

2016 SVSFE Fish Camp

From August 17th - 21st Wellman Lake's United Church Camp was the "place to be" for children who love the past time commonly referred to as Sport Fishing. "Fish Camp", which has been facilitated by Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement (SVSFE) since 2011 occurs each August for children aged 9-14. The camp is designed to get kids out angling while at the same time providing them with the opportunity to learn a variety of outdoor skills.

It all began on Wednesday (the 17th), with the arrival of the campers; a record breaking 30 registrations later and the fun was about to begin. We started with introductions. The children stated their names and something they liked; it was funny how many children stated they liked "fishing"... I think they were pretty eager to get out on the water. We then split the kids into three groups. The first group went with Megan Paterson (SVSFE technician), Nicholas Connolly (SVSFE summer student), and Nicole Yarema (ISFE summer student), for a briefing on boat safety and the opportunity to drive some boats. The second group went with Holly Urban (SVSFE Projects Manager), and Elgin Barnett (SVSFE director) to go over lake regulations, proper catch-and-release fish handling techniques, knot tying, and prepping the kid's rods for the week. The third group went with myself, Brock Koutecky (SVSFE technician) for a quick demonstration on the four species of fish in the lake (Walleye, Northern Pike, Smallmouth Bass, and Yellow Perch), and the species' seasonal behavior and some tips on how to catch each of them. After the three groups rotated through, and a quick break for supper, it was time to get out fishing! We had integrated a "trip plan" system into camp this year. The children were to document their plans each time before going out on the lake, and sign out a dry bag containing a variety of safety items that includes two-way radios. I must admit, this system worked quite well and is definitely something we will implement in the future. That night, like most nights, we stayed out on the water until the sun went down; it was a really great first day!

Thursday, we had invited some special guests to do some presentations. In the morning, we split the children into 2 groups. The first group, went with Pattie Atwell (AdventureSmart), a search and rescue volunteer from Winnipeg on behalf of the PaddleSmart program. Pattie had put together a presentation that aimed to inform the children on how to



prepare for outdoor expeditions, how to avoid getting into hairy situations, and lastly how to survive if you find yourself "right sideways", as Pattie would say. The second group went with Eddie Shao and Steven Rivard (AIS Watercraft Inspectors) for a lesson on aquatic invasive species and how to be diligent and avoid the transportation of invasive species to other waterbodies. These presentations were great, and I got to say, we volunteers learned a thing or two from these great public speakers.

Following a tasty lunch of pulled pork prepared by our wonderful cook Linda Cober, we had Darby Blazenko (SVSFE Director) volunteer to take the children on a nature walk. Darby is a reforestation expert, and took the children on a hike where they identified plants, and collected blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, wild mint, and lavender for tea making later that evening. The rest of the day was allocated to either free time or fishing. A few of the older boys had caught multiple pike the day before, and wanted to go out and target some other species, so I volunteered to take them out to the main lake where I had caught some walleye the week before. We bottom-bounced for an hour or so with limited success, only catching one 55cm walleye in 5m of water. The sun was going down so we decided to head back to the camp. Shortly after passing Jeff Connolly (SVSFE President) with a group of kids jigging for walleye, we noticed some activity in the calm water near a popular bass fishing spot. After quickly tying on a top water lure we casted towards a group of large boulders, and on that first cast, about 2 seconds after the lure hit the water, we knew we had a large bass on. After about a minute of peeling line and the fish breaking the surface we netted a 43cm smallmouth (3cm short of a Manitoba Master Angler). We quickly admired the fish before releasing it. I will never forget how excited those boys were after landing that fish. They borrowed some of my bass lures and targeted smallmouth for the rest of the week. That night, following a few games of "ManTracker" prepared by the camp councilors Cole Brading, Abby Black, Jessica Urban and the camp lifeguard, Ben Burick, the kids still had no intention of going to bed anytime soon.



Friday morning, following a delicious pancake breakfast, we gave the children the option of either free time, shelter building, fishing or fire building. Jessica, Abby, Cole, and Ben took some kids out fishing. One younger boy and Abby had found a good perch fishing spot off the park's dock just south of camp. They used split-shots with night crawlers and caught perch all morning. I remember the boy being so excited to write all his perch down on our fish tally board we had installed in the mess hall. Holly, Megan, and Nicole took some eager groups out to build lean-to shelters. Shelter building is an activity well received by the majority of campers as three separate groups headed out to the mixed-wood forest surrounding the camp. Two groups of younger campers were split up and sent with Holly and the rest with Megan and Nicole. An older group who had attended the camp in previous years were sent off to do what they know best. "The excitement in finding the coolest spot to start building sends the kids off in a scramble" - Paterson. After discovering "the best and coolest spot ever" they begin building the frame. Not surprisingly, using the folding hand saw to collect spruce boughs seems to be the most desired job. Kids are allowed the creativity to design the lean-to however they wish, but are judged after completion on how well they utilized tips received on location, integrity of the structure and materials used. "An on-going and hilarious threat is to tell the campers to make a good shelter because they have to stay the night in it. Mixed reactions from campers range from determination to absolute horror. All in all, each teams shelter would have been worthy in a survival situation" - Patterson.

Myself, Elgin, and Matt Harris (SVSFE Volunteer), took some kids to compete in a fire building competition. We had prepared tripod stands out of willows and hung soup cans with water from them. We also provided birch bark and cedar kindling. The idea was to build a fire from scratch and time how long it took for the water to boil. After about a dozen teams went through the process we decided to have a final with the adults involved. Matt and myself were a team, and we even had a secret meeting to discuss strategy before the competition. Embarrassingly, we lost to a team of 4 girls who called themselves "The Warthogs". Following the big finale, I recall Nicole taking pictures of the girl's celebratory stance with their fingers imitating ears as they snorted like warthogs... It was extremely comical. After lunch was much of the same, and we gave the kids options to do what they were interested in, but this time we threw a casting competition, and geocaching into the mix.



Holly, Megan, and Nicole had hidden items for a geocaching challenge the day before.

Geo-caching usually draws a small crowd of campers due to the difficulty of understanding both compass and GPS units, but they learn quite quickly how both are very important when navigating out in the wilderness. "Once overcoming the learning curve the kids took quick to locating the caches hidden in various locations around the camp" - Urban. Each team member took a turn at both devices and worked together to find the caches. "We believed they had the best hiding spots but once the campers keen navigating skills had them within 3 meters of their location it was a matter of seconds before they pinpointed the bag filled with popsicle sticks" - Urban. Each team had a different color and they had to gather popsicle sticks pertaining to their team that were labelled with different letters which they would later have to unscramble to spell a local fish species. "Once they located the last cache the race was on to get back to the main lodge and being unscrambling! It was a tight race but the girls team came out on top." - Urban.

Elgin, Matt and myself hosted a couple casting competitions, one for distance and one for accuracy. Again, following the casting competition I wanted to get involved, and once again, I was unable to beat the furthest cast which was conquered by one of the older boys. Friday was not a good day for my ego. After supper, fishing was once again on the menu. Some kids chose to take out canoes and fish by themselves, while others chose to go with adults in boats. We returned after the sun went down to Cole, Jessica, Abby, and Ben having a nice campfire with all the ingredients for making smores. The kids were eager to snack before playing a nightly few games of "ManTracker". I wondered if the kids were ever going to slow down.

The next morning we met up with a good friend of ours, Ryan Suffron (Alpine Country Outfitters), who is a stillwater fly-fishing guide, amongst many other "outdoor orientated" professions. Ryan has been coming to camp since the beginning to provide the children with an opportunity to learn how to fly fish. That morning as the children rotated through groups with Ryan learning to cast fly rods, the other kids fished or had free time. Megan and Nicole took a few boys out pike fishing. That boat was "on-fire", as they caught over a dozen pike in under an hour. Holly took a few girls across the bay to a beach with steep drop-off



where they jigged up a few walleyes. Matt, Tammy Forsachuk (SVSFE Director), and myself took two boats of campers to a main lake hump with lots of green pondweed to cast for pike. I had a younger boy in my boat who seemed to get his line tangled up all the time, and there was another younger boy who would put down his rod mid-reel to help him out. It was really nice to see the young kids helping each other like that. Taylor Bednarski (SVSFE Director), took a boat of children to a really nice near shore drop-off in Regatta Bay, where one younger boy caught 5 walleye casting a green jig and twister tail; this boy knew what he was doing. Elgin took a boat of kids to some great pike habitat near the Roaring River outflow and casted around. That afternoon, Chris Stock (SVSFE Director), popped in and dropped off his fly-tying equipment for the kids to play around with if they wanted. Again, the afternoon consisted of mostly free time, fishing, or getting involved in activities that they haven't had a chance to do yet. While Trevor Urban (SVSFE Volunteer), and Elgin prepared the fish for the fish fry scheduled for supper we met up with the Duck Mountain Park Patrol, Kyle and Sonja, who provided the children with a presentation regarding angler responsibilities and how to use the angler guide. Like we do every night, we prepared questions to determine which table of children got to eat first, but this time, instead of asking questions about all the demonstrations and presentations, we asked specific questions about the Manitoba Angler's Guide. I must admit, the kids did awesome, and I truly believe that they now understand how to use this extremely confusing regulation guide. After a delicious fish fry supper we went out on the lake for the evening. I had a return camper in my boat who hadn't caught a fish at camp in the previous two years along with the boys who had been targeting bass for the whole week. The sun was nearly down and the boys brought me to a beautiful bass spot with a large fallen fir tree with lots of rock and deep water nearby. As the boys were casting towards shore for bass, and the two girls were casting towards the deep water with spinners. The girl, who had bad luck in the past two years caught, one pike, then two pike, then a third pike in a matter of about 10 minutes. The third pike, which measured 67cm ended up being the longest fish caught at camp. Finally, my ego was starting to come back after losing all those competitions on Friday.





As much as you don't want it to end, Sunday always comes way too quickly. After breakfast Sunday morning, before bidding farewell to all the kids we had prepared and allocated a variety of prizes for different things that occurred at camp - including most fish, most species, biggest fish, smallest fish, best shelter, best fire builders, best geocachers, longest cast, etc, etc. As we do every year, we ensure that each child wins something, including ridiculous acknowledgements such as "best imagination", "best redemption", and "shortest cast". In total, we caught a total of 127 fish including, 84 northern pike, 32 walleye, 2 smallmouth bass, and 9 yellow perch. Without the generous contributions to Fish Camp from our many supporters, none of this would be possible; and for this, we are extremely grateful. We had fun, they had fun, and we look forward to SVSFE's Fish Camp 2017.

- Brock Koutecky