MIRAMICHI SALMON ASSOCIATION 2016 Annual Report



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Since 1953, the MSA has watched over the Miramichi as a champion of conservation on behalf of anglers, outfitters, guides and all others with economic, environmental and recreational interests in the river. The net result has been a well-managed river system that today, thanks in part to the MSA's championing of its cause, has more miles of salmon angling water and traditionally holds larger and healthier populations of Atlantic salmon than most salmon rivers in North America.

Mission Statement - Global-class leadership, stewardship, and conservation practices for the Miramichi Watershed to continuously preserve and advance its environmental integrity for the benefit of all species, in particular the Atlantic salmon.

2016 - A Watershed Year?

In a number of years' time, 2016 may well be considered and remembered as a watershed moment in salmon conservation; that it was "the year" (or turning point) when words of concern and empathy were finally matched with real and measured actions. This suggestion is well founded, in that those charged with the duty and responsibility to protect and sustain our threatened wild Atlantic salmon resources, namely our Federal and Provincial governments, both made new and substantial commitments to salmon conservation in 2016.

A few notable and encouraging happenings; in June 2016, the Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) released their departmental *Forward Plan for Atlantic Salmon*. Entitled 'Analysis and Strategy to Advance the Recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Atlantic Salmon' (a Committee the MSA pushed hard for in 2014), this plan clearly identifies the tangible actions DFO needs to take and deliver upon in the areas of Conservation, Enhancement, Science and International Affairs. In October 2016, DFO also announced \$600,000 in new funding for salmon research and study, including the creation of the Atlantic Salmon Research Joint Venture, another direct response to the recommendations of the Ministerial Advisory Committee. Last but not least, was the November 2016 joint Federal-Provincial government announcement of \$4.7 million for CAST, the unique collaboration of public, private, academia and conservation partners (including the MSA) that has come together to support and undertake key research programs that will help to sustain the Miramichi River's salmon populations.

We hope (and believe) that together, these significant and incremental investments by both levels of government signal a renewed appreciation and direction in salmon conservation. Through their support for CAST and other recently announced salmon conservation research projects, our governments appear to be finally acknowledging that they can't do it alone; that they need to better engage and collaborate with the science and conservation communities, each of who brings unique and much-needed expertise to the table. By pooling our collective resources, we'll be much more effective in achieving our mutual goal of stabilizing and sustaining our threatened salmon stocks.

These recent and encouraging developments certainly wouldn't have happened had it not been for the MSA and other conservation groups. Thanks to the commitment and annual financial support of its membership, the MSA has, and will hopefully continue to have, the resources required to deliver the type of leadership and effective conservation programs activities that ultimately attracted and enrolled the new levels of support from government, the private sector and other key stakeholders. So it is with great appreciation that we thank and congratulate each and every MSA member and donor listed in this year's Annual Report. Your support really does make a difference!

Brian Moore, Chairman Mark Hambrook, President



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All photos are © MSA unless otherwise noted Cover – Donald W. Hight, MD Back Cover – 2016 MSA Photo Contest Winners (L to R) Humphrey Sheehan, Zack Aube, and Andrew Clark Design & Layout: Jenny Colford & MSA Communications Printed in Canada

Members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans visited the Miramichi Salmon Conservation G

MIRAMICHI FOREVER FUNDS

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MSA Campaign 60

MSA's River Cam provides live real-time footage of river conditions near Boiestown, NE



Advocacy

In an effort to insure salmon management decisions for the Miramichi River are science-based, the MSA proactively engages with many different federal and provincial government agencies. On the federal level, the MSA regularly interacts and works with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) on important salmon conservation issues such as stock assessment, regulations for the recreational salmon fishery and expanding the harvest of the ever-growing Striped bass population. Complementary to this, the MSA also works hard to garner political support for salmon conservation, with a notable highlight being a personal visit and on-site briefing with members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, which took place at the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Center during the Committee's 2016 visit to the Miramichi.

The MSA also regularly interfaced with many different provincial government agencies as well, shoring up their continued support for critical conservation actions such as maintaining the all-important barrier pools, the eradication of Smallmouth bass from Miramichi Lake and a continued commitment to consult on matters related to any large scale and/or public resource development projects that could affect the Miramichi watershed. Complementary to these efforts, the MSA also regularly met with local MPs, MLAs, Municipal Officials and First Nations Leaders.

Communication

Great strides were made in the area of communications in 2016. The February launch of The Leaper, the MSA's new monthly e-newsletter, was especially well received and now serves as the MSA's flag ship communiqué. In April 2016, the MSA also distributed its first formalized Annual Report, which highlighted the organization's hard work in 2015 as well as the names of all MSA members and donors who made that work possible. The MSA's Facebook page grew leaps and bounds in 2016, resulting in hundreds of new salmon enthusiasts now being regularly engaged with the MSA. Additionally, the number of visitors to the MSA website (approx. 40,000) was also way up over the previous year, thanks in part to the MSA's live-time River Cam which is accessed via the website. Finally, the MSA published a new book, entitled; Fishing the Atlantic Salmon of the Miramichi River -Revisited (edited by Dr. Martyn Vickers) as well as the 2016 MSA Calendar (featuring photos of popular salmon pools), which was sent to all MSA members in appreciation of their support.

Education

Throughout 2016, the MSA continued to engage with what it hopes will be many of our future conservation leaders. The MSA's annual school-based Bruno Bobak Art Contest received 400 plus entries as did the annual MSA Printing & Writing Contest. The MSA hatchery continued its support of Fish Friends by providing salmon eggs for in-school aquariums. The 7th annual MSA First Cast took place on June 25-26, 2016. This hands-on mentoring event introduces the sport and techniques of fly fishing to both young and old. And finally, very informative Salmon Science Symposiums were held during 2016 Board meeting weekends in both Boston (January) and Boiestown (April).

Beaver Dam Removal

Each fall the MSA increases the spawning habitat available to adult salmon by opening up beaver dam obstructions on key tributary streams. Beaver dams impede the upstream progress of adult salmon and prevent them from reaching critical headwater spawning areas, which are excellent rearing areas for juvenile salmon due to the habitat quality, fewer numbers of large predators and cooler stream temperatures.

In 2016, MSA field crews removed and/or breached a total of 76 beaver dams. These obstructions were located throughout the watershed, and were identified through aerial reconnaissance (thanks to donated helicopter time) and/or by MSA staff hiking or canoeing into areas known to have ongoing beaver activity.

The MSA's beaver dam removal program has proven to be a successful salmon enhancement program, as electro-fishing in follow-up years has shown improved juvenile counts in areas upstream from breached and/or removed dams. For more detailed information on the MSA's beaver dam removal program and other field program activities, please visit the MSA website.

Juvenile Stock Assessment

The MSA conducts an electrofishing program each year to assess the distribution of juvenile Atlantic salmon in the headwater areas of the Miramichi River watershed. Priority areas that are found to have few or no juveniles, often because low water and/or beaver dams impeded access to spawning adults in the previous year(s), are stocked with wild Atlantic salmon fry incubated at the MSA hatchery in South Esk.

The MSA also works co-operatively with DFO Science on another electrofishing survey that measures juvenile fish populations at a number of historic baseline sites in the lower reaches of the watershed. This survey allows DFO to compare yearly numbers of both fry and parr, thus determining if different tributaries are meeting their required production targets.

Stock Supplementation

Each year, the MSA spawns, incubates and then stocks wild first-feeding salmon fry in an effort to supplement juvenile productivity in areas of the river that are determined to be under seeded. Stocking sites are selected based on low juvenile densities found at the exact or nearby locations from the previous year's electrofishing results and in tributaries that typically have low juvenile production.

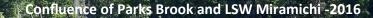
The stocking of fry over fingerlings has several benefits, including the reduced risk of fish contracting a pathogen while in artificially high densities at the hatchery, and the improved capacity to develop "wild" behaviour tendencies at a younger age. First-feeding fry are stocked out in June/July at an average size of 0.5g which makes fin clipping impossible.

Approximately 91,200 first-feeding salmon fry were stocked into 45 sites in five tributaries of the Miramichi River. The NW Miramichi system received 15,483 fry and the SW Miramichi system received 75,688. An additional 21,100 fry were taken to satellite holding tanks for future release by local conservation groups. All salmon fry were stocked in their river of origin i.e. "river specific stocking". For more details on the MSA's stocking program, please visit the MSA website.









Cold-Water Refuge

As climate change promotes increasing water temperatures, wild Atlantic salmon are now having to tolerate an ever increasing number of stressful and life-threatening warm water occurrences (i.e. 20°C and above). Consequently, cold-water thermal sanctuaries are fast becoming a key limiting factor for Atlantic salmon during their time in the Miramichi River system. Therefore restoring and maximizing the long-term influences and contributions of cold-water brooks and seeps for thermal refuge and protection has become a priority conservation management action in the effort to maintain a healthy river system for returning adult spawning salmon as well as growing juveniles. In 2016, the MSA completed the following cold-water projects;

Parks Brook Project – Completed in late August 2016, this project enhances the flow of the brook's cold water into the LSW Miramichi River, a river known to warm up to extremely stressful levels during high temperature events. Increasing flow conveyance at the mouth of the brook was accomplished through reshaping the channel, installation of a rock toe on both banks, and bank stabilization in the form of reshaping and installation of bank wraps and plantings. Finally, a modified riffle structure was installed at an upstream ATV ford crossing to stabilize the channel and reduce erosion and sedimentation.

Salmon Brook Project – In early August 2016, the MSA also undertook Phase One of its next cold-water enhancement project, namely the completion of an on-site geomorphic/hydrological survey that will be used to prepare a detailed project design plan for improving the cold-water refuge found at the confluence of Salmon Brook and the Cains River. Phase-two of this project, namely the actual in-river restoration work, will be completed sometime during late summer or early Fall 2017.

Factoid – Since 2013, the MSA has completed six cold-water refuge projects; Donnelly Brook, Doak Brook, and Indiantown Brook on the SW Miramichi, Otter Brook and Parks Brook on the LSW Miramichi and Pats Brook on the NW Miramichi.





The MSA has been actively involved in using both acoustic and satellite tracking technology to gain a better understanding of the migratory routes, behaviour, and survival rates of both juvenile and adult salmon as they journey from the river to ocean feeding grounds each spring. Understanding the dynamics of this part of the salmon's life cycle allows fisheries manager to better understand the threats and actions required to help sustain this iconic wild natural resource.

Smolt Tracking

In 2013, the MSA initiated a 5-year acoustic tracking study, made possible by a generous funding grant from the International Paper Foundation, to determine the migration patterns and survival rates of smolts leaving the NW Miramichi each spring. The study was initiated to determine if the multi-year average for the number of smolts successfully reaching the ocean is sufficient enough to sustain the population. Using acoustic technology, biologists are able to track smolts as they move down the river to head of tide (HOT), out into the estuary, then on to the Outer Bay, and finally out through the Strait of Belle Isle (SOBI). This tracking study also helps identify areas of unusually high mortality (possibly by a predator e.g. Striped bass). This NW Miramichi study is being conducted in concert with a similar smolt tracking study being conducted by the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF) on the SW Miramichi. The following table illustrates the percentage (%) of tagged NW smolts detected at key locations along the smolt's migration route (Note - a second receiver line was added in the SOBI in 2015 which is felt to account for increased detections in 2015 and 2016).

YEAR	HOT - Cassilis	Loggieville	Outer Bay	SOBI
2013	86	13	10	2.5
2014	80	48	14	10
2015	71	39	36	21
2016	79	53	28	13

Kelt Tracking

In partnership with the ASF, the MSA has also been actively using acoustic tags to track NW Miramichi kelts (adult spring salmon returning to the ocean to recondition) to garner better insight into their at-sea foraging behaviour, migration routes and overall survival rates. In addition to acoustic tracking tags, satellite pop-off tags have also been used when funds were available. As shown in the chart below, tracking data collected over the past 8 years appears to confirm that the largest losses of adult salmon are occurring at sea.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Kelts Tagged (#)	50	50	50	50	35	16	21	24	26
Head of Tide (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100	95	100	96
River Mouth (%)	96	92	90	94	94	75	85	100	96
Miramichi Bay (%)	94	92	90	94	94	69	85	100	96
Strait of Belle Isle (%)	44	18	14	30	30	38	33	38	37
Consecutive returns (%)	6	8	18	10	10	0	10	31	15
Alternate returns (%)	8	0	10	4	0	6	0	0	*





Collaboration for Atlantic Salmon Tomorrow (CAST)

CAST, the unprecedented collaboration of two levels of government, private industry, academia and special interest conservation groups, continued to gain positive support and momentum throughout 2016. Of particular mention is the successful securement of key funding support from the Federal Government, the Province of New Brunswick and a number of private industry partners. With commitments of \$5.7 million in hand, CAST began to assemble and initiate an innovative suite of salmon research and population enhancement projects that will reverse the decline of the wild Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi River and potentially other Eastern Canadian rivers as well. A founding member of CAST, the MSA is pleased to be playing a leadership role in the Smolt to Adult Salmon (SAS) release project. For more detailed information on CAST, please visit www.castforsalmon.com.



ARIS Sonar Population Assessment

This project utilizes new sonar technology to increase accuracy in determining the number of out-migrating juvenile salmon (smolt) and as well as the number of returning adult spawning salmon. In 2016, two ARIS cameras were successfully installed and tested in the SW Miramichi River just below the Blackville Bridge.

Agency



Water-based LiDAR **Thermal Imaging**

This project will use the latest remote sensing technology to better understand and address the challenges posed to Atlantic salmon by global climate change and in particular, the effects of warming water conditions. Field tested in 2016, this technology will be used in the coming year to map and assess a large portion of the Miramichi River system.



Aquatic Data Warehouse Stock Recruitment Model

This project will create an electronic data warehouse, making salmon data, records and patterns readily available to scientists and managers, thereby facilitating a potentially faster response to the changing pressures on salmon and their environment.





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Smolt to Adult Salmon (SAS) **Release Project**

In 2016, work began to convert and enable the MSA hatchery facility in South Esk to start rearing wild smolts to mature adults, thereby by-passing the currently very high "at-sea" smolt mortality suffered during migration. Initially captured during the 2016 spring smolt migration, a first group of approximately 4,300 wild smolts from the NW Miramichi system have now grown to an average 2-3 lbs. These fish will continue to be grown until they reach sexual maturity (in 1-2 years), at which time they will be released into a controlled and monitored section of the same river from which they were captured. Ongoing monitoring through telemetry and genetic testing will determine spawning success, offspring survival and migration behaviours. Depending upon the initial results and findings, this program is expected to run for 4-7 years, with smolts being collected in each of the next 4 years while monitoring and generic testing will continue over the full 7 years or longer.

MSA Events

Special Events are the backbone of the MSA's support. In addition to being the organization's largest source of unrestricted revenue, MSA events are popular social gatherings too, with old and new friends alike gathering to catch up, share the odd fishing tale, purchase their next fly rod and/ or fishing trip, or just to join together with other like-minded salmon enthusiasts in the common interest and cause of supporting Miramichi salmon conservation.

The MSA formally recognized and honoured a number of very special 'friends' at many of its 2016 events. Each has given greatly to the MSA and to the cause of salmon conservation, both in terms of volunteer time and/or financial resources. We sincerely thank and applaud each of them for their dedication and commitment to salmon conservation.





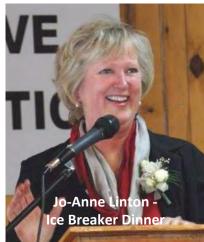
2016 MSA Events

January 30, 2016 – 62nd Annual Boston Dinner March 15, 2016 – 18th Annual NSPA/MSA Dinner April 30, 2016 – 19th Annual 'Ice Breaker' Dinner May 17, 2016 – 16th Annual Moncton Dinner July 10, 2016 – MSA 'Salmon Classic' Dinner September 14, 2016 – 21st Annual Fredericton Dinner October 26, 2016 – 15th Annual Saint John Dinner November 9, 2016 – 3rd Annual Carleton County Dinner November 17, 2016 – 3rd Annual Halifax Reception November 19, 2016 – Manley Price Tribute Dinner



Volunteer today – help make a difference in salmon conservation by joining your local MSA dinner committee. It's a great way to have fun, meet new people and help our troubled salmon all at the same time. Contact the MSA today!









2016 Membership and Financial Donors

Membership in the MSA is the perfect way to express your passion and support for the wild Atlantic salmon, for the Miramichi River that is their home, and for the vital work being done by the MSA to conserve and sustain both.

The MSA is fortunate to receive support from individuals and business throughout Canada, the United States and abroad. In additional to annual memberships, hundreds of conservation-minded individuals and companies also support the MSA through attendance and merchandise donations to one or more of the MSA"s annual fundraising events. The MSA regrets not being able to list all those donors here.

The MSA respectfully acknowledges and greatly appreciates the 2016 financial support it received from the following members and donors, which was crucial to the MSA being able to carry on and deliver its annual salmon conservation programs and activities.

Edwin Baker III

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