

North American Commission

NAC(07)5

*Review of Atlantic Salmon Management Measures for 2007
(tabled by Canada)*

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Introduction

The outlook for Atlantic salmon stocks continues to be generally poor throughout Atlantic Canada and Québec. There are few areas where returns and spawners are consistently above conservation requirements, other areas where returns are adequate (or close to being so) for conservation, and many areas where there are serious concerns for conservation of the stocks. Low returns are associated with low marine survival.

Three major initiatives that will positively affect Atlantic salmon conservation have been introduced by the Canadian government in 2007. The first is a modernized *Fisheries Act*, which will put emphasis on the Precautionary Approach to conserve fish and other aquatic resources, and on a science-based approach to fisheries management. This new Act is currently being considered by Canada's Parliament.

Secondly, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has recently introduced to stakeholders a draft new *Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy*. This represents the first overhaul of wild Atlantic salmon policies since 1986. The overall goal of this Policy will be to maintain and restore healthy and diverse salmon populations and their habitats for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of Canada now and in the future.

The *Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy* is intended to transform the approach to conserving Atlantic salmon, their habitat, and dependent ecosystems. Key elements of the policy recognize that:

- Protection of the genetic and geographic diversity of salmon is a prerequisite to their future evolutionary adaptation and long-term well-being;
- Shared stewardship and inherent responsibilities provide the most efficient and effective use of resources to achieve conservation objectives. Decision-making has to be shared and undertaken using open and accountable public processes that are collaborative, inclusive and comprehensive;
- Future success in salmon conservation relies on the use of freshwater, estuarine and marine habitats. Habitat requires effective protection and rehabilitation if salmon are to prosper. This will require partnered approaches with provinces and others;
- Ecosystem integrity must be considered in management decision-making to foster the conservation of salmon in an increasingly uncertain future; and
- Management must be based on good scientific information and consider biological, social, and economic consequences.

The Policy will provide a modernized framework for priority-setting and decision-making with respect to wild Atlantic salmon. The Policy will help guide the delivery of both the approximately C\$10 million annual investment by the federal government in Atlantic salmon and the C\$30 million Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund.

The third initiative is the Atlantic Salmon Endowment Fund. The federal government has contributed C\$30 million to this Fund, which will be held in trust by an incorporated Board

(the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation). Income earned on the investment of the Fund will be used to fund projects at the local, watershed or broader level that contribute to salmon restoration and conservation in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. The Foundation has recently been established and is organizing project review committees in each province.

Aboriginal Food Fisheries

Aboriginal food fisheries for Atlantic salmon take place throughout Atlantic Canada and Quebec. Aboriginal fisheries for food, social and ceremonial (FSC) purposes are permitted after conservation requirements have been addressed, and take precedence over recreational fishing.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans seeks to develop food fishery licences with Aboriginal groups with specific allocations of salmon, monitoring system requirements (fishery guardians, logbooks, tagging, etc.) and in some areas where practical, scientific projects such as tagging or gear trials.

In the Gulf Region, Aboriginal FSC fisheries in 2006 occurred in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence rivers generally in accordance with agreements and communal fishing licences. It is expected that the agreements will be negotiated at approximately the same levels for 2007.

In the Maritimes Region, food fisheries on five rivers in southern Nova Scotia are permitted for fin-clipped hatchery grilse. This limited access is not expected to contribute to any further decline in the stocks.

In Labrador, reduction of the harvest of multi-sea-winter fish continues to be the primary consideration in 2007 for the three directed FSC salmon fisheries (the Innu Nation, Labrador Métis Nation and the Nunatsiavut Government). In 2006, FSC fisheries resulted in the harvest of approximately 30t of salmon. Recent harvests have been below 2004 levels. Allocations for 2007 are still under negotiation with the Aboriginal groups involved, and measures already in place to reduce 2SW catches will continue.

There are 3 user groups with directed FSC access to salmon in Labrador. These fisheries are monitored through dedicated guardian programs and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. There is also an all-resident trout and char fishery at Upper Lake Melville and the south coast with a limited bycatch of salmon, which is monitored by the Department.

Commercial Fishery

There are no commercial fisheries for Atlantic salmon on Canada's east coast. The last commercial fishery, a small fishery on Quebec's Lower North Shore, ended in 1999.

Recreational Fishery

Newfoundland and Labrador

A new five-year (2007-2011) recreational salmon management plan for Newfoundland and Labrador was announced on 23 May, 2007. Key measures from the previous multi-year plan are maintained, including an adaptive management strategy, river classification system and special watershed management plans, as well as mandatory use of barbless hooks, and river closures based on environmental protocols. No changes for Labrador. For insular

Newfoundland, the changes are a standard season for all zones (1 June – 7 September) and standard retention levels for all Class I rivers.

Maritimes Region

In the Maritimes Region (southern Nova Scotia and Bay of Fundy), only one stock is believed to have met conservation requirements in 2006 (North River, Cape Breton). Inner Bay of Fundy (iBoF) salmon populations are listed as “endangered” under Canada’s *Species at Risk Act*. Live-gene banking continues for iBoF salmon; over 3.5 million releases of various life stages to the wild since 2001. Low abundance is expected to continue with possible extirpations in rivers in the Southern Uplands area, which are negatively impacted by acid rain and are generally of low productivity. Live gene banking, i.e., parr to adult grow-out on a rotational basis, is done in priority rivers to prevent extirpations in Saint John River and several Southern Upland rivers.

Given the stock status and the forecast for similar returns in 2007, management options in the Maritimes Region are limited. Complete closures will be applied to most rivers in the Region with some limited hook and release angling opportunities in cold water conditions. Angling licence sales have declined in Nova Scotia by about 74% within the past decade.

Gulf Region

In 2007, the Gulf Region is embarking on a new, multi-year (2007-2011) integrated management plan for Atlantic salmon. The Region’s main focus will be to strengthen communications with stakeholders and provinces, to encourage the community-based salmon management organizations to share responsibility in managing the resource and to develop and implement the new integrated management plan.

Key elements in developing the Plan will be to set management objectives, define management measures and to establish the process to involve stakeholders and other interested parties, both in the conduct of the management program and in the decision-making process. The management approach will be adaptive and inclusive, based on local capacity and on the roles and responsibilities of the parties, with management activities that could range from a renewed participation in, and collaboration with, the local recreational advisory committees, to a more extensive sharing of the management responsibilities associated with fish and fish habitat for a management unit or on a watershed basis.

Quebec

Quebec has a multi-year salmon strategy which establishes conservation limits and management targets for each river. Where the conservation limit is not met, catch and release fishing only is permitted for large salmon and, to some extent, for grilse, if the latter contribute more than 10% to the egg deposition to reach the conservation limit for each river. The fishing of MSW salmon is permitted, with restrictions, on rivers where the conservation limit is exceeded.

Since 1984 the reporting of catches is mandatory in Quebec. Since 2003, an on-line catch reporting system has been implemented on some rivers to provide timely information on catches (date, length, weight, location). Managers will be able to make better management decisions more quickly with this information.