



MIRAMICHI SALMON ASSOCIATION
Leading River Conservation Since 1953

**MSA Conservation Dinner
Fredericton – September 16, 2014**

**Honouring Hon. Keith Ashfield, P.C.
Member of Parliament
Former Minister, Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

**A Call for Action
The Wild Atlantic Salmon Action Plan**

Presentations

**Mr. David Wilson, Chairman
Miramichi Salmon Association
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**Mr. Bill Taylor, President
Atlantic Salmon Federation
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Miramichi Salmon Association
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Presentation

**David Wilson, Chairman
Miramichi Salmon Association**

As the highlight of this Conservation Dinner tonight, we are honouring a true champion of wild Atlantic salmon conservation. I am speaking, of course, of the Hon. Keith Ashfield, who some years ago served our Province as the Minister of Natural Resources; in more recent years was our federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for Canada; and, recovering thankfully from illness over the past year, continues to represent Fredericton as our Member of Parliament.

It was as Minister of Fisheries and Oceans that Keith Ashfield demonstrated his concern for the wild Atlantic salmon and his willingness to act firmly for its conservation. As one powerful example, when he became aware of the high risks to wild salmon smolt runs from predation by striped bass in the Miramichi estuary, he resolutely stepped in to initiate a course of corrective action. Despite resistance within his department, a limited striped bass fishing season was introduced as an opening stage towards reduction of overwhelming striped bass populations. While much more yet needs to be done to achieve balance between wild salmon smolts and spawning bass, Keith's action was a major breakthrough in acknowledgement of, and action upon, a predation issue that has critical ramifications to the survival of salmon smolt on their migration to the sea.

By taking the time to listen to conservation concerns and to understand practical implications of the issue, Keith chose to take action in a situation where a common sense approach was able to overrule scientific caution, and in which the state of the wild Atlantic salmon deserved very high priority. To those of us on the MSA board it was also evidence that, when we have strong political representation, we can open doors and get action, a course we intend to follow ever more vigorously in the days ahead.

I am pleased at this time Keith to present and read to you a message from the Prime Minister of Canada, Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, who fully endorses and himself supports the conservation goals you have pursued. (Read the message from the Prime Minister).

Also, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Hon. Gail Shea has sent along a congratulatory message to Keith (Read the message from Minister Shea).

Now, having heard those words, I hope you will understand and accept that, in honouring you this evening, we are also asking for your continued assistance as we call on the Prime Minister's Office to launch a Wild Atlantic Salmon Action Plan at this critical stage of that specie's existence throughout Eastern Canada. We need your help as a continuing champion for wild Atlantic salmon in the halls of Parliament, in the corridors of the PMO, and in the offices of DFO.

We are on the precipice of a disaster with Atlantic salmon in our rivers and, as most of you are aware, the Miramichi watershed has this year experienced unprecedented poor returns of this mighty fish. Salmon returns to the Miramichi through the last decade of the 1990's averaged 82,000. Through the first decade of the 21st century, the average had dropped to 53,000. Since 2011, the average has declined by an alarming amount to only 23,000 returning fish. And this year, with near perfect angling conditions, the returns to date appear to be running at ½ of that rate with a likelihood that total returning fish could be as low as 12,000. These are frightening numbers!

Outfitters, guides and their respective communities are understandably concerned about their livelihood if something is not done to preserve this species, and done soon!

One year ago at this Conservation Dinner we issued a call for action by governments *"to proclaim the wild Atlantic salmon as a symbolic species of the environment within New Brunswick, and also within Canada – an environmental icon, like the flag, around which all forces can rally and against which all threats can be measured."*

We called for the wild Atlantic salmon *"to become a priority among priorities, in terms of its protection and preservation, regardless of the circumstances"*.

We delivered the message in clear and no uncertain terms – *The wild Atlantic salmon simply must be saved!*

So tonight we are repeating that call for immediate action to protect and preserve this precious resource. With the dire returns to the Miramichi as a signal, the risks to salmon survival go well beyond our river, and the challenge is one for all of New Brunswick, indeed for all of Eastern Canada.

Tonight, Keith, we are making a request both through you, and publicly, to have the Prime Minister immediately appoint a Wild Atlantic Salmon Task Force with the authority and resources needed to implement conservation actions that have long been recommended to save this species from extinction in our Atlantic rivers. There is abundant evidence to motivate and compel prompt action in the face of pending disaster, but the will to do so has been lacking at both federal and provincial government levels.

I should also say that we similarly appeal to our provincial leaders who are with us tonight, asking that they apply their influence to support the creation of a Wild Atlantic Salmon Action Plan, and the appointment of an effective task force to ensure its implementation.

In making this call for action tonight, we are joined by Bill Taylor, President of the Atlantic Salmon Federation, who will confirm the unity of the conservation community in this call, and who will emphasize the urgency of the action that is required to fulfill it. (Bill Taylor speaks)

Thank you again, Keith, you are a true champion for the cause of wild salmon in our rivers and we are extremely pleased that you have allowed us to honour you tonight for your determined efforts towards wild Atlantic salmon conservation.

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**Bill Taylor, President
Atlantic Salmon Federation**

The Atlantic Salmon Federation joins MSA's call to the Prime Minister to appoint a multi disciplinary task force to create a Wild Atlantic Salmon Action Plan.

Wild Atlantic salmon runs throughout Quebec and Atlantic Canada are in very serious trouble and nowhere is that more apparent than on the Miramichi.

The Atlantic salmon's decline has become a crisis. A cultural icon and an indicator of environment health is failing. People's livelihoods are at stake.

In New Brunswick the recreational salmon fishery is worth \$50 million a year and supports thousands of good seasonal and full time jobs. On the Miramichi alone the salmon fishery generates \$20 million each year. When you include the rest of eastern Canada salmon angling is worth \$150 million annually and supports the equivalent of nearly 4000 full time jobs.

Those numbers are significant but wild Atlantic salmon could be worth so much more to our province. Half of our salmon rivers are currently closed to angling because of too few fish. Twenty years ago 25,000 people purchased salmon angling licenses in New Brunswick every year. Last year there were only 16,000 licenses purchased. Declining salmon runs means fewer people fishing. Fewer people fishing means less money spent in our communities and fewer jobs.

As well, there are many First Nations that depend upon healthy salmon runs for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

There are many factors responsible for the salmon's decline. Some people will argue that the matter needs further study or that there are issues at play that are beyond our control such as poor sea survival and climate change. While that may be true, there is ample evidence and data currently available upon which a strong and effective Action Plan can be based.

In 2009 Canada announced a new Policy for Conservation of Wild Atlantic Salmon. DFO hailed the Policy as a transformation in the approach to conserving wild Atlantic salmon and protecting its habitat. The Policy's goal is to maintain and restore healthy salmon populations for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of Canada.

Unfortunately, in numerous meetings with senior DFO officials since the Policy was adopted, we have been told there is no funding for its implementation. In fact, DFO's budget for Atlantic salmon management, research, assessment and enforcement has been reduced from \$25 million in the mid 1980s to \$12 million today. At the time when wild Atlantic salmon need the most help from DFO the department can't respond.

In 2010 Canada's Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, an expert panel of federal and provincial biologists, released its Report on the Status of Wild Atlantic Salmon and found that of the 15 designated populations or regions with wild Atlantic salmon in Quebec and Atlantic Canada: 1 was found to be Extinct, 6 were Endangered or Threatened, 4 were of Special Concern, including the Gulf of St. Lawrence populations, and only 4 were healthy or Not at Risk and all of those are in the northern regions of Newfoundland, Labrador and Ungava.

Each year the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) provides management advice to the international treaty organization, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) of which Canada is a member.

In 2011 NASCO even hosted its own international symposium, the Salmon Summit in France to investigate all the research and scientific evidence on the salmon's decline.

My point is the federal and provincial government agencies responsible for the conservation and wise management of our wild Atlantic salmon runs have the information they need to take meaningful action to curb the salmon's decline.

Last year anglers and First Nation fishermen killed 136 tonnes of salmon (13,000 large spawners and 45,500 grilse). The Greenland fishermen killed another 47 tonnes, or 14,200 salmon, more than 80% of Canadian origin and all large spawners. It's estimated that poachers in Canada took another 24 tonnes of salmon.

For starters we need to stop killing so many salmon.

1. DFO should be required to implement the ICES advice concerning the management of our own salmon fisheries. We need to start practising what we preach.
 - There should be no harvest of any kind on any salmon population that is not exceeding its minimum spawning target.
 - There should be no harvest of mixed stocks of salmon while they migrate at sea.
 - Anglers should release all the large salmon and grilse they catch and First Nations fishermen should use selective gear such as trap nets and release all large spawners. Gill nets for Atlantic salmon must be banned.
2. Canada must adequately fund and implement its Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy.

3. Canada must invest more money in Atlantic salmon assessment and enforcement.
4. And, Canada must separate DFO's conflicted mandate of aquaculture promotion and wild fisheries conservation.

Obviously, there is more that needs to be done but these first steps would go a long way towards halting the salmon's decline and positive results would be seen immediately.

Honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, we know much of what needs to be done to not just save wild Atlantic salmon from extinction, but to rebuild their runs to abundance. What's missing is the political will . . . the leadership to do what is right.

Keith, we need your help and the Atlantic salmon needs a champion.

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**Mark Hambrook, President
Miramichi Salmon Association**

Once again, Keith, we thank you for your distinguished public service to conservation, both as NB Minister of Natural Resources and Canada's Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Your words tonight are especially appreciated, as we urgently seek creation of a Wild Atlantic Salmon Action Plan, and the appointment of a task force of qualified people **to put such a plan into real and immediate action.**

In the days and weeks ahead, we shall need your help and the dedicated assistance of all who are here this evening, (including our Provincial leaders), to successfully bring implementation to our call for action for the wild Atlantic salmon.

If we do not act now with conservation measures that are long overdue, the future existence of this symbolic environmental resource is in great peril. As one who has lived his professional life in wild salmon management, I must advise that continuing declines in returning stocks have never been so alarming, and the challenge to salmon survival has never been so compelling.

Once more, our message to you Keith and to all in New Brunswick and in Canada who cherish the wild Atlantic salmon for its many virtues – **our call is for help.**

We need to implement now the measures necessary to save this famous fish.