

Ahhh...the Good 'Ole Days!

Excerpts from *Great Bay Smelt Season is Upon Us*, first published in January 2009 by Dick Pinney

When I was growing up within spitting distance of the bay, it was never in doubt that people would be celebrating the New Year smelt fishing on the Great Bay ice.

Fishing technique and gear have changed since we first started to fish the bay. Our original set-up, if we were fishing from a home-built shanty, as they were called then, would be heavy cod line with terminal gear of (Navy Yard-built) two-ounce spreader bars that featured brass rod that either had loops on the ends for attaching your hook and leader or the end of the brass rod was hammered down to prevent the leader from slipping off.

Chipping your hole, which in the custom of those days was rectangular and sized to fit the hole in the bottom of your shanty, was done with a heavy chisel or "ice spud." Those who had connections with some of the locals would also have an ice saw that was used to harvest ice. And the real lucky ones would also have a set of ice tongs that were very helpful in retrieving the big chunks of ice out of the hole. There was some science to cutting the hole. It had to be cut so that the tide flow would work across it, not on an angle. Some fishermen were so fussy about this that in areas where the angle would change on the incoming or outgoing tide, they'd have another hole cut at the proper angle for the different tide and move their shanty onto the hole when the tide changed. The big blocks of ice removed from the hole were usually allowed to freeze onto the ice outside the shanty on the downwind side to prevent the wind from moving the shanty.

Most shanties were constructed of strapping with white canvas covering (probably Navy Yard). The real old timers used to wax this canvas each year by pouring melted paraffin thinned by paint thinner or other solvent. A few years

before I was old enough to get out there, shanties either had to be made collapsible, or, if not, had to be moved off their holes at low tide. The reason for this was that the incredible amount of eelgrass growing on the bottom of the Bay held the banks of the different channels. Everyone fished in the channels because that's where the smelt were. At low tide, the shanties would drop into the channels with the ice, far enough so they might not even be seen from shore. But when the tide came in, a well anchored and airtight shanty could be blown apart by the increase in air pressure brought on by the incoming tide.

Warmth and light came from the extreme of wood heat and candles, kerosene heaters or lamps to the more expensive but much more efficient Coleman lanterns and heaters fueled by white gas.

Back then, and this is not common knowledge for many living baymen, the common bait used for smelt was frog meat that was dyed red with either Mercurochrome or Carter's red ink. The frogs were kept alive in moss-lined cages in the dark and cool areas of dirt cellars. From frogs came a switch to marine worms or glass shrimp. Of the marine worms, blood worms were the favorite, followed by sea worms. The practice of dyeing the worms with red dye is still alive with some traditionalists...

Dick's column continues with writings on modern ice fishing...warmer, easier to drill into the ice, and "no hours sitting in your woodshed, warmed by a stove and some kind of liquid internal warmth while dressing out a too-heavy bag of smelt"

Ah...the good ole days...

Dick has lived on Great Bay for close to 50 years. His column Guide Lines appears weekly in the New Hampshire Sunday News. Write to him at

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Spotlight

Great Bay Special Collections Room

Over the course of the winter and spring, the basement of the Hugh Gregg Coastal Conservation Center will be transformed into the "Great Bay Special Collections Room". Many unique historical artifacts have been donated to the Reserve over the years, including an antique sneak boat used for waterfowl hunting on Great Bay, a classic bob-house complete with hand-made barrels and fishing tip-ups, turn of the century Victorian bird mounts and many local tools once used to harvest clams, oysters and eels from the estuary. Also planned for the room is built-in shelving and filing to store important or historical books, publications and audio saved over the years. The Special Collections room will eventually be open to the public and available by appointment. This project has been made possible by a generous family donation and the Great Bay Stewards.



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Notes from the GBNERR/GBDCVC

Volunteer Spotlight

Nine years ago when I started working at the Discovery Center, one thing I quickly discovered was how many acronyms were used by federal and state organizations. As a former educator, I knew that the education field loved its own jargon, and buzzwords like “holistic training” permeated the writings and workshops I had attended. But other than NHEA (New Hampshire Educational Association) and PTA/PTO there were not too many acronyms floating around the educational universe. Then I started working for GBNERR.

One of my first jobs was helping to proof read a federal report put out by the Reserve. There I was introduced to NHEP, CICEET, NHDES, JEL, NRCS, ERD and other organizations whose acronyms were like a foreign language. Seeing them capitalized on the page, made them also appear quite sinister, sort of like a scenario from a James Bond movie.

Just imagine Bond receiving a coded message: “GOMEA and FARB are waiting for your report on ERLAC and SPNEA. Signed SWMP P.S. Remember PCCASNH.” Or picture Bond covering in a watery cave as he encountered GOOS and his evil twin IOOS.

I started to look up the acronyms so I would know more about the Reserve and its mission and goals, but as soon as I checked out NROC (Natural Resources Outreach Coalition), not to be confused with NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service), I quickly forgot what the R meant or which C it was, Conservation or Coalition. Or when I finally learned one like NHEP it changed its name and became PREP. The worst one for me is still CICEET (Cooperative Institute for Coastal and Estuarine Environmental Technology). I never can remember

what the EE’s or the C means. As NOAA has 5 agencies that begin with the word Coastal (CMP, CTP, CREST, CZMA), Coastal Institute makes sense to me as I don’t really know who CICEET is cooperating with.

When I read articles about local conservation issues and BMP and LID appear, I usually have to check for their “real words” with Steve Miller our CTPC (Coastal Training Program Coordinator) and the undisputed “king” of acronyms. Do local developers know them as Best Management Practices and Low Impact Development issues? Are the CDMs (Coastal Decision Makers) aware of the CWA (Clean Water Act) and the SLPA (Shore Land Protection Act) and of course the RCRA (Resource Conservation and Recovery Act)?

The state acronyms also overlap causing me much distress and confusion. NHDOE is pretty easy, Department of Energy, but why is there NHOEP, Office of Energy Planning? There are even two NHDES’s! The NHDFL (Division of Forest and Lands) should perhaps partner up with the SPNHF (Society for Protection of NH Forest) and maybe the NHNH (Natural Heritage Bureau) should merge with NH Fish & Game’s WHFNH (Wildlife Heritage Foundation).

I picture a day that when the volunteers show up, we hand out a list of acronyms and tell them to memorize them in order to communicate with us and our state and federal partners. On that day the EOS will merge with the GIS and despite the GOES no SOP will be enough to keep the CSRC that maintains NH GRANIT system from crashing and we will all become part of the NEIWPC. LOL

Sheila Roberge
Volunteer Coordinator, GBNERR

2009 Evelyn Browne Award Winner!

This year’s winner of the Evelyn Browne Conservation Award is Sharon Meeker. Sharon was the Outreach Chair for Save Our Shores, the main group which helped defeat the planned Onassis oil refinery in Great Bay in the 1970’s. She is known by many for her role as the former director of the UNH Marine Docent Program which she led for 23 years. She is currently a member of the Gundalow Company Board of Directors and chairs the Lamprey River Advisory Committee Board. She also works with the Heritage Commission of the town of Lee and is actively involved in conservation projects in the Lamprey River Watershed. The award is presented annually by GBNERR to an individual(s) who has made a significant contribution towards the protection and conservation of the Great Bay Estuary. Sharon has definitely done so!

