



### **ASF Recommendations to the Ministerial Advisory Committee – Monday March 23/2015 @ Moncton**

ASF has captured 33 recommendations in 11 categories pertaining to improving returns of wild Atlantic salmon to all rivers in New Brunswick and PEI. Due to time constraints, I will present a subset of these recommendations and will table the entire package in a written submission to the committee.

The recommendations that follow were developed with these principles in mind:

- Conserve and protect what we still have,
- Identify and reduce what is causing harm and mortality where possible,
- Restore what we've lost,
- Be leaders in this pursuit on all fronts.

In New Brunswick, PEI and eastern Canada in general, we all have a role to play – including government, anglers, conservation groups, First Nations and industry – in restoring wild Atlantic salmon to our rivers and influencing the management of salmon in other jurisdictions.

#### **A) Conservation – reducing impact of fisheries**

DFO should implement the ICES advice concerning the management of Canada's salmon fisheries as follows:

1. **Recommendation:** Move the recreational fishery to live release only, with single barbless/pinched barb hooks where minimum conservation limits are not being surpassed.
2. **Recommendation:** Transition the First Nations fishery to the selective harvest of grilse only. Selective harvest of grilse could be accomplished through the use of trap nets, angling and other methods such as delaying the start of the fishing season to allow large spawners greater chance of reaching spawning areas. This must be done in a fashion that fully respects the rights of First Nations, providing appropriate compensation for any reduction in food fishery harvests. Ideally, according to ICES guidance, harvest should only be allowed where populations surpass minimum conservation limits.

Improve Assessment to Guide Effective Conservation Management:

3. **Recommendation:** Improve the reporting of all harvests (recreational and Aboriginal). Harvest statistics for New Brunswick fisheries are recognized as chronically insufficient at annual Atlantic Salmon Advisory Committee meetings. For example, there has not been a detailed and reasonable estimate for the Miramichi since 1997. All provincial harvest estimates since 1997 have been based on old data pertaining to exploitation rates, release rates and applied to estimated returns. Conduct a comprehensive angling/harvest survey in NB to improve harvest statistics based on current trends in the exploitation, harvest and release of angled salmon. Another option for improving harvest statistics could be to disallow the re-issuing of tags or licenses to individuals who failed to report their harvests the previous years (as has been recommended to Greenland).
4. **Recommendation:** Where possible, utilize population assessment techniques on index rivers that enable in-season decision-making, based on how current season returns are performing relative to minimum conservation limits.
5. **Recommendation:** Increase population assessment on PEI rivers and set up an index river for monitoring long-term trends.

**B) Enforcement / Protection:**

6. **Recommendation:** Restore and increase funding and resources to DFO to:
  - a. Increase surveillance and enforcement to reduce illegal harvest of salmon in rivers, in estuaries and along the coast.
  - b. Increase monitoring and enforcement of salmon habitat violations arising from land-use issues (e.g. forestry, agriculture, industry and land development). Habitat protection experienced significant cuts as a result of changes to habitat provisions in the Federal Fisheries Act in 2012.
7. **Recommendation:** Fund, develop and implement the Professional Designated River Guardian Program in conjunction with First Nations and Aboriginal communities to increase presence and surveillance on our rivers.
8. **Recommendation:** Collaborate with angling and conservation groups to maintain the presence of anglers on the water. Law abiding anglers provide distributed presence and surveillance on our rivers and play an important role in watching for signs of illegal activities (poaching, habitat violations), detecting presence/distribution of non-native/invasive species, providing on-the-ground reports of predation pressures, as well as continuing to contribute to and invest in conservation programs throughout NB.
9. **Recommendation:** DFO should work closely with DNR, watershed groups and First Nations to identify and implement additional protection barriers on other river systems. Protection barriers

provide effective sanctuary for early returning adults from the pressures of poaching in the remote headwater reaches of our rivers. Examples include NW Upsalquitch, NW Miramichi, Dungarvon and Tobique rivers.

**C) Predation:**

**10. Recommendation:** Support and help fund more research on the impact of predators in freshwater, estuarine and marine environments. Examples of predators in these areas include native species such as mergansers, cormorants, striped bass and seals, and non-native species such as smallmouth bass, chain pickerel and muskellunge.

**11. Recommendation:** Work with provincial/federal agencies, conservation groups, First Nations and other partners, using scientific rationale and the precautionary approach, to implement predator control methods that respect the predators' natural place in the ecosystem, and with an aim of restoring ecosystem balance. Predator control methods could include:

- a. Allowing a longer retention season for the recreational striped bass fishery as well as increased daily and seasonal bag limits.
- b. Supporting First Nation initiatives to develop sustainable FSC fisheries for striped bass that may offset food fishery requirements for salmon where populations do not meet minimum conservation limits. If there is sufficient striped bass abundance, support First Nation initiatives to develop commercial fisheries.
- c. Where scientific rationale exists, work with First Nations to develop a commercial seal hunt. An example would be for the grey seal population which was identified by the Senate Committee in 2012 as being too abundant in the Gulf of St. Lawrence to permit the recovery of groundfish stocks and ecosystem balance.

**D) Addressing Research Gaps – Low Marine Survival:**

**15. Recommendation:** DFO must make marine recovery objectives highest priority for research, and significantly increase the funding and resources necessary to conduct tracking and other research to address the significant gaps in knowledge about low marine and estuarine survival in the Maritimes and Gulf regions. Use the findings of the recent Marine Threats Workshop, hosted by DFO in Truro, as a basis for developing an action plan to address the gaps.

**E) Non-native/invasive Species:**

**16. Recommendation:** DFO needs to authorize decisive action to eradicate smallmouth bass from Miramichi Lake using an approved piscicide such as rotenone, through the provisions of the Federal Fisheries Act. The cost of this program would be in the range of \$1M. Multiple partners are likely willing to shoulder some of the cost and effort. Smallmouth bass would pose a significant threat to salmon populations in the SW Miramichi if they were to spread throughout the watershed from the Lake.

17. **Recommendation:** The New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources is currently considering changes to the provincial fisheries regulations to allow early and increased retention of smallmouth bass in waters that are considered native Atlantic salmon habitat. DFO needs to support this initiative as a means of reducing predation pressure on juvenile Atlantic salmon by the expanding smallmouth bass population and reducing habitat/forage competition between the non-native bass and native Atlantic salmon. DNR and stakeholder groups that represent both Atlantic salmon and smallmouth bass fisheries should work closely to implement these regulation changes in a manner that is mutually agreeable, and with the support of DFO.

**F) Salmon Aquaculture:**

18. **Recommendation:** Resolve DFO's conflict of interest with respect to salmonid aquaculture. Relieve DFO from the responsibility of promoting the growth of the aquaculture sector. Return DFO's sole mandate to the conservation and sound management of wild fisheries.

19. **Recommendation:** Place a moratorium on new aquaculture leases in the marine environment.

20. **Recommendation:** Move salmonid farming to land-based, closed containment recirculation systems which prevent escapes, do not require the use of pesticide treatments, antibiotics, etc, and are not subject to fluctuating environmental conditions. Start by only granting new licenses to operators that will utilize land-based facilities. Make compensation payments an incentive to phase out net-pen operations and to move them into land-based facilities.

21. **Recommendation:** Work with provincial aquaculture agencies to adopt and implement the recommendations of the Doelle-Lahey Report that was recently completed in NS. The process in developing the DL report was comprehensive and obtained wide buy-in from both industry and other stakeholders in Nova Scotia. These recommendations are needed in New Brunswick to address our concerns of escapes, disease and parasite transfers to wild fish.

**G) Dams / Fish Passage / Habitat Fragmentation:**

22. **Recommendation:** DFO should enforce the provisions of the Federal Fisheries Act to reduce or eliminate the significant kill of migrating smolts and kelts at all dam sites. DFO must mandate that effective improvements to upstream and downstream fish passage at all dams on the St. John River system must be installed as quickly as possible. DFO's Recovery Potential Assessment for the OBoF salmon indicates that the salmon in the upper St. John River will be extirpated if passage is not improved.

23. **Recommendation:** Increase funding and reduce red tape to empower watershed groups, First Nations, provincial agencies and other stakeholders to assess, prioritize and address fish passage,

habitat and fragmentation issues throughout NB. Habitat fragmentation results from barriers blocking fish passage to high quality spawning/rearing areas, thereby reducing habitat availability and therefore production capacity. Examples include poorly designed and installed culverts, bridges and fishways.

**H) Supportive Rearing to assist restoration of critically low populations:**

**24. Recommendation:** Ensure that any hatchery-based supportive rearing programs are based on state-of-the-art scientifically-based best practices that maximize wild exposure, minimize hatchery effects and are appropriately targeted toward critically low populations. Supportive rearing programs alone are not a solution for restoring wild Atlantic salmon populations.

**25. Recommendation:** Invest in the Mactaquac Biodiversity Facility and expand programs as necessary to support both OBoF and IBoF needs. It is insufficiently funded and resourced to provide adequate supportive rearing services for the critically low populations of the Bay of Fundy, both of which are considered endangered by COSEWIC. The Mactaquac hatchery was originally built only to produce fish in compensation for the fish killed by dams on the upper St. John River. This goal was never met. Now the facility is stretched further as it attempts to provide services to SARA listed IBoF populations in addition to OBoF populations with resources strained by cutback. Investment is needed to maintain programs for the upper St. John River, including the Tobique and Aroostook, to develop programs for the lower basin, and to add the Petitcodiac to the IBoF programs.

**I) Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy:**

**26. Recommendation:** Conduct the pending mandatory independent 5-year review of progress in achieving the goals of the Canadian Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy. Develop an action plan that identifies priorities for implementation and timelines to carry it out. Fund it.

**J) Reduction and Control of Greenland Fishery:**

**27. Recommendation:** Improve management of Canadian salmon fisheries to show leadership to Greenland.

**28. Recommendation:** Strengthen Canadian influence and diplomacy to reduce and control the harvest of Canadian salmon at Greenland. The 2014 reported harvest grew to 59mt and 10mt unreported harvest, meaning that about 18,000-19,000 spawners will not be returning to Canada in 2015.

**29. Recommendation:** Work aggressively with Greenland both bilaterally and through NASCO to limit the Greenland salmon fishery to no more than 20 tonnes for personal consumption. A reduction in this fishery will be a direct benefit to PEI and NB rivers in the Southern Gulf and NB rivers in the outer Bay of Fundy.

30. **Recommendation:** Work aggressively both bilaterally and through NASCO towards effective monitoring and control of Greenland's salmon fisheries.

**K) Reduction and Control of Fishery at St. Pierre et Miquelon:**

31. **Recommendation:** Work aggressively bilaterally with France to get France to join NASCO as a Party with respect to St. Pierre et Miquelon and/or control this fishery through agreement between Canada and France.

Respectfully submitted on Monday, March 23/2015 by ASF co-presenters, Alan Graham (ASF Director) and Geoff Giffin (Director of Regional Programs)

A detailed written submission supporting these recommendations will be submitted shortly.