

*Kespukwitk
Species at Risk*

(Written by Sarah Jenney)

2017

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Making it Possible

This regional Mi'kmaw community-based SAR monitoring and conservation program is made possible from the partnerships between Acadia First Nation, Bear River First Nation, community members/Elders/youth and regional ecologists.

Partners in field work include: Mersey Tobetic Research Institute, Clean Annapolis River Project, Nova Scotia Youth Conservation Corps and Kejimikujik National Park/Historic Site.

Funding for this program came from the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk (Environment Canada), Acadia First Nation and Bear River First Nation.

And of course, these kinds of projects happen because of the relationships we have with our Elders, youth, the communities, and the land itself. We are inspired as Mi'kmaq to do what we can to walk lighter on the earth, learn, reconnect, restore ecological integrity and protect it.

Wela'liog



Overview

Since 2013 Acadia First Nation has teamed up with Bear River First Nation to work on a regional basis for monitoring and recovering terrestrial Species at Risk. Throughout the years of this project we have continued our research, analysis, and monitoring, trained new fieldworkers, hosted environmental events and workshops, worked with youth in the communities, and held community meetings along with talking to community members. This project is mainly being conducted on reserve lands of Acadia First Nation and Bear River First Nation, which together span the district / Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve. This is where a high concentration of Species at Risk is found.

Our Project Focal Species

Reptiles

- Blanding's Turtle (Endangered)
- Eastern Ribbonsnake (Threatened)
- Wood Turtle (Threatened)
- Snapping Turtle (Special Concern)

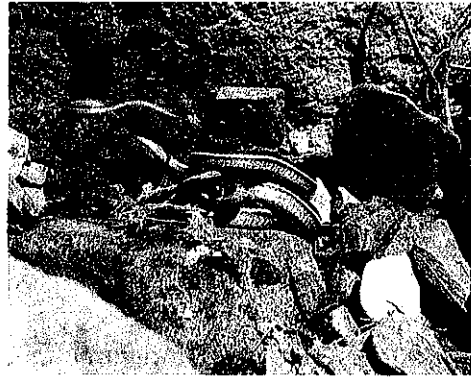
Birds

- Chimney Swift (Threatened)
- Common Nighthawk (Threatened)
- Eastern Wood-pewee

Plants

- Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora (11 Species)
- Black Ash (Provincially Threatened)

Monarch Butterfly (Special Concern)

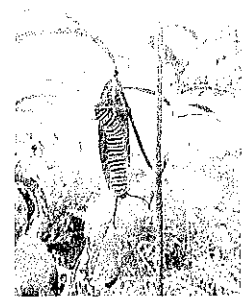


Work Summaries

Most of our field research was focused on the Eastern Ribbonsnakes and rare plants that grow along the shores of our communities. We were happy to hear many reports of Ribbonsnake sightings. For the past 3 year we had a summer student from Clean NS helping Sarah with the research and monitoring, along with an additional fieldworker. The fieldworker continue to monitor and collect data about the Eastern Ribbonsnake. We are also pleased to continue monitoring the special regional plants that are found in healthy ecosystems of NS. A few we focus on are: Redroot, Long's Bulrush, and Marsh Mermaid-weed.



Throughout the years, butterfly gardens have been planted in Wildcat, Gold River, Yarmouth, and Bear River. In 2017, gardens have been updated and new gardens have been established in Ponhook and at the Gold River Powwow Grounds. The Butterfly Gardens consist of Swamp Milkweed and other great nectar source flowers were planted. The Swamp Milkweed is the only plant that the Monarch caterpillars will feed and develop their chrysalis on. Each garden is chemical free!



For a few summers we live-trapped and released turtle in Grand Lake, in Wildcat and Gold River to see what types of turtles we have. The main turtles found were Painted Turtles, which are no at risk. The Snapping Turtle is a species of Special Concern in Canada and we had trapped ~15 all together. Our biggest focus was to see if we had a population of Blanding's Turtles in our wetlands. (To date, no Blanding's were trapped or sighted.)

In the valley of Bear River, Chimney Swifts previously had a communal roost in the old Oakdene School and approximately 200 birds were counted each year. In 2011, the chimney was capped leaving the birds without a roosting site. Happily, during 2013 people noticed the Chimney Swifts flying into a chimney of an old house down the road. Monitoring the new location started in 2013 and is continuously ongoing each year.

Water quality testing was carried out a number of times throughout the years in five communities and their surrounding watersheds from July to November. Our water quality tasting is done by using a YSI meter which is a hand-held unit that measures water temperature, pH, and dissolved oxygen.

The water quality guideline for pH is 6.5 in order to support aquatic life. According to our data so far it seems our streams are a bit too acidic. This can be attributed to various things including bedrock type, acid rain, and so on. The guideline for dissolved oxygen is 5.5 mg/l to support aquatic life. All of our recorded data is above/meets that.



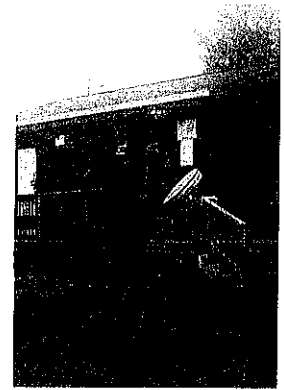
Many community meetings have been taking place throughout the project years. These meetings or workshops included species identification, project updates, gathering community input, and discussing how to protect our Species at Risk. There will be more meeting in the future and we encourage all community members to come and learn about our project and the Species at Risk in your own community!

For more information on Species at Risk, check out:

www.speciesatrisk.ca

Honoring Wskitqamu

As with many ecological projects, we still need a bit of other funds to help offset some costs in our budgets and so fundraisers for our project have been held throughout Kespukwitk. The events hosted local singers/songwriters, poetry readings, documentary screenings, and as a table at the AFN Powwow. The fundraisers are a good turn-out and we hope to see many more attend our future fundraisers/events.



Conservation Planning

As we have Threatened species in our communities we thought it would be a good idea to start working on planning how to protect them. We have held meetings in the Wildcat community to talk about the proposed protection plan.

Sarah also organized a 2-day Elder gatherings to ask for input on the ecological state of our region and about monitoring species, for example which species and how, following cultural and ecological protocols. During these two days we talked about the project, showed our research and monitoring results, spoke in shearing circles, did a water ceremony, and had an activity called World Café. The café exercise set-up around the room gave people the freedom to speak openly about how they felt about the 3 different topics we had (written on the paper on the tables) and move around with their tea/coffee joining various conversations happening.

Many people at this Elders' gathering were concerned about our forest ecosystems and the human impact on our birds, plants, and medicines. We also had many suggestions for respecting the land and species during monitoring and not to be overly invasive. Overall, the gathering was a great success with ~16 people who attended. We asked that our Elders continue to come together with us in an advisory capacity for future conservation planning as we move forward with our work. We hope to have more meetings and gatherings in the future.

Future Plans

For the next 3 years we will be focusing our research and monitoring on the Eastern Ribbonsnake and other wetland habitats. We will continue to be interested in all Species at Risk sighting reports and any suggestions you might have to improve our work. If you are interested in helping out with monitoring or protection planning, please feel free to contact Sarah or shalan. Contact information below.

Youth: Stay Tuned!

Our plan for the spring and summer 2018 is to involve our community youth in ecological monitoring and restoration around Kespukwitk. Please stay tuned for workshop sign-ups.

If anyone is interested or has ideas about events/activities/workshops please contact Sarah by email at sjermey@outlook.com.

It was a pleasure to do this work in our communities around Kespukwitk. Thank you for all your input and advice. Wela'lioq.

If you have any other questions about the SAR program, please contact shalan at: envirobrfn@eastlink.ca

