

# Work to solve salmon problem can't all be done in-house

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April 21, 2015

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The Government of Canada is continuing to show signs that it is taking seriously the downright troubling situation involving plummeting Atlantic salmon counts in river systems throughout Eastern Canada.

The Miramichi River watershed is a main battleground in the fight to preserve a species of fish that has come to symbolize this region. The King of Sport Fish is also, not insignificantly, a \$20 million industry in Northumberland County alone, one that provides hundreds of vital jobs to rural Miramichiers while drawing tourists from far and wide.

The panic button has officially been pressed as counts along the Miramichi have dwindled by 70,000 in the last 20 years. What was once an abundant resource is now very clearly no longer so. Federal officials appear to have finally woken up to the issue and we can only hope it isn't too late.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada Minister Gail Shea was in the area last week to announce her government's latest bit of salmon stimulus, earmarking \$500,000 toward upgrades of the vital salmon research station located in South Esk. This is definitely a case of money well spent, considering the roll the South Esk station and its team of staff have played in monitoring those counts here on the ground and conducting extremely valuable research at every turn. The funding announcement follows the wise approach Minister Shea and company have been employing by deferring to those who know the situation best, the experts who deal with this situation day in, day out.

A bureaucrat sitting at a desk somewhere in the Ottawa area isn't in a position to provide real insight into this problem nor would they be able to provide any solutions. But everybody very clearly has a role to play in this complicated dance. Take, for instance, the recently struck salmon advisory committee formed by Minister Shea back in December.

That group has been tasked with the goal of, very simply, providing concrete feedback the government can ultimately take into consideration as it looks to adopt new policy aimed at turning this situation around.

With the spring run about to come in, we anxiously await what that group of people - consisting of representation from throughout Atlantic Canada and Quebec - will be able to come up with through that collaboration.

While it is definitely proactive of government to delegate that responsibility in order to help ensure that corrective, research-based action can be taken, it should be obvious by now that this isn't an issue that can be handled entirely in-house. Government has a very direct and important role to play as well and it goes beyond forming this committee or providing funding to the salmon research station. After all, there are multiple factors at play here.

While it awaits the committee's report, we can only hope that a close eye is being kept on an escalating commercial salmon fishery in Greenland. The salmon being caught by fishermen in Greenland are the same salmon that make the annual journey into the heart of the Miramichi River Valley to spawn.

Hopefully Minister Shea, and others, have reached out to their Greenlandic counterparts to make their concerns known and, ideally, both sides can work toward a diplomatic solution. There is also the matter of the threat being posed by the remarkable explosion of striped bass within the Miramichi watershed. Any angler can tell you the bass population is out of control and we believe it is time to institute an open season that, best-case scenario, could help save the Miramichi salmon. It's worth a shot and, for the government, it's imperative that this very important file remains at or near the top of its priority list until real solutions can be found.

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