



MIRAMICHI SALMON ASSOCIATION

Leading River Conservation Since 1953

Opening Remarks to Parliamentary Committee on Fisheries May 26, 2015

Honourable Members of the Parliamentary Committee on Fisheries;

The future of the Wild Atlantic salmon in North America is in a crisis stage, best exemplified by the three graphs and the one table of statistics which accompany this presentation:

Graph 1: The decline of 2SW salmon coming to North America from their feeding grounds (primarily large female spawners bearing the eggs of the next generation) from 1970 to 2014, a decline from 900,000 in 1971 to less than 100,000 in some recent years; a reduction of almost 90%.

Graph 2: The historical returns of all salmon to North America (large and small) for that same period, which peaked at 1.8 million fish in 1974 to less than 600,000 in 2009; a reduction of more than 65% in that period.

Statistics 3a
Graph 3b: The historical returns of all salmon (large and small) to the Miramichi River alone during those same periods is captured in both graph and a list of the actual numbers. With respect to these river statistics, it must be noted that a large commercial salmon fishery existed in the Maritime Provinces until 1984, and in Newfoundland waters until 1992, which does not permit direct comparison to the North American numbers above, which included the commercial fishery. Thus, the most compelling in-river numbers are from 1992, a total of 189,600 returning fish to 2014, a total of 17,744 returning fish – the last being the lowest salmon run to the Miramichi in history.

The Atlantic salmon has long been a cultural, economic and environmental symbol for Atlantic Canadians, as this species was throughout history very important to sustaining our early settlers both as food, and as a commercial commodity to barter for other essential goods. During those early times, wooden ships were constructed from pristine forests and sent back to Europe with the first cargo usually being a load of salted salmon.

In subsequent decades, Atlantic salmon stocks have been in serious decline throughout North America, and have never recovered to their previous high levels, despite reduced consumption and increased conservation efforts. The salmon's range has also been reduced: the Atlantic salmon is on the endangered species list in the United States, the Bay of Fundy and the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia. The Atlantic salmon stocks in the Southern Gulf of St. Lawrence have also been proposed for the endangered list as well. Stocks in the Atlantic Region are now at record lows, prompting the federal government to recently introduce "catch and release angling only" in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia for the 2015 season.

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The Miramichi River has been the largest producer of Atlantic salmon stocks in North America, and one of the best salmon rivers in the world, because of its natural environmental setting. There are no dams in the watershed, very little agriculture, no operating mines and no large industrial polluters. The watershed is sparsely populated and is mostly forest land, so water quality is good, if salmon cannot thrive here then there seems little hope for other rivers that have so many additional and adverse environmental impacts.

But even here on the Miramichi, our climate is changing and there are fundamental actions that must be taken to sustain and improve the productive spawning process. We believe the major problems are primarily in the ocean, but meanwhile we need a comprehensive recovery strategy to protect and nurture our in-river populations and to ensure that new generations of smolts are consistently going to sea each year. Until the mystery of salmon mortality in the ocean can be solved, the battle needs to be waged on the Miramichi, the Restigouche and other spawning rivers where the chances for success are at the highest level.

The Miramichi Salmon Association was formed 62 years ago to be a voice for the preservation of the Atlantic salmon, and over time has been very effective in raising the voice of conservation, one which resulted quite directly in the closure of the commercial fishery in the Maritimes in 1984. As well, the MSA has consistently raised funds to assist DFO in research about the status of Atlantic salmon stocks; participating with universities and other non-profits in similar studies; and in 1997 acquired Canada's oldest salmon hatchery from DFO, and assumed responsibility to help sustain stocks of wild salmon in the Miramichi.

Today, the MSA spends about \$1 million annually on its conservation mission and yet, there is a great frustration of conservationists everywhere, while salmon stocks continue to decline. With returns in 2014 the lowest in history, the MSA joined forces with the Atlantic Salmon Federation to call on the government of Canada for an Action Plan to save the wild Atlantic salmon. Subsequently in 2015, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Hon. Gail Shea, appointed a Ministerial Advisory Committee to deeply examine the status of the wild Atlantic salmon in Eastern Canada, and to provide her with advice on actions needed to reverse the downward spiral of salmon abundance that has been experienced over the past 50 years.

While the Atlantic salmon has long been respected for its cultural and environmental values, the threat of its demise also poses very significant economic losses. A report by consultants Gardner Pinfold, on the value of recreational fishing for wild Atlantic salmon, estimates an employment potential of 3,316 full-time equivalent jobs and more than \$128 million in spending throughout the salmon's range in North America. For the Miramichi River alone, this means 637 full-time equivalent jobs and spending of more than \$20 million each year. In the hard pressed current circumstances of rural New Brunswick, this would easily equate two new manufacturing plants with a capacity to each employ over 300 people. A powerful economic factor indeed!

In addition to the recently-appointed Ministerial Advisory Committee, which is now finished its hearings and is preparing its recommendations to DFO, a voluntary coalition has come together among conservation groups, large industries and university scientists to help further identify issues and propose solutions that will complement future government actions. It is important to note that, while the federal government must take the lead to bring recovery of wild Atlantic salmon stocks, you in Parliament are not alone. There are highly motivated partners having the expertise, dedication and resources to support and join the federal government in such a wild Atlantic salmon recovery program. We in the Miramichi Salmon Association are strong partners in that coalition and we are willing to work with all concerned to save this precious resource.

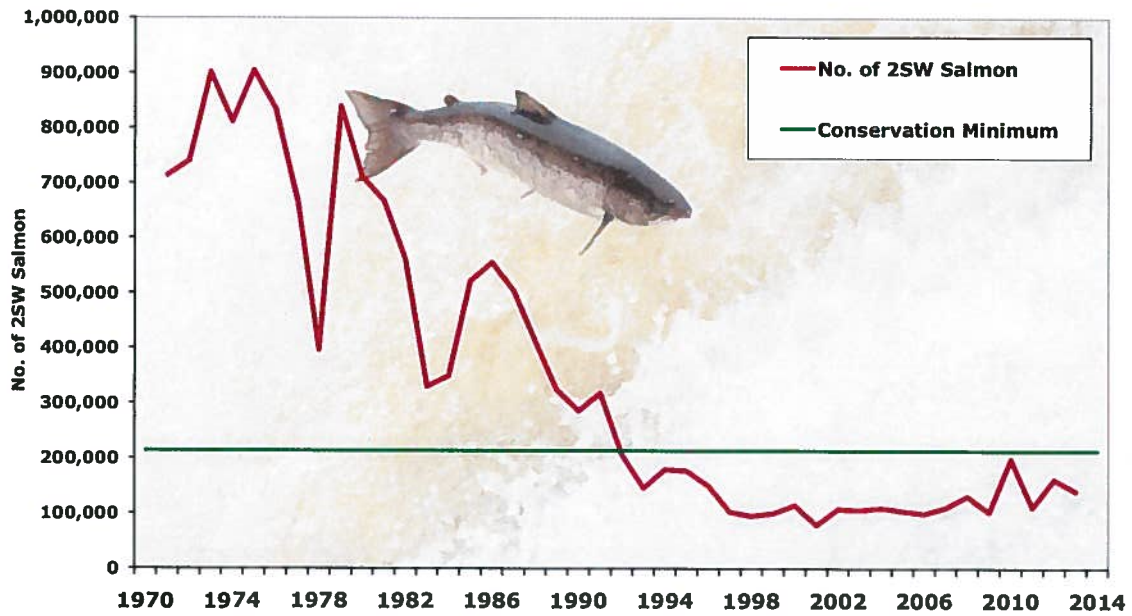
Enclosures:

Graph 1

Graph 2

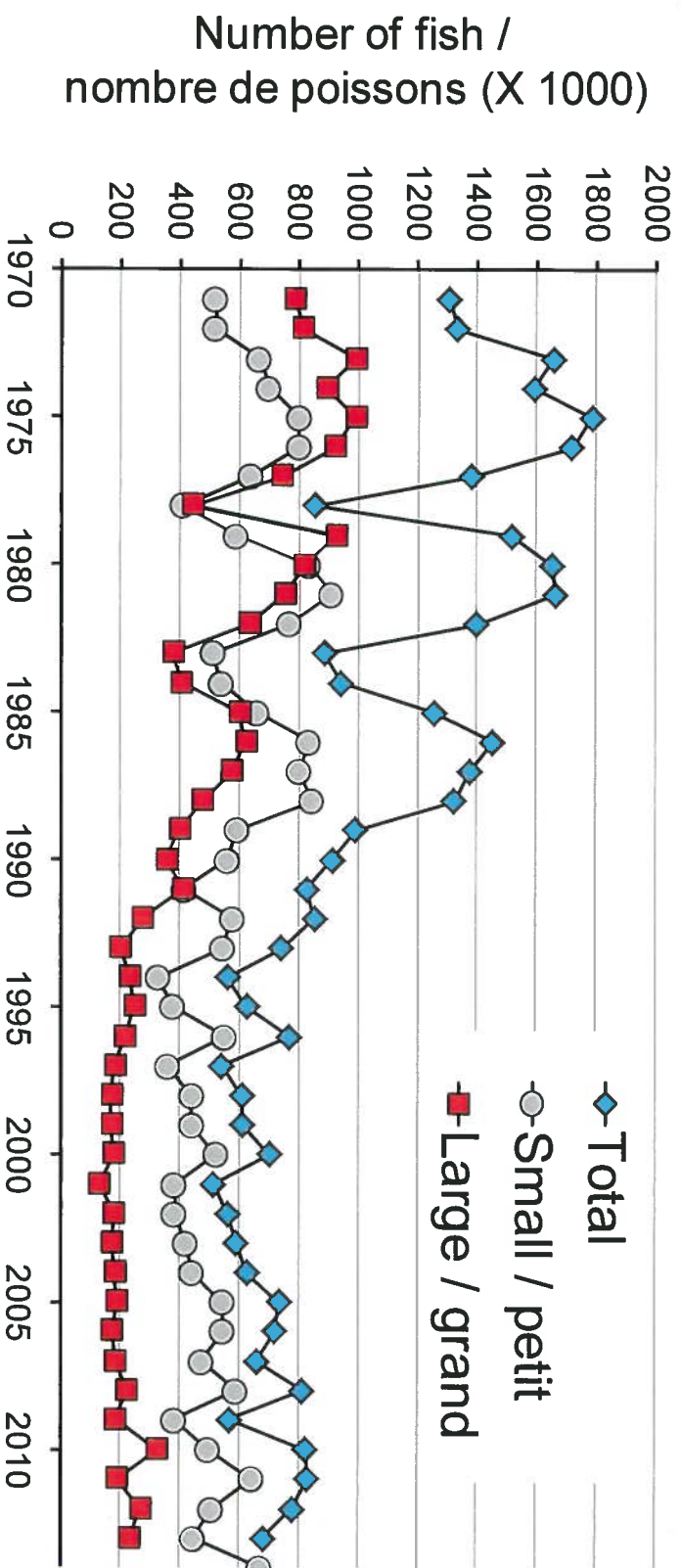
Statistics 3a/Graph 3b

Pre-fishery Abundance - North America



Pre-fishery Abundance (PFA) graph for North American 2SW salmon showing the Conservation Minimum in green. The PFA numbers are those 11 months before they return to their home rivers in North America. The PFA conservation minimum is 213,264 for all North American rivers. (Graph based on ICES numbers)

Historical Atlantic Salmon Returns to North America 1971-2013



- peak abundance all age groups was 1.8 million
- average abundance 2003-2012 = 0.72 million
- high abundance of small in 2013 due to high returns in Newfoundland and Labrador
- large salmon abundance in 2013 was sustained due to high Labrador returns
- abundance maximale tous les âges était 1,8 million
- abondance moyenne 2003-2012 de 0,72 million
- forte abondance de petits saumons en 2013 attribuable aux forts retours de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador
- abondance de grands saumons en 2013 soutenue par la forte abondance au Labrador

3a

Estimate of Adult Salmon Returns to the Miramichi River, 1971 - 2014



	Small Salmon (Grilse)	Large Salmon	Total Fish
Year	Return	Return	
1971	35,673	24,407	60,080
1972	46,275	29,049	75,324
1973	44,545	27,192	71,737
1974	73,418	42,592	116,010
1975	64,902	28,817	93,719
1976	91,580	22,801	114,381
1977	27,743	51,842	79,585
1978	24,287	24,493	48,780
1979	50,965	9,054	60,019
1980	41,588	36,318	77,906
1981	65,273	16,182	81,455
1982	80,379	30,758	111,137
1983	25,184	27,924	53,108
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*	1984	29,707	44,844
	1985	60,800	81,538
	1986	117,549	148,834
	1987	84,816	104,237
	1988	121,919	143,664
	1989	75,231	92,442
	1990	83,500	112,074
	1991	60,900	90,849
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**	1992	152,600	189,600
	1993	95,000	130,000
	1994	43,571	64,517
	1995	46,458	78,473
	1996	33,610	52,043
	1997	16,139	32,538
	1998	23,170	40,040
	1999	21,940	38,130
	2000	32,050	49,650
	2001	27,210	49,840
	2002	41,260	53,500
	2003	28,390	48,650
	2004	45,460	65,760
	2005	31,700	50,570
	2006	34,640	55,430
	2007	26,940	44,730
	2008	29,180	42,670
	2009	13,040	31,670
	2010	50,110	66,210
	2011	43,880	74,940
	2012	8,322	21,872
	2013	11,750	25,010
	2014	7,474	17,744

* Commercial net fishing stopped in Maritimes

** Commercial net fishing stopped in Newfoundland

Historical Atlantic Salmon Returns to Miramichi River 1971-2014

