

Maitland Musings



Inside this issue:

Special Fishing Edition

Past Events & Activities 2

Cleaning Up the Valley 2

Undiscovered Country 3

Who Are We? 4

What Are We About?

The Maitland Promoted 4

WHAT: "Let's Go Fishing" Event

WHEN: July 9th, 2005

from 9 am-2 pm

WHERE: Falls Reserve Conserva-

tion Area, Benniller

ADMISSION: \$9 per vehicle

(Day entry to park)

Come and try your hand at casting a fly rod! Demonstrations and free lessons will be brought to you by the LMSG. Local river guide, Mike Verhoef of Fly Fitters will be offering these sessions from 10 am to 2 pm.

under 12's, \$5 for ages 13 and over.

For more details about the day, or if you wish to attend, please contact Darren Kenny at the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority (519-335-3557).

We hope to see you there!



Mike Verhoef with Rick Morgan fishing on the Maitland.

As part of Ontario Family Fishing Weekend (July 8th—10th), the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group (LMSG) is partnering with the Conservation Area to promote fishing as one of the numerous recreational activities available along the river valley.

The Conservation Area has organized a fishing derby where families can fish without a licence, if they are Canadian residents. If you wish to attend the fishing derby in addition to the LMSG fly-fishing lessons, registration includes lunch and is \$2 for

Come celebrate Family Fishing weekend with the LMSG, and try your hand at casting a fly rod.

Undiscovered Country

By: Jack Imhof, National Biologist, Trout Unlimited Canada

I couldn't believe it. As I stood on the old iron span bridge, a few kilometers downstream of Wingham, huge fish emerged out of the depths of the river to swim around the footings of the bridge. I turned to my friend Frank and gasped,

"They're bass!"

Frank and I had gotten bored that early spring day 33 years ago and had decided to explore the Maitland River, downstream of Wingham. Years before, Frank had caught a large brown trout in

that area. What neither of us expected was to discover that although the Maitland may have trout, it was really home to a glorious smallmouth bass fishery. Two months later, we had our bass tackle and began our love affair with the river that is one of

the finest fisheries in southern Ontario: truly an Exceptional Water.

(Article cont'd on page 3)

What Have We (the LMSG) Been Up To?

By: Darren Kenny

Lower Maitland Report (2000)

The Lower Maitland Report represents the combined efforts of many of the partners participating in the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group (LMSG). The report provides a great deal of interesting information about the Lower Maitland River and surrounding area including history, geography, fish and wildlife, vegetation, regulations applicable to the area and more!

Local Landowner Property Visits (2000)

During the summer of 2000, the LMSG hosted two outdoor events at the homes of local landowners Jim and Brenda Ginn and Jim and Melba Walters. The events were open to all landowners along the Lower Maitland River and designed to provide an opportunity for landowners to share their experiences of the area and learn about the river's natural heritage. Activities included plant identification walks and a presentation on fish habitat in the river.

Barbecue lunches were also provided.

Maitland Fly Over/Bus Tour (2002)



In September, 2002 an airplane and bus tour of the Lower Maitland River Valley and surrounding area was organized for local municipal councillors and staff. The event was held in order to educate decision-makers about the river's unique natural environment and the development pressures along the valley. New official plans were being developed for several abutting municipalities and presented an opportune time for such an event to help encourage strong planning policies for natural area protection. This event was a huge success and enjoyed by many.

Natural Environment Event at Richard Moore's (2003)

Local landowners and concerned citizens were invited to attend an outdoor social event and barbecue on the property of Richard Moore along the Lower Maitland River near Auburn. A short walk was held during which the natural environment, wildlife and plants of the Lower Maitland were discussed. A local scientist and naturalist held a demonstration of the many insects that inhabit the river and how they reflect river health and well as a discussion on how the river shapes the local landscape.

Stewardship Series (2004)

In the spring of 2004, an indoor speaker series for local landowners was held. Presentations included issues such as environmentally responsible forest management, tree planting and naturalization, wetland creation and rehabilitation, nuisance wildlife and encouraging wildlife on your property.

An outdoor event was designed to help local landowners develop a stewardship plan for their own individual properties. Activities included a tour of different woodlot types and discussion of management options for a variety of outcomes - recreation, income, biodiversity and wildlife habitat creation. Participants were given information on options for wetland enhancement and creation on their properties.

Code of Conduct Signs (2004-05)

The LMSG has been involved in a project to create and install code of conduct signs at various locations around the river valley. Signs are sponsored by local municipalities and various community organizations. The signs are designed to help educate recreational users about the importance of the natural environment of the area and how to enjoy their use of the valley in an environmentally and ethically responsible manner.



Landowners and stakeholders of the Lower Maitland River Valley are invited to help clean up this fall.

Come and clean up your river valley.

WHAT: Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup

WHEN: Saturday, September 10, 2005

Connect with your community and with people across Canada who care about the envi-

ronment. Make a difference! Help remove garbage from sensitive environments and protect aquatic animals.

Join members of the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group and help clean up the Maitland

River. Learn more about it at:

<http://www.vanaqua.org/cleanup>

and follow the links to register, or call **Beth Ross** at 524-8144 for more information.

Undiscovered Country

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I still fish the Maitland with delight and passion. My passion, over the years has been more tempered by my interest and concern as an aquatic ecologist for the river, its valley and watershed. The river and its fishery are changing and if the community and local landowners are not vigilant and proactive, we all will loose an exceptional natural resource.

The Maitland River is an anomaly in southern Ontario: a highly productive, river flowing through the intensive farm country of Huron County. Most rivers under these circumstances are often physically degraded, full of sediment and algae, nutrient enriched and devoid of life larger than a bug. The Maitland however does not suffer many of these maladies, despite its location in the heart of agricultural southwestern Ontario. The reason for this is the unusual structure of the river's valley, its local geology and the vigilance of groups such as the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group.

"Two months later, we had our bass tackle and began our love affair with the [Maitland] river that is one of the finest fisheries in southern Ontario."

The Maitland flows through a deep valley, cut into the landscape of Huron County. The geology along the mainstem is composed of large glacial moraines of cobble, gravel and sand sitting on fractured dolostone bedrock. The moraines act as enormous sponges that soak up rainwater and snowmelt creating large active watertables under the

landscape. The deeply incised valley helps drive and direct groundwater towards the river: resulting in enormous amounts of groundwater seepages and flows along the river. Groundwater moderates the river's temperature, dilutes enriched agricultural water and maintains good baseflows. The deeply incised valley has naturally prevented farmers from attempting to farm near the river and as a result much of the valley and floodplain is either forested or in natural floodplain vegetation. The river channel is complex with



good riffle and pool structure with a substrate of cobble, gravel and boulders. All these factors have created a river and fishery resource that could be one of the finest in southwestern Ontario.

Although the river is classified as containing a warm-water fish community, the groundwater discharges also create localized zones of cold-water habitat in the main river and its tributaries. The tributaries of the river downstream of Wingham contain stream resident brook trout and also provide the opportunity for successful spawning by rainbow trout and occasionally Chinook salmon.

Warm water fish such as smallmouth bass, suckers and various minnow species abound in the river. Fish from Lake Huron also move into the mouth of the river, (below the railway bridge) to feed, or, in some cases, to spawn. The assembly of warm water species is typical of most rivers in

southwestern Ontario, although the river is also home of one species, the Black Redhorse Sucker which is a nationally threatened species and absent in

"I still fish the Maitland with delight and passion."

most southern Ontario streams.

Although the Maitland is a superb river for fall and spring fishing for rainbow trout, I impatiently wait for the opening of smallmouth bass. In the last 30 years, the quality of fishing for smallmouth bass has declined dramatically. Back in the 1972-1980 time period, it was not uncommon to catch at least one or two smallmouth bass over 16" per fishing trip. The Maitland was one of the finest river bass fisheries in southern Ontario.

Things changed in the 1980's. For a number of years a bass derby was held on the river with many large fish removed from the river. As the river slowly recovered in the mid-1990's, we experienced one of the worst droughts to occur in Ontario since the 1930's, leading to further reduction in the quality of the fishery.

The decline in the fishery and the slow recovery are not surprising if one considers that river bass grow more slowly than their cousins in the lake. Aging of bass from the Maitland and Grand by National fish aging experts found that these river bass take 15-18 years to reach trophy size (>18")! Smallmouth bass of 20" were over 20 years old.

A number of anglers a few weeks ago were bemoaning the fact that the river bass fishing was not as good as it used to be. As one angler said, "I can catch a load of bass under 12" in a day of fishing but I have to bust my butt to catch one over 16". It isn't like it was 30 years ago."

If you are satisfied with the present quality of fishing, you need do nothing. If you wish the river to return to its past quality, then you and the community should be asking for designated reaches of the river to be classified as special regulated water with a reduction of harvest of large, older fish. Regulations such as a reverse limit where only small fish are harvested or catch and release are options that have been very successful in other waters in Ontario and the USA. None of this will happen unless the local community and local anglers are willing to demand the establishment of special regulations to bring their fishery back.



The Maitland is one of the finest rivers in southern Ontario. The unusual combination of geology, geography, and topography has created a river and valley of exceptional beauty and productivity. I urge landowners and others in the larger community along the Maitland to work with groups such as the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group, Maitland Valley Conservation Authority and Ministry of Natural Resources in order to protect and restore it. Having experienced some of the best fishing the Maitland once had, I would dearly love to see it rise to that quality again.

Mission:

"To maintain and enhance natural ecosystem features of the Lower Maitland River Valley."

Vision:

The long term vision for the Lower Maitland River Valley is a healthy river system and valley which:

- sustains a natural ecosystem thriving on clean water and natural features and functions;
- supports limited human activities carried out with minimal impact; and
- is maintained by the cooperative efforts of the community, including landowners, users and governments.

Goals

- ⇒ To advocate responsible stewardship of resources by landowners and valley users through:
 - encouraging a sense of community and cooperation among landowners and valley users through providing a forum for them to interact, share ideas and develop an understanding of each other's viewpoints;
 - provision of information on natural features, their presence, status and management options; and
 - provision of educational opportunities to learn about and develop an appreciation for the valley resources.
- ⇒ To encourage and direct research on natural features of the valley.
- ⇒ To profile existing protection measures, e.g. legislation, and encourage their appropriate enforcement.
- ⇒ To investigate other opportunities for protection, e.g. recommendations to regulators, special designations and learning about approaches taken in other areas.
- ⇒ To foster sustainable use of the valley and its resources.

www.huronstewardship.on.ca

Who Are We?

The Lower Maitland River Valley is certainly a landscape worthy of protection. Surrounded by highly productive agricultural land, the valley is deeply incised and features an intact corridor of forest, numerous natural heritage features such as fish and wildlife habitat, productive woodlands, limestone outcroppings and many other features of interest. To date, the river valley has been relatively untouched by development.

The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group was formed in 1998 and consists of landowners, stakeholders, organizations, agencies and individuals interested in protecting and enhancing the valley and its natural features. The group has prepared a strategy to direct its activities that reflects their vision for the area, with a focus on protecting the valley while preserving landowner's property rights and allowing stakeholders continued use of the area.

Through proper use, management and education, it is our group's hope that the Lower Maitland River Valley can remain a positive example of a natural area that is both protected and enjoyed.

Maitland River Valley is promoted by FlyFitters

By: Mike Verhoef



Patrick, Paul and Mike
on the Maitland River

A visit from Outdoor Canada magazine editor Patrick Walsh, writer Paul Quarington, and photographer Ted Smith came about from a picture that was taken last fall of Mike Verhoef fly fishing on the Maitland (Colborne Park area). The photo was a double page spread in their spring fishing issue, 2005.

Based on this photo, an

article will appear in the fall issue of Outdoor Canada magazine, featuring areas with the best steelhead fishing in Canada, BC or Ontario!

FlyFitters and the Maitland River will be featured for the Ontario portion of the article, as magazine visitors were very impressed with the river valley - even the fish cooperated.

FlyFitters and the Maitland River was promoted for unique float trips in their Outcast drift boat on Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters TV show (OFAH TV). The show will air in January, 2006 and will feature different tactics used to pursue Steelhead here in SW Ontario.