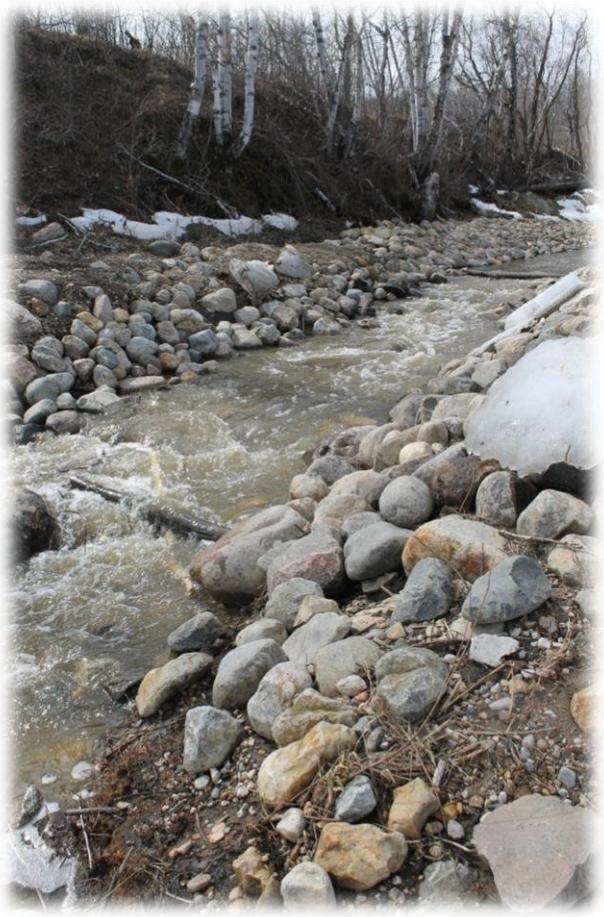
***Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement* will be "Giving Fish a Helping Hand" again this summer.** This is their 4th consecutive year of field season assessments, education and stocking. SVSFE would like to share their project accomplishments with the valley. Each project completed in the past is listed under its location.

Swan River



Beginning in 2008, SVSFE partnered with (along with financial support) Swan Lake Watershed Conservation District (SLWCD) who initiated a project with the goals to inventory river habitat (using aerial assessments), assess the species diversity & abundance. The main objective of this survey was to obtain important information to coordinate into the Swan Lake Watershed Management Plan.

In the fall of 2009, technicians tagged 13 walleye on the Swan River to understand habitat utilization, fish movement, spawning requirements and any barriers to fish passage. Tracking continued until November of 2010. Barriers were identified during this project – prompting the groups to take action.

In 2010, the SLWCD began the construction of the Honoway fish way located at the ford crossing east of Swan River. A new path was created on the south side of the ford crossing – rock and rubble was added creating pools and riffles. The fish way was designed specifically to allow spring spawning species to continue their migration upstream. The fish way was not opened until the early spring of 2012, allowing the entire area to establish.

During the fall of 2011, SVSFE technicians captured five walleye to tag with radio telemetry tags. These fish were tagged mainly to monitor their movement upstream – and more specifically if they migrated through the fish way.

Most of March and April 2012 were spent monitoring the new fish way around the ford crossing. SVSFE's role in the fish way was to assess the usage of fish species using hoop nets, gill nets and radio telemetry tagged walleye. Since 2010, SVSFE has stocked 396 adult walleye into the river in various locations -Technicians were keeping a watchful eye out for these fish tagged with either a floy tag or a clipped dorsal fin.

Low water levels combined with a late spawn created an unusual year for walleye in the river, therefore currently no conclusions could be made on the true success of the fishway – tracking these walleye will continue until the fall of 2013. A special thanks to our director's Dave Chetyrbuk and Leanne Kalinowich who took flight in search of these fish on a few occasions.

Bell Lake

The spring of 2009 marked the beginning of studies conducted at Bell Lake. Creel surveys are perhaps the most important survey to obtain angler information. Using these surveys, SVSFE partnered with Conservation & Water Stewardship (C&WSD) to estimate angling pressure on walleye, harvest rates of each species, and determine the quality of fishing. The average angling pressure at Bell Lake was calculated at 1.96 anglers a day. Harvest rates (recreational) were also considered below the maximum sustainable yield. SVSFE and C&WSD knew their work was not done here – why was angling pressure that low? Where are the fish? In addition to the creel survey, depth information was collected – and in collaboration with the Assiniboine Community College – a depth map was completed. This map is available on our website.

SVSFE's next step to understanding more about Bell Lake included trap netting which was conducted May 16th – 23rd. Trap netting is a live release method and is essential for obtaining growth information, health conditions, habitat utilization and population estimates. A total of 401 fish were caught – 129 Walleye, 56 Northern Pike and 216 White Suckers.

Opening day was May 12th this year and SVSFE technician; Holly Urban said, "While trap netting we found the Walleye at Bell Lake were just beginning to spawn - even with the mild spring". Small lakes like Bell can be easily affected when spawning occurs during or after the opening of the fishing season, especially if there are low practices in catch and release. The program is already indicating important information pertinent to management of the Bell Lake Fishery.

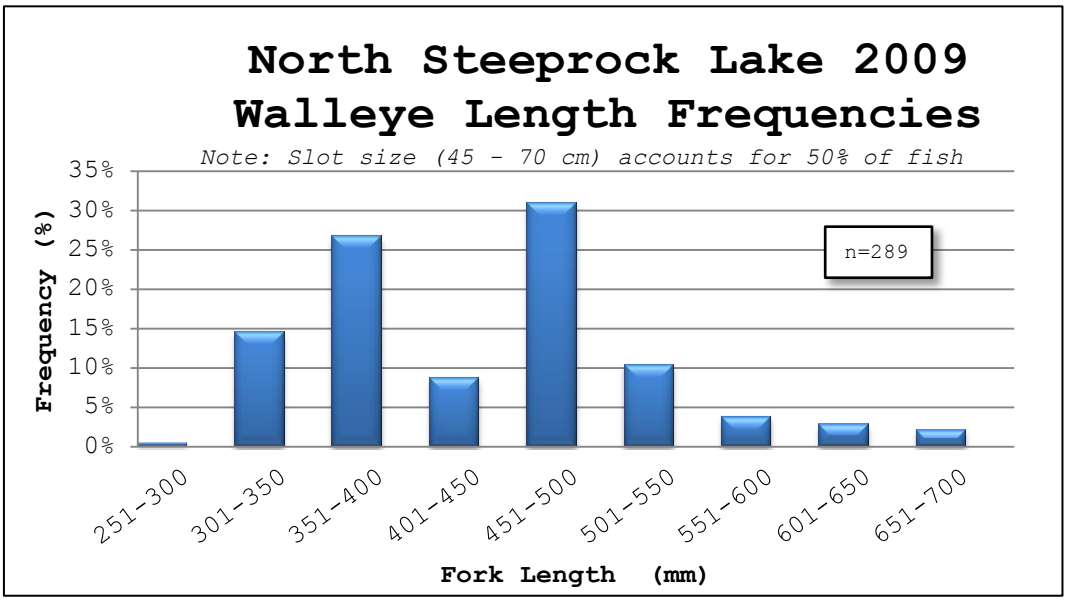
Volunteers were a great help during the program pulling nets on both the Saturday and Sunday. SVSFE loves to see interested community join them during trap netting. It gives everyone the opportunity to check out first-hand how Sport Fish is positively impacting the local fisheries. If you are disappointed that you missed out on Bell Lake Trap Netting – don't be worried, SVSFE will be at North Steeprock this fall and Bell Lake is on the agenda to be repeated again next spring. Keep an eye on our website later in the year to see when we will be there!

North Steeprock Lake

During the 2009 season Creel Surveys, a Walleye Mark/Recapture Study, and Stream Assessment were conducted at North Steeprock Lake. The study's objectives were to obtain; angling pressure & quality, population estimates through angler recap submissions, size & structure of walleye and spawning requirements. Fishing pressure was considered low here, with 4.8 anglers/day and harvest rates under the maximum sustainable yield for a lake of its size.

Stream assessment results indicated suitable spawning habitat was available and walleye utilized the in-flow river for spawning purposes. Anglers should always respect this habitat during spawning seasons.

Close to 300 walleye were tagged in the Mark/Recapture Study. It was found that 50% of walleye sampled were in the protected slot size. Due to lack of participation in re-cap surveys developing an accurate population estimate was not possible - in conclusion further sampling was required.



Therefore, SVSFE is returning to Steeprock Lake to begin trap netting in the fall of 2012. SVSFE has no doubts that this program will provide an accurate representation of not only the walleye population in this lake but also the diversity of species here.

Whitefish Lake

Whitefish Lake is one of the most popular recreational fishing destinations. As this lake gains in popularity, so does the increased need to help protect the fish populations within the lake. Cottage development, an expanding campground, and a growing angling community all contribute to increased pressure on the Whitefish Lake fish communities.

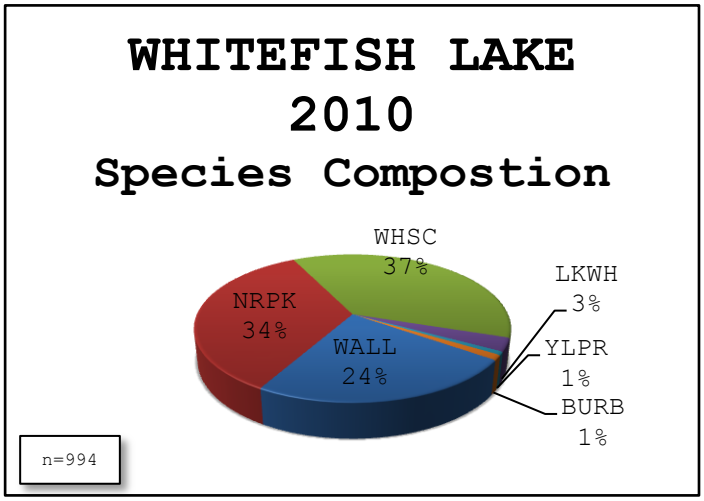
SVSFE recognized the need to initiate a rehabilitation process and contracted AAE Tech Services in the spring of 2009 to;

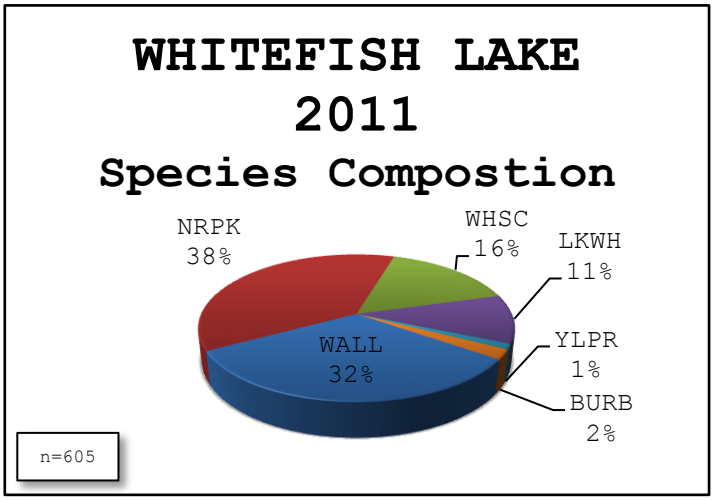
- Conduct detailed habitat assessments of the tributaries
- Document potential spawning habitat in the tributaries
- Conduct surveys to understand species utilization, composition, and abundance of species.

Results indicated that Whitefish Lake would benefit if the tributaries returned to their natural state.

SVSFE took immediate action. In the fall of 2009, 10 walleye were tagged with radio telemetry tags to monitor seasonal movement with an emphasis on the spawn. AAE Tech Services mapped numerous dams on both creeks. In order for the fish to reach suitable spawning habitat SVSFE Directors travelled up North and Lagoon Creek in March of 2010 blasting several barriers on each creek. When the spawning season arrived later that year – walleye utilized both creeks but preferred North Creek and walleye were observed moving upstream by the hundreds. Angling success this year has displayed the success of SVSFE's efforts. From these findings, SVSFE along with C&WSD suggest respecting the spawning habitat North and Lagoon Creek provide and ask anglers to refrain from fishing in the creeks at this time.

Enhancing the spawning habitat was only the first step in understanding Whitefish Lake. A two year trap netting program and creel surveys were also initiated in 2010. Trap netting results provided managers with population estimates and information on the health and current status of the fishery.





Creel surveys indicated a very high fishing pressure during the project timeline of May – September. Harvest rates indicate the maximum sustainable yield has been met. Do not let this worry you – but instead heighten your respect for catch and release methods and follow the limits and slot sizes posted. They are there for a reason! Monitoring the spawning habitat and angling pressure will continue to ensure fish for the future.

Stocked Trout Assessments

Stocked trout assessments took place from June 2010 to September 2011 (2 summers and 1 winter sampling period). Sampling was completed with the direct objective of providing managers and our local stocking committee with information to make decisions on stocking rates and species selection.

Information collected included an index of stocked trout abundance, biological information, summer/winter habitat requirements, predator prey interaction, growth rates and discovering species present unknown to anglers. Lakes assessed include; Glad Lake, Beaver Lake, Black Beaver Lake, Two-Mile Lake, West Blue Lake, East Blue Lake, Gull Lake, and Vini Lake.

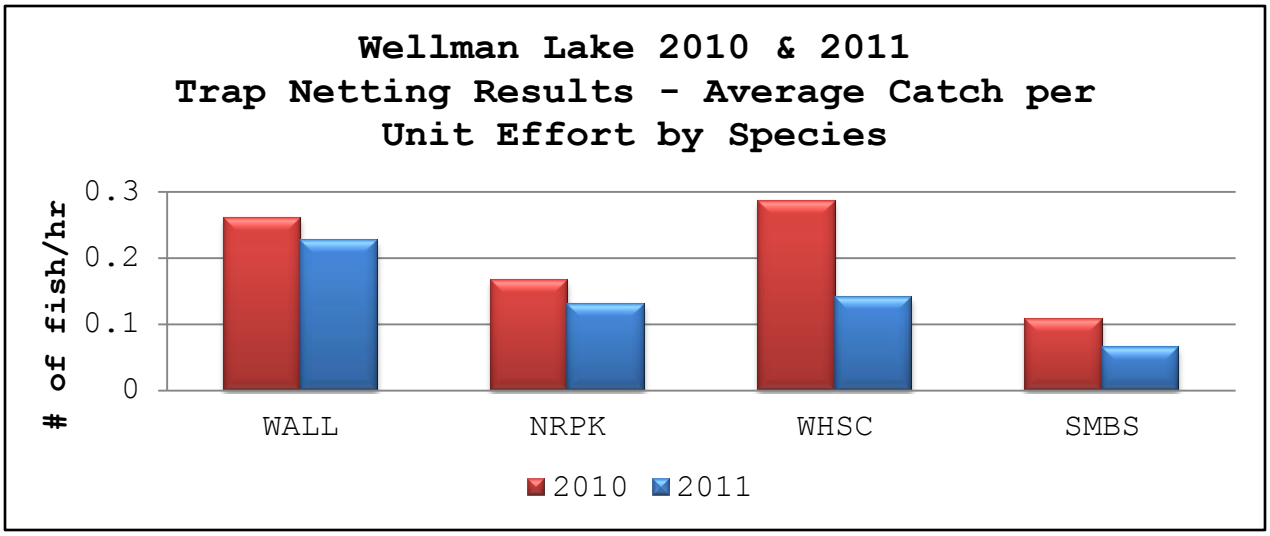
The stocking committee for the Swan River Area are comprised of members from SVSFE and local fisheries biologist. This data collected from the stocked trout assessments has directly influenced and expanded stocking decisions in our region since the beginning of stocked trout projects in 2010. An example of this would be; Vini Lake in the Porcupine Mountains is now home to a small population of Lake Trout.

Wellman Lake

Wellman Lake is just the beginning to many angling opportunities found in the Duck Mountains. In 2010, C&WSD in partnership with SVSFE initiated a trap netting program with the same objectives as the above lakes. Trap netting was only the start to obtaining information on the health, growth, and habitat of the fishery. University College of the North used Wellman Lake as a base for a portion of their fall camp in 2008 and 2010, and created an update to date depth map of the lake.

In 2011, SVSFE took over by initiating projects which included creel surveys, walleye telemetry, spawn evaluations, creek assessments, as well as year two of trap netting.

Creel Surveys indicated Northern Pike were the highly caught species by anglers followed by walleye. Anglers displayed 72% of fish were released indicating high catch and release practices (thumbs up!). Though this lake is seen as a recreational boater's lake it possesses a diverse population of game fish species indicated through trap netting results.



And of course, SVSFE didn't stop here. Ten walleye were tagged with radio telemetry tags in the fall of 2011; tributaries and spawning habitat were monitored closely for usage in both the spring of 2011 & 2012. Majority of the fish frequented the spawning reef at this time. Technicians have been monitoring this reef consistently since 2010. Once the success of the spawn has been evaluated through young of the year catches this summer, SVSFE will be able to determine whether the reef requires (if any) improvement.

We like to call this "MISSION WALLEYE" Walleye Stocking/Assessments (2009 – Current)

Adult Walleye Stocking takes place in the early fall – and is one of the most important stocking projects for it provides instant angling results. SVSFE along with C&WSD have transferred close to 5,000 adult walleye from Beautiful Lake since 2009. These walleye have ranged from 10 to 18 inches and have been stocked in a variety of locations within the Duck Mountains and also the Swan River. Stocking adult walleye is undoubtedly the best way to increase walleye populations... therefore enhancing your fishing experience! Ian Kitch stated, "It's pretty exciting when you can supplement or create (in the case of Beaver or Marge) walleye fisheries to the extent we all have over the past 3 years".

Since 2010 SVSFE has transferred 549 walleye to Beaver Lake, 593 to Line Lake and 984 walleye to Marge Lake. Until SVSFE has concluded the successful establishment, a freeze on walleye limits has been in place for both Marge & Line Lake. Catch and Release is encouraged for Beaver Lake. Pending results from the follow up's on Line, Marge and Beaver, SVSFE hopes to continue stocking efforts on these & many other water bodies.

Without volunteers and partnerships with local organizations – the fish would still be in Beautiful Lake. SVSFE's Motto is Giving Fish a Helping Hand – SVSFE and the community are accomplishing this – literally lending a hand by putting fish into the lakes!

Stewards of the Future: Giving Fish a Helping Hand

This was a two month program designed to educate grade 5/6 students within the Swan Valley School Division on the conservation of fisheries including preserving and improving habitat for game fish species. Presence of the fish inspired students to relate all learning concepts to fish within their environment. Students raised Rainbow Trout in their own fish tank and technicians spent February & March educating students on fish anatomy, habitat, life cycle, history of fishing in MB, angler responsibilities and ended with a fishing trip! Each fish was measured, weighed and tagged on the release day so the students will know if they catch their fish during future angling adventures. Great Job guys! Knowing the youth will be the future of angling; SVSFE will continue to educate youth in our valley on the importance of conserving fish – and the environment surrounding.

Fishing & Fisheries Biology Camp (2011 & 2012)

During August of 2011, 13 campers were educated on fishing and fisheries biology. The campers learnt boat safety, canoe tipping, geocaching, seining on the beach and of course tips on how to fish. Camp will be held this year from August 20 to August 23 at the Wellman Lake United Church Camp for a fee of $100.^{00} (Ages 10-14). Learn more on the website.

Porcupine Mountain Fishing Lakes Inventory (Current)

Starting in July, an inventory of recreational fishing lakes lacking biological data will begin in the Porcupine Mountains. To broaden the catch selectivity of fish size and species, custom trap nets (Holissa Traps) were designed to assess abundance and diversity of species. Obtaining this information will help us to understand the lake's capability of sustaining fish life. Along with fish assessments, the lakes will also be depth mapped (which will be available to all anglers) and access will be evaluated for possible improvement. All this information will directly benefit stocking decisions with the objective to create more angling opportunities in the Porcupine Mountains.

Stocked Trout Rivers Assessment (Current)

The Swan Valley area provides anglers with diverse angling opportunities. Some opportunities are not so familiar - under-utilized stocked trout rivers. The Steeprock, Bowsman and Birch River have all been stocked with Brook & Rainbow Trout for several years. SVSFE will be assessing the fish stock and fish habitat in the upper, mid and lower reaches of the rivers using a back-pack electro shocker.

TAGGED FISH!

Remember every project completed by SVSFE involves tagged fish! Signs are posted at most lakes SVSFE has worked at with what information to record if you catch a tagged fish and where to submit it. Please submit the tag number, if that fish was kept or released, species, length, weight, and any comments you may have – it's very important to report that information. All this information directly benefits the management of our local fisheries.

Each project has been funded by the Fisheries Enhancement Fund, funds raised from SVSFE`s Annual Banquet and local organizations. Since 2009, SVSFE has accessed $446,500.00 from the Fisheries Enhancement Fund, contributed $31,750.00 directly from SVSFE and over $7,000.00 from local partners & organizations. ***A reminder to all anglers:*** when you purchase your fishing licence, the stamp should be a reminder that a portion of the licence goes to the FEF fund to enhance Manitoba's Fisheries. On top of this SVSFE has partnered in projects which brought an additional $140,000.00 to the valley with $10,000.00 of their own raised funds being contributed. Each dollar spent goes specifically to educating the public and sustaining & enhancing our local fisheries for now and the future.