

New Brunswick Wildlife Federation
Presentation to Salmon Advisory Committee
Moncton, NB.
March 23, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Charles LeBlanc. I am the President of the New Brunswick Wildlife Federation. I would like to say a few words on behalf of our members on the important issues affecting the future of our important Atlantic salmon resource.

Mission Statement

The New Brunswick Wildlife Federation has been addressing issues surrounding fish and wildlife since 1924. Our constituency is province wide. Our constituents are strong conservationists, and avid outdoors people who are committed to the long traditions around angling and hunting in New Brunswick. An integral part of their commitment involves the diligent protection and enhancement of our fish and wildlife resources. Additionally, we have a strong interest in sharing these traditions with young people so that there will be a continuity of stewardship into the future.

Most of these folks have fished for salmon. For a good many of these fishers, salmon angling is their primary pursuit, and the health of salmon stocks returning to New Brunswick rivers is their biggest conservation concern. They stand ready to do their part to help ensure the health of our

salmon populations. Their interest in the proceedings of this committee is very strong indeed.

As mentioned earlier, our members are respectful of the traditions surrounding angling and hunting. When it comes to salmon angling, one of these traditions is the opportunity to harvest a fish for enjoyment at the dinner table. For us, this is a significant part of the quality of the salmon angling experience. We believe that a sound management plan will acknowledge and account for the importance of this part of the salmon angling tradition.

Purpose and Objective:

The purpose of this presentation is to focus on what we believe are some key questions to better understanding the decline of returns in 2014 and the future survival of our Atlantic salmon resources in New Brunswick. However, the decline in salmon returns experienced in 2014, while alarming, must be taken into context. Similar declines occurred in 1979 and 1997, and as we saw, were followed by recovery in the ensuing years. We would discourage introducing further angling restrictions in New Brunswick before this year's returns are assessed.

Key Issues:

Bay of Fundy Stocks: A particular concern in this downturn is the Bay of Fundy salmon. These populations that are already in a precarious position despite their status under Species at Risk legislation. Recovery plans must

be adequately funded. Stocking programs must be increased, the Petitcodiac River in particular must be indexed, potential interceptory gaspereaux fisheries must be contained, and aquaculture practices must be addressed.

Management Model: We believe that DFO's salmon management model must be revisited. Much has changed over the 75 or so years since Dr. Elson designed the model while studying the Pollett River in the Petitcodiac watershed. The relationship between the composition of grilse, one sea winter and repeat spawners in the spawning stock, egg deposition, fry densities, and smolt production and survival must all be considered in determining conservation requirements on a river-by-river basis. Similarly, regulations should be supported with science as part and parcel of a measurable conservation initiative to enhance salmon stocks.

Watershed Management: Following generations of degradation, much has been done to restore salmon habitat over the past 40 or more years. While much work remains, arguably our watersheds are now in better condition than they have been for previous generations of Atlantic salmon in our lifetime. Sustaining this recovery has rested with volunteer and not-for-profit organizations. These groups know what needs to be done in our rivers. Both the public and private sectors should continue to encourage and fund their initiatives.

Smolt Survival: Smolts are a significant performance indicator. We remain concerned not over production but over at-sea survival. Predation alone cannot explain the cause. Climate change is undoubtedly having an effect on migration, habitat and prey species. Understanding these factors is important and research must continue, but it can do little to sustain the species. However, we feel much more must be done to addressing two key issues:

1. The latent effects of forestry, particularly herbicide applications, on the capacity of smolts to adapt to their marine environment.
2. The possible cause and effects of sea cage aquaculture requires a concerted effort to develop a time line to transition the industry to land based facilities.

Retention Fisheries: Many New Bunswickers, native and non-native, desire a retention fishery. Retention fisheries, wherever they occur, must be within river specific management objectives. A fundamental and longstanding management principle that discourages indiscriminate fisheries must be applied in practice. This principle should not be disrespectful of aboriginal and treaty rights of our Native New Bunswickers, Labradoreans, or Greenlanders, but should guide their future activities.

Predation: Understanding the significance of imbalances between species in nature is an important challenge in salmon management. In past, our organization has assessed the impact of the merganser duck and lobbied successfully for control measures. Evidence suggests that there are other

ongoing threats such as grey seals, striped bass, smallmouth bass, and cormorants. As in the case of the merganser duck, effective control measures are required when predator populations fall out of balance with historical averages.

Mr. Chairman, there are undoubtedly many other significant issues to discuss here. However, I will leave your committee members with these points and my wish for success in your important mission. Thank you once again for this opportunity to appear before you.

Charles LeBlanc
President
New Brunswick Wildlife Federation