



For Immediate Release

January 2024

South Esk, NB – Survival of Miramichi salmon stocks at high risk, says Miramichi Salmon Association

Atlantic salmon returns to the Miramichi River recorded during 2023 represent a historical low point. Annual salmon counts are sourced from protection barriers on the Northwest and Dungarvon rivers and the declines have been dramatic. Since 2011, the Dungarvon barrier counts on adult salmon are down by 80%, grilse are down by 90%, and as terrible as those numbers are, the Northwest Miramichi is even worse. Adult salmon returns on the Northwest branch have declined by 83%, and grilse by 98%.

Local conservation groups point to the recent explosion of striped bass in the Miramichi estuary as a significant factor in the sharp declines in salmon returns. According to Joe Palmer, Chair of the Miramichi Salmon Association (MSA), "There are many hazards to Atlantic salmon survival, but by far the most dangerous in the Miramichi is the explosive over population of Striped bass".

The MSA is dedicated to conserving Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi River with the overarching objective of restoring salmon populations to robust levels. Recognizing the significant value of the salmon fishery for food, social, and ceremonial purposes to First Nations, as well as the economic and cultural importance to local communities, outfitters, and anglers, the MSA emphasizes the urgency of addressing the current situation. Stakeholder groups, including the MSA, have identified the burgeoning striped bass populations in the Miramichi estuary as a primary factor contributing to the decline in salmon returns.

The Atlantic Salmon Federation, the Miramichi Salmon Association, Anqotum Resource Management, and other conservation organizations have been tracking the smolt migrations in the Miramichi for over 20 years. Recent studies indicate that less than 5% of smolt are able to migrate through the Miramichi estuary and successfully make it to sea. These groups have consistently urged the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to take immediate and decisive action. Butch Dalton, President of the MSA, states, "The members of the Miramichi Salmon Association call upon the Government of Canada in general, and DFO in particular, to honour the longstanding commitment for the preservation and recovery of wild Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi and other New Brunswick rivers. The menacing numbers of striped bass must be significantly reduced or the wild Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi will very soon be gone forever."

Striped bass, known to prey on fish species native to the Miramichi watershed, including Atlantic salmon smolt, smelt, and gaspereau, present a pressing concern. While the Northwest Miramichi River estuary serves as critical spawning habitat for striped bass in the Gulf region, the management strategy employed by DFO fails to account for other species native to the Miramichi. A 2022 report from the

Main Office – 485 Route 420, South Esk, NB E1V 4L9

Development Office – P.O. Box 30035, Prospect Plaza, Fredericton NB E3B 0H8

U.S. Office – P.O. Box 646, Houlton, ME 04730

Tel: 506-622-4000 | admin@miramichisalmon.ca | www.miramichisalmon.ca



Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS) highlights the shortcomings of DFO's single-species management approach. The report provides direct evidence of predation by striped bass on Atlantic salmon smolts and underscores the need for a comprehensive re-evaluation of DFO's management effectiveness in response to the recent surge in striped bass populations, signaling an imbalance in the ecosystem.