

**Council**

CNL(07)33

***Unreported Catches – Tabled by USA***

*Unreported Catches – Tabled by USA*

As has been reported previously and through other returns to NASCO this year, commercial fisheries for sea-run Atlantic salmon are closed in US waters, including freshwater systems, coastal/ estuarine systems, and marine waters within the US Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In 2006, as in the last several years, a limited recreational fishery was conducted on reconditioned surplus broodstock released in the Merrimack River. In 2006, the State of Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission (MASC) authorized a one-month experimental recreational catch-and-release fishery on the Penobscot River, Maine from 15 September to 15 October 2006. Prior to authorization of the fishery, a structured risk assessment was conducted which considered a suite of alternatives. The MASC had the authority to close the fishery during the open season as necessary to protect the resource. For both of these limited recreational fisheries, management and enforcement presence was maintained at a high level to prevent illegal activities, including poaching.

**Documenting Unreported Catches in Commercial Fisheries**

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), as well as state fisheries management agencies, place trained fisheries observers on commercial fishing vessels to obtain information about these fisheries, particularly information about bycatch. Over the last several years, there have been no documented observations of Atlantic salmon through any state or Federal fisheries observation program. Offloading from commercial vessels is also monitored by enforcement agents, and often by port agents and other state and Federal personnel. There have been no documented incidents of Atlantic salmon being offloaded during such monitoring efforts.

Federally licensed commercial fishing vessels in the U.S. are required to complete and submit logbooks. Each year, NMFS reviews these logbooks, as well as reported purchases from vessels from seafood dealers, to document any reports of Atlantic salmon. There have been no reports of Atlantic salmon over the last several years.

It should be noted that at-sea and dockside observation efforts are not designed to achieve 100 percent coverage, and rarely achieve 25 percent coverage of overall fishing effort. Despite this level of coverage, the amount of bycatch and/or unreported catch of Atlantic salmon in U.S. commercial fisheries is expected to be minimal and approaching zero.

**Documenting Unreported Catches in Recreational Fisheries**

Unreported catches of Atlantic salmon can be difficult to evaluate, and can happen in several ways. For those limited fisheries allowed for Atlantic salmon in the U.S., an angler could catch a salmon, but not report it. Because of high enforcement presence at these limited (in both time and area) fisheries, this is expected to be minimal. Unreported catches could be occurring outside of these fisheries, and could be happening through intentional effort (poaching), or by unintentional catches of Atlantic salmon by anglers fishing for other species. In the U.S., we have attempted to address the potential for unreported catches via enforcement efforts, closure of particular areas known to hold salmon to fishing of any kind, and through outreach efforts. Over

the last several years, NMFS has provided funds to Maine particularly for use in Atlantic salmon enforcement efforts. This has resulted in additional patrols and surveillance efforts in Atlantic salmon rivers. There are also Federal enforcement agents in Maine and other states that work with local authorities in monitoring areas that might be particularly vulnerable to poaching.

To address the issue of unintentional recreational catch of Atlantic salmon, and the potential for misidentification of juvenile Atlantic salmon with other species, NMFS, FWS, and several state agencies provide species identification materials in recreational fishing brochures, and post information in kiosks in fishing areas where this may happen. Information is also distributed through permit mailings, informing and reminding anglers of the regulations associated with Atlantic salmon.

Despite these efforts, there are occasional anecdotal reports of Atlantic salmon caught, either intentionally or unintentionally. When these reports reach state or Federal management agencies they are fully investigated. These reports are very infrequent, on the order of one or two each year – none in some years.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Despite the almost complete closure of all Atlantic salmon fisheries in the U.S., and strict control over the limited authorized recreational fisheries and associated regulations, there is the potential for illegal harvest and unreported catches. The U.S. makes a concerted effort, through fisheries observation and monitoring, enforcement activity, and outreach to deter, prevent, and document any illegal harvest and unreported catches. As a result of these efforts, and due to the poor status of stocks in the U.S., unreported catches of Atlantic salmon in both recreational and commercial fisheries in the United States are expected to be minimal, and approaching zero.