.

The Liberals with the exception of a few back benches love this bill, the NDP have supported it and the Bloc are in support of the law.

It has been suggested to starve the bill from cash and let it die from a lack of funding to the Canadian Firearms Center (CFC). That approach sounds simple to do but is complicated in that death with money issues in parliament may make changes to the funding of the CFC, which could lead to a motion of non confidence in the government, - and who needs another election.

The Conservatives could take a page from the Liberals play book and make a couple of cuts to the CFC with other legislation that the opposition parties would have to support in an ominous bill. The previous government liked to put a jumble of good things in legislation to be passed at the same time sticking in something that was hated by the opposition. It forces the opposition to throw the baby out with the bath water.

You know I really don't care how they do it just as long as they start soon and finish with a firearms law that is; beneficial to the Canadian public, proven to be of benefit to the police, is cost effective, provides a user friendly program for legitimate firearm owners, and has the ability to punish criminals who use guns in the commission of crime.

Boy, I love to write about subjects other than the gun laws but until this huge impediment to the growth our sport is changed I'll dwell on it a bit longer.

Have a safe angling season this year. Use your PFDS and respect all fishing laws. ❄️

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# A Walk In The Woods

## Mild winter could have significant impact on insects and forests

*"There is no greater joy nor greater reward than to make a fundamental difference in someone's life."*

—Sister Mary Rose McGeady



**Don Cameron** Certainly our weather continues to be one of the most common discussion topics. After the unusually warm, wet and snowless winter months thus far - and the fact that Shubenacadie Sam indicates that we will have an early end of season - many wonder if the end is near.

Although I still hold out hope that we will enjoy many more weeks of snow and cold for the enjoyment of outdoor recreational pursuits such as trips to Wentworth and other ski hills, there are no weather guarantees. Lately there has been media coverage regarding the potential implications of these mild winter conditions on insects - both helpful bugs and pests. The truth is, it is too early to know for sure.

One thing that is known is that there has been some unusual insect movement in recent weeks due to the warm, wet weather. Reports of worms, caterpillars and crickets on the move is usually unheard of in early February in these parts. Unfortunately for these and other premature risers like them, they will die from cold and starvation at this time of the year. During the real warm spell a couple of weeks ago, there were reports of various spring bulbs cracking through the thawed soil. Of course, once they are hit by freezing temperatures, they quickly die and wilt away.

Some insects, in a similar way, are tricked by the warming conditions similar to the onset of spring. Once they emerge from their winter hiding spot, they are defenseless against the cruel drying wind and cold which undoubtedly will arrive periodically in the coming weeks.

The population numbers of various insects - such as spruce budworm and

white-marked tussock moth - traditionally rise and fall cyclically due to various conditions. Mother nature often throws curve balls at all forms of wildlife, which demonstrates the theory of the "survival of the fittest." For instance, when a certain insect population reaches an epidemic level, either a naturally occurring virus or really cold winter temperatures will bring it crashing down.

To decide whether it is a good or bad winter for insects, you have to look at all aspects of the winter weather; temperature, snow cover, wind, and ground freezing. Insects will seek shelter from the elements when choosing a location to overwinter. An insect that lays eggs will usually choose the underside of a branch or in a crevice rather than an exposed area. If this branch or crevice is covered with snow, the insect is even more protected. The balsam woolly adelgid is a pest of balsam fir, particularly important in Christmas trees. The overwintering nymph is killed by temperatures of  $-30^{\circ}$  Celsius or greater. Thus far this winter there has been no prolonged period of cold temperatures that would adversely affect these types of bugs. A winter that is cold, with little snow, and high winds would be the worst conditions for insect survival. This followed by a wet spring would decrease the amounts of most forest pests. However, the wet spring would still ensure that we have plenty of black flies and mosquitos.

Consistency is also important. An early spring followed by a late frost may kill the insects that emerge during the thaw. Warm days in December will usually bring the large cutworm caterpillars to the ground surface. Their mistake is nearly always a fatal one as they either freeze or become bird food. The mourn-

ing cloak butterfly overwinters as an adult and emerges early in the spring and is susceptible to the same hazards. The best spring for an insect is after a winter of heavy snow cover when the snow melts slowly and temperatures rise slowly and consistently.

If current conditions continue with a lack of snow cover in February and March, insect eggs and larvae will be exposed to the harmful cold winds and temperatures. Although insects are adaptable and opportunistic, they have geographic and climatic zones where they do best. Usually cold is a factor in limiting the spread of an insect. You could import all the beautiful South American butterflies you wanted - if it was legal - but most of them will not survive a winter in Nova Scotia.

Insects whose range is slightly south of us may be able to exist here, but they often cannot survive an unusually cold winter, and therefore, they cannot flourish over the long term. Situations where imported insects do survive is when they come from a climate similar to ours.

Currently there is concern in the forestry sector that a mild winter will result in higher populations of harmful forest pests. Critters such as the spruce bark beetle, hemlock looper, gypsy moth, pale grey, aphids and adelgids may continue to grow in numbers. This could potentially result in increased damage and mortality to thousands of hectares of young and old forest across the province. ❧

*Don Cameron is the Information Officer for the Nova Scotia Section of the Canadian Institute of Forestry.*

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# The Nova Scotia Black Bear

## Born to be Wild (With Our Help)

By Jenny Costelo

It was a warm, spring day when the two yearling bears crawled out of the den with their mother. The young bears rolled in the snow and slid down the hill on their bellies, while the sow watched. Eventually she got up and walked down the hill towards a small

brook. The cubs quickly followed and, after a drink, the animals wandered along a nearby animal trail.

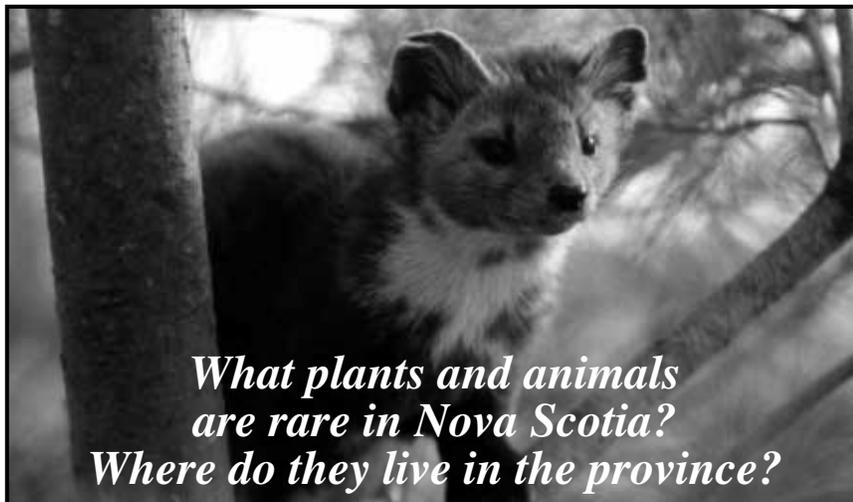
They ate some fresh deer scat which contained the necessary organisms to get their digestive systems working, after being inactive all winter. Organic soil was also consumed, possibly as a digestive aid, or as a source of vitamins and nutrients. As natural foods were still scarce in the woods, the bears fed on what they

could find, including alder catkins and acorns.

Eventually, the surrounding forest started to green up and the bears fed on the new growth of many plant species. They occasionally wandered close to houses built in the woods. The young bears' keen sense of smell picked up many interesting odors emanating from this area. They had vague memories of the sow visiting these houses the previous summer, while they waited in nearby trees. She had stolen a garbage bag and the three of them had feasted on the bones and vegetable peelings found inside.

The adult female had also taken the cubs into a few yards to feast on food found in green boxes. The spring was cold and rainy resulting in slow plant growth. Food was scarce and the bears fed on what they could find, including the remnants of deer carcasses. The sow and the yearlings made a few nocturnal house visits, where some recycling boxes were emptied. They particularly enjoyed the sunflower seeds from bird feeders, as these seeds have a higher fat content

*Continued on page 12.*



*What plants and animals  
are rare in Nova Scotia?  
Where do they live in the province?*

The Department of Natural Resources is regularly asked these types of questions. Conservation groups, industry and the public all need reliable information if we are to work together to conserve biodiversity.

Experts familiar with wild species regularly meet to share information and assess the status of hundreds of wild species in the province. Each species is given a colour rank of RED, YELLOW or GREEN indicating how well the species is doing. You can find this information at:

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife/genstatus>

Knowledge about the distribution of wild species is often lacking, because actual surveys and inventories are incomplete. Museums, universities, expert naturalists and scientists however, can provide good sources of reliable data that can be mapped and used in land resources planning. You can find these mapping tools at:

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/wildlife/Thp/disclaim.htm>

If you have knowledge about any RED or YELLOW species, we would like to hear from you. You can report your information using these web sites, or contact the Regional Biologist at your local DNR office to learn how you can help!



  
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# Nova Scotia Sportfishing Weekend, Get out for the Fishing!

By Tara Crandlemere

Family, friends, beginners, fishing enthusiasts and especially young anglers are encouraged to come out for the fishing on June 3-4, 2006. On those days Nova Scotia residents may fish without a general licence. Sportfishing Weekend provides a great opportunity to introduce youngsters to angling and promote family togetherness and outdoor living.

This weekend is the perfect time for anyone who has ever wanted to fish to give it a try. There are organized fishing derbies throughout the province and prizes to be won. This fishing event is well supported throughout many communities and many organizers indicated on their surveys that the kids really enjoyed their introduction to fishing.

The main objective of this weekend is to introduce young anglers to sportfishing in a fun environment surrounded by family and friends. Nova Scotia's Sportfishing Weekend helps generate awareness of opportunities that provide healthy, family-oriented outdoor activity. Studies show that when people get involved in the outdoors they are more aware of their natural surroundings and are more likely to take an active role in protecting and enhancing the resource.

Keep in mind that the angling opportunities are available province wide during this weekend not just the organized derbies geared towards youth. There are more than 6700 lakes and over 100 rivers province wide open to fish without a general licence. Also,



Fish derby

this weekend is an excellent means for people to discover and rediscover the joys of angling.

To further promote and develop sportfishing in Nova Scotia we are going to make this event available during the 2007 Winter Fishery. A recent survey on sportfishing in Canada found that Nova Scotia anglers spend an average of 9.5 days angling during the winter, the highest in the country. This promotional strategy was presented and supported during the fall 2005 Recreational Fishing Advisory Council

(RFAC) meetings.

If you fish for Atlantic salmon, you will need a salmon fishing licence. Please keep in mind that bag limits and all other sportfishing regulations will still apply. For more information on Nova Scotia's Sportfishing Weekend, please visit our website: "[www.gov.ns.ca/nsaf/sportfishing/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsaf/sportfishing/)"\*\*

*Tara Crandlemere*  
Inland Fisheries  
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# Looking At The Affects Of Mercury On The River Otter (*Lutra canadensis*) In Southwestern Nova Scotia

By Sarah Spenner

The river otter is the most aquatic member of the mustelid family. Other members of the mustelid family include mink, weasels and ferrets. The otter is Nova Scotia's largest freshwater predator. At maturity, this mammal weighs between 10 and 30 lbs. It has glossy fur that is brown to black in color. The otter has small ears and long facial whiskers used to detect prey. Its long, narrow tail makes up 40 percent of its total body length. Its webbed feet and streamlined body allow it to glide easily through the water.



River Otter.

Home range is the area in which an animal lives, reproduces and obtains all of the necessities of life, including food and shelter. Home range is largely dependent on available food sources. Otters have been reported to travel up to 70 km in search of food. Despite this extensive travel otters are rarely seen as they

are secretive animals that choose habitats where human disturbance is minimal.

Otters consume a diet of 90 percent fish. Other prey species include muskrats, waterfowl, reptiles, amphibians, crustaceans, and aquatic insects. Otters are at the top of the food chain; this position makes them a good indicator of pollution (i.e. mercury) in an aquatic ecosystem.

Environmental pollution and its affects on wildlife and human populations have been a concern for many years. In the last few decades, heavy metals have been a focus of attention. Mercury is a heavy metal and is naturally occurring in the earth's crust in small amounts. Mercury is released into the atmosphere through both natural and anthropogenic (man-made) processes. It is naturally released by the erosion of bedrock, volcanic eruption, forest fires and earthquakes. Some anthropogenic processes that increase mercury concentration include burning of fossil fuels, municipal waste incineration, flooding to create reservoirs, and gold mining and smelting. Mercury is also found in consumer products such as batteries, thermometers, fluorescent light bulbs, and dental fillings.

Mercury is a neurotoxin (i.e. a toxin that affects brain function) and it and other heavy metals accumulate in concentration through food chains in a process known as bioaccumulation. Mercury concentration increases from water to aquatic plants to fish to fish eating predators such as river otters, common loons and humans.

The toxic affects of mercury on humans has been reported as far back as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when workers in factories producing beaver felt hats, from pelts preserved in mercury were reported to have "gone mad". This is where the phrase "Mad as a Hatter" comes from. In the 1950s people in Minamata Japan became ill after consuming fish and shellfish from watersheds contaminated with mercury from the run-off of a chemical plant.

In a study conducted in 1996, otter samples provided by trappers from southwestern Nova Scotia found otters from inland habitats to have mercury levels 10 times higher than those in coastal habitats. Since older animals tend to have higher mercury concentrations, this difference could be due to the age and size of fish being consumed. An-

other explanation is the dilution of mercury concentration due to the larger size of the ocean when compared to lakes and rivers.

In order to study this coastal/inland pattern further, nine otters have been live trapped in south western Nova Scotia, surgically implanted with radio tracking devices and tracked by helicopter on a weekly basis to determine the most frequently used area in the home range of each otter. At the time of surgery, fur samples were removed from each otter and tested for mercury. Fur samples are used because the procedure is simple and non-invasive. By comparing the mercury level in the fur of each otter with the area in which it spends most of its time, mercury sources can be pinpointed.

In this study otters from inland habitats are showing higher levels of mercury than the coastal otters. A mercury level of 20 parts per million (ppm) in fur can cause sub-lethal affects such as a reduction in reproduction. Higher concentrations can cause death. One live trapped otter from an inland habitat had a fur mercury level of 92ppm.

So why is mercury so high in Nova Scotia? Although there is no definite answer to that question, there have been many suggestions. First, mercury can be transported by wind, thousands of kilometers from its source. Nova Scotia receives pollution from the United States as well as more industrial parts of Canada. Mercury then enters waterways through acid rain. Secondly, in southwestern Nova Scotia the bedrock supporting many lakes is composed of granite, limestone and shale. Mercury is present in these rocks and is released into the water through erosion. Thirdly, there are many wetlands in the south west, wetlands act as a natural sink for mercury, but when drained for agriculture or development purposes, the mercury is released back into the watershed.

The results from this study will provide information about the health of the river otter population in southwestern Nova Scotia, and help wildlife biologists maintain and implement new management plans. This project has implications for all species that consume fish, including humans.✻

*Special thanks to Nova Scotia  
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Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund  
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# Woodsproofing Your Child

By A.R. (Sandy) Anderson

Many of us will be camping this summer. The fresh air, beautiful surroundings and good friends make for a wonderful, carefree time. But each year we read of adults and children being lost in the woods. All too often, the stories contain lines as "clad only in a sweater, shorts and running shoes", or "wandered into the bush while picking berries". Nobody expects to get lost, yet it happens. All too frequently the victim is a child.

The following checklist will help prepare your child for the outdoors:

Tell someone - Have them always let someone know where they are going and when they expect to return.

Dress well - Make sure they dress for the weather and terrain. Remember, weather conditions can change in a matter of hours. Headwear is very important.

Set boundaries - Familiarize your children with the camping area. Show them how far they are permitted to go.

Travel with someone - Adults and children are safer and more secure when traveling with a "buddy".

IMPRESS UPON YOUR CHILDREN that if they are ever lost, to:  
NOT PANIC - Fear can kill. Save your energy for survival.

SIT DOWN AND REST - AVOID FATIGUE

STAY PUT - They will be easier to find, and can better prepare for weather changes by building a fire and a shelter.

BUILD A FIRE - Older children should be taught how before being allowed to travel in the woods. Point out how it can keep them warm, dry their wet clothes, and be useful to signal for help.

FIND SHELTER - Show them how to safely use caves, fallen trees and brush piles, and how to build a simple lean-to.

And teach your children these life-saving ideas:

Hug a tree - Tell them that if they ever

get lost, the trees are their friends. When scared they can hug a tree and talk to it. This not only helps to prevent panic, but keeps them in one spot, increasing chances of discovery.

Yell at Night Noises - Tell them to yell at noises that scare them. If it's an animal, this will frighten it away. If it's a searcher, they will be found.

No punishment - Assure the child that you will not be angry with them. (There have been cases of children hiding from searchers for fear of being punished.)

Look Big - Your child can attract attention by wearing a brightly coloured garbage bag or jacket. If they hear or see a plane they should lie down in a clearing. ✪

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## Random Casts

By Don MacLean

### Fishing for Early Season Trout

Many of the anglers I know will be fishing on opening day regardless of the weather. It takes more than rain, ice or snow to keep them from that first day on the water. Early season fishing places special demands on the angler,

not only is the weather unpredictable, but conditions on the water can vary greatly from year to year.

In a year with heavy snowfall rivers will be running high and dirty for awhile. If the weather stays cold then your favourite lake may remain frozen for several weeks as well. If lakes are ice covered anglers will be concentrating on rivers and streams for their early season fishing.

High water will force most trout to seek cover behind rocks, logs and other structure. There they can stay out of the main current while taking advantage of any feed that is washed into them. Undercut banks are a great spot to target.

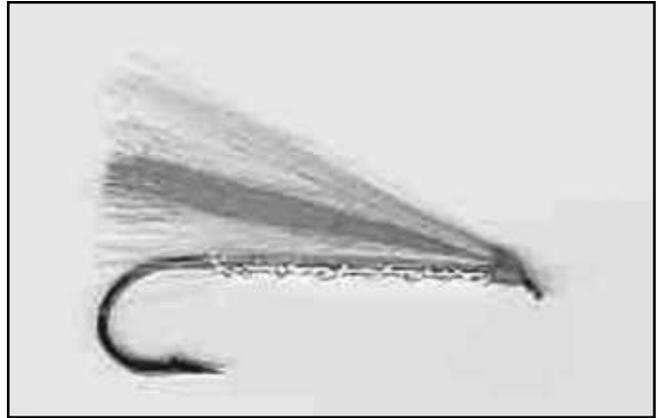
Fish can stay out of the main current while feeding. Drift your lure, fly or bait through these spots and you have a good chance of connecting.

When lakes open up after the winter they provide special challenges for anglers.

The cool water means fish can be found throughout the water column. It will be some months before the water warms up enough for them to move to the cooler depths.

Spring time trout will often be found in areas where they can find food. Generally speaking food will be concentrated in two areas of lakes during the early season, brooks and inshore. Fishing the mouths of brooks running into lakes is always a safe bet.

Small fish such as minnows will gather to eat any insects washed into the



Mickeyfin

lake and in turn these will attract trout.

If the lake you fish has a run of smelt trout will be attracted in the spring to eat smelt coming down after spawning. Shoreline shallows are another spot to pinpoint for early season trout. Since the shallow water warms up quite a bit faster than the deeper water you often get more insect activity and feeding trout.

Early season angling is when bait works best. Fish are hungry after the winter and the smell of bait is very attractive to early season fish.

Tackle for early season lake fishing is fairly simple. A spinner baited with a worm or minnow is hard to beat, Minnow shaped lures and trolling flies or big streamers can also be very effective. Streamer flies such as the Mickey Finn are a good choice for early season fishing. Spoons like mepps spinners, daredevils, or the five of diamonds are also good choices. Remember to wear your life jacket when fishing and, if you are wading in high water, be sure to wear a wading belt. It will keep water out of your waders if you take a tumble. That early season water is cold.\*\*\*

Tight Lines

*Don MacLean is a Nova Scotia biologist who writes on sportfishing topics. His book Discover Nova Scotia Sportfishing, was published in 2003. ©2006 Don MacLean*

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**The Nova Scotia Black Bear...**  
*continued from page 7.*

than acorns and were quite filling.

As the days grew longer, the sow became restless and irritable with the yearlings and left them alone for longer periods. She continually marked her territory with urine and tree rubs. It wasn't long before a large, adult male bear showed up.

The boar instinctively knew he had to be patient and wait for the sow to be receptive to his mating overtures, because a female bear is stimulated to ovulate only when a male bear is in attendance.

It was time for the yearlings to leave the area as the boar would not tolerate them. The two young bears traveled many kilometers continually searching for food. They came across another wooded subdivision. The young female fed on a clover patch close by, but her sibling couldn't resist checking out the odors percolating from the residences.

It was mid-afternoon when he wandered into a backyard, knocked over a recycling box and started devouring the contents. He could hear people talking excitedly from inside the house but ignored them while he ate. The click of a video camera was audible through an open window.

When a police car drove into the driveway, the bear fled into the forest. The young male would not stay away and continued visiting by day, and at night. The female accompanied him occasionally, but she was more hesitant and easily spooked by human sounds. The bond with her sibling weakened and she eventually wandered away from the area. One day the young male was caught in a trap set by staff from the local DNR office. Staff now had to decide what to do with the yearling. Wild bears could not be kept in captivity and remote release sites were becoming scarce because of increased human use. And, for the most part, the public did not like to hear about captured bears being put down.

During 2004, black bear complaints exploded throughout mainland Nova Scotia. It was DNR's busiest year to date for handling bear problems. Bear complaints usually slow down when natural food sources such as blueberries, raspberries, and tree nuts and fruit ripen at the end

of July. Last year's unusually cold spring meant natural food items were scarce, and bear complaints continued until the end of November.

Bear numbers appear to be higher now than in the past for several reasons: a decrease in hunting, changing land patterns and increased human use of bear habitat. People are also more tolerant of black bears than they were in the past. Historically, black bears have always been hunted in Nova Scotia, and for many years bounties were paid for dead animals. Mike Parker, in *Guides of the North Woods*, wrote about David Costley, a well known guide from Kings County, who between 1852 and 1922, killed over 144 bears (his registered kill number only).

Costley was even given a gold medal and gold ring by Queen Victoria in honor of his exploits (he supplied the bearskins for the hats worn by the Queen's Coldstream Guards).

Until 1988 there was no limit on the number of bears a person holding a big game license could take, and there was no requirement to report what was taken.

Current regulations stipulate a one bear bag limit for both hunters and bear snarers during the open season in the fall. People are concerned about human safety around bears. Bears should always be considered dangerous, but there have been less than three dozen deaths by black bears in North America during the past century. There are no records of anyone even being scratched by a bear in Nova Scotia. Compare these numbers with the thousands of encounters that have occurred between bears and people during the same period. Usually a bear runs away when approached by a human; however, yearling bears can be an exception as they tend to be more inquisitive and less fearful of people.

Research has shown that given a choice, black bears prefer to obtain food away from human habitation, but when food is scarce, their natu-

ral timidity is compromised. When bears do come around houses, they can sometimes be taught to leave the area. Most importantly, any food attractants on a property must be removed.

If a bear persists in visiting a site, the homeowner should yell at the animal from a safe distance (as far back as possible) and can also throw rocks or water, bang pots or blow whistles at the same time. It is always important to holler at the bear while making noises so that the animal associates the adverse conditioning with humans. Another technique is throwing rocks or balls in the woods behind a bear, which causes the animal to believe there is another bear present. The bear will then run away to avoid an altercation. Bears can be taught that residential areas are out-of-bounds. It takes time and diligence on the part of homeowners to keep bears in the woods.

Although bears and humans have lived together for centuries, complaints about these magnificent creatures are on the increase across North America. It is up to us to stop robbing them of their wildness because of our sloppy habits. And, if while out in the forest one is lucky enough to see a bear walking along a woods trail or swimming in a lake, take time to savour the moment as it may happen only once in a lifetime. ❦

*Jenny Costelo is a Wildlife Technician with DNR's Waverley office. This first appeared in Natures Resources.*

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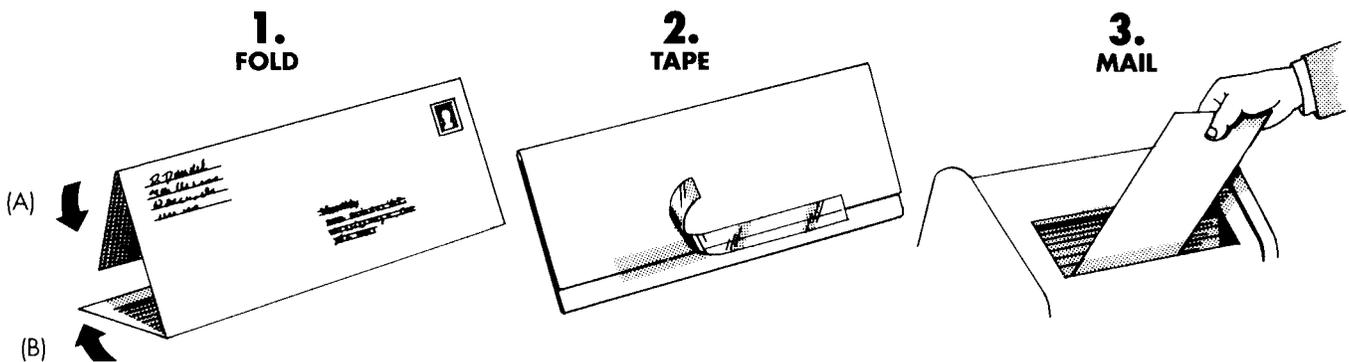


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