

CNL(23)81

THE LONLIEST
SALMON IN THE WORLD
OR
IF YOU COULD SEE
THROUGH MY FISH EYES

**A salmon's tale
From
A Wolastoqiwik/Maliseet Perspective
NASCO Meeting
Moncton, NB**

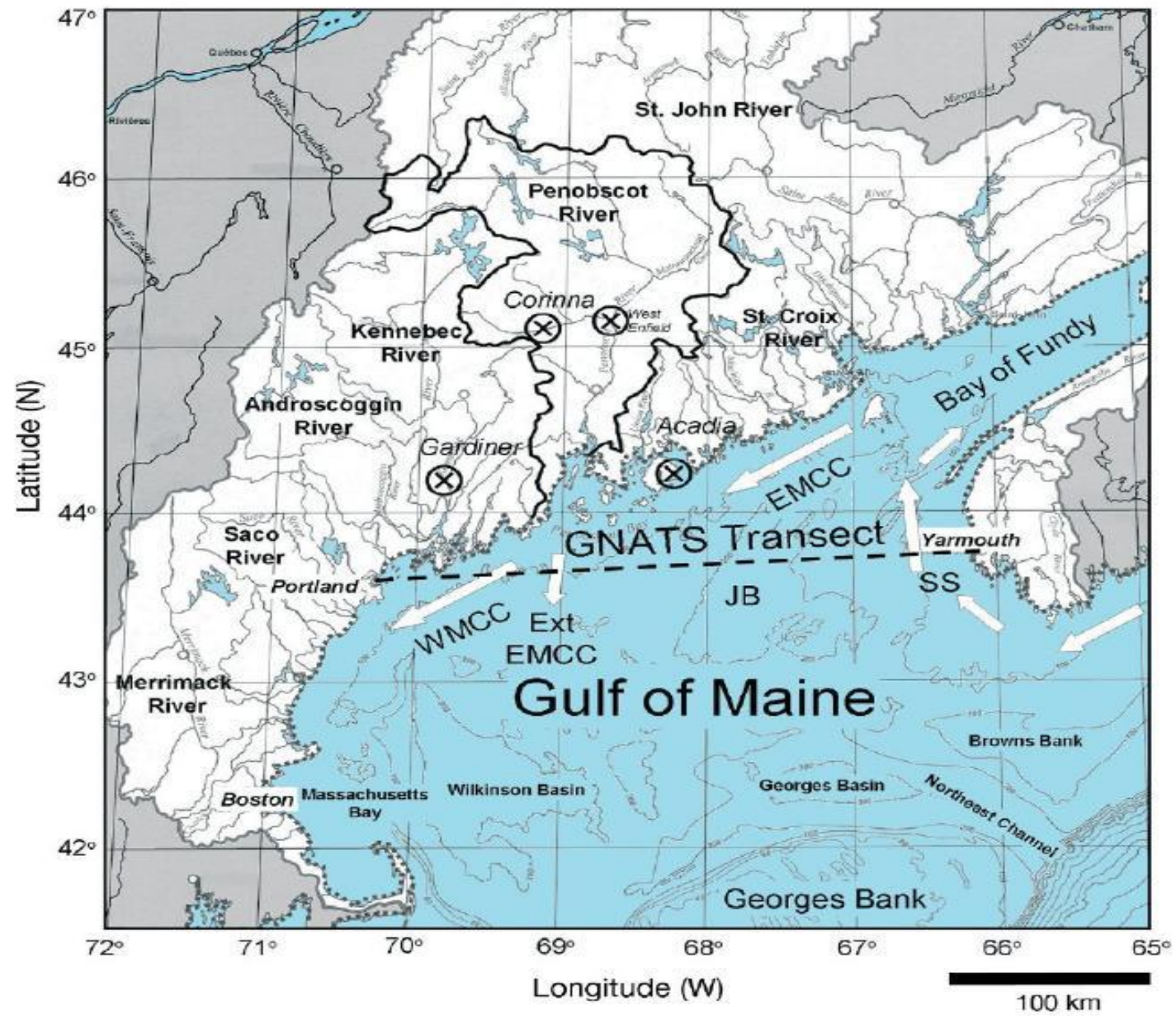
Two eyed seeing

- **Acknowledgement that there is a combined vision necessary to understand the plight of life today; some Wolustoq Elders have stated that what happens to the salmon will happen to us**
- **Acknowledgement that what humans are doing to their surroundings is having a devastating and lasting impact to all life on our earth**
- **Acknowledgement that climate change does exist and that it is man made**
- **Acknowledgement that it is going to take a connecting of vision between 2 competing world views to fully understand where we are at and what needs to change; take the best of both: Indigenous and Western Knowledge systems**
- **Acknowledgement that this is a story about life and death and there is great grief, sorrow and anger in the telling of this story. My ancestors have been here since time immemorial and for the past 500 years, we have seen devastation and ecocide because of genocide of our Wabanaki peoples.**
- **Indigenous led conservation is a key to reversing biodiversity loss vis a vis revitalizing Indigenous languages and ecosystem wide approaches to sustaining what is now left. UNDRIP respect!**



Narrative style

- **Speaking for those that can not speak for themselves**
- **Reciprocity of role and responsibilities, who am I responsible to? What is my role? How do I take on my role and exercise my responsibilities?**
- **Oral tradition and the importance of maintaining what is left for the sake of sustaining life**
- **Cultural practice of speaking from the non-human centered worldview**
- **Allowing voice and giving importance to empathy, especially in times of suffering**
- **Creating visibility where it has been erased (erasure) as a way of silencing spirit**
- **Providing a space for spirit to speak out and bring attention to what matters**
- **Reminding from non human relatives who teach us what is healthy and unhealthy through relationships, kinships and connections that reach out to the universe/creation**



My story

- I have been here for millennium and I have enjoyed my home, the Wolustoq, where my ancestors laid their eggs
- I have seen less of my relatives travelling the waterways where we always called home because we can't get through because of the dams that were made without concern for our health or safety
- While we were in the millions at one time, now these are approximate numbers on my existence:

Mactaquac Dam	192
Tinker Dam	6
Nashawaak River Counting Fence	45

My story continued

- **There have been many reasons given why I am dying: major hydro dams with no way for me to get through and for those that do that are trapped and trucked, they are lost in a system that only sees them relocated without connection to their ancestral imprinting and for those that survive that, trying to come back down the river, river flows that don't provide enough current or suddenly too much, or too little cool waters or a lack of oxygen or certain death through turbines that eat up our bodies**
- **Some of the people still cry for me even through many don't know my name in their language, don't sing songs at the shore for our arrival, aren't provided in feasts and ceremonies and don't remember how much medicine we bring to keep the people healthy. We don't see their children coming to fish us with their old ones and we don't hear their words of praise for our lives and how important we have always been. Their river has been closed to fishing for us and us providing to them for over 20 years**

Climate change

- **Some have blamed climate change for our demise, the warming of our waters, the lessening of water level, the black box of our marine journey and how ocean currents are changing**
- **Some have used the excuse of climate change to do nothing claiming that now that our numbers are so low that there is no point in trying to do anything, that it would be a waste of resources as some of them call us no longer viable**
- **We heard there was a study done to see what effect was happening in the river because of climate change, the study found that because of the effect of the Dams over the past 52 years, that it has been a climate change catalyst, mimicking climate change effects over that period of time. Now that rapid climate change is happening in our river, there is a doubly devastating effect on our home, why can't someone do something about that?**

Climate Change Study

- The study was created to understand the river, my home better and what effect is happening to the people living along the river
- In 2017, Maliseet Nation Conservation Council (MNCC) engaged One Sky International (OSI), a Mi'kmaq owned and operated company, to complete a climate change risk assessment evaluation utilizing the Public Infrastructure Engineering Vulnerability Committee protocol (PIEVC).
- OSI utilized this particular protocol, developed by Engineers Canada, for climate change risk evaluations for three major reasons: a) it is very comprehensive in evaluative procedure b) it weaves together climate change knowledge, engineering knowledge and traditional Indigenous knowledge equally and c) it provides a clear analysis of infrastructure risk and recommendations. The process is guided by Community Advisory Committees (CAC) which are chosen by community leadership, and are formed through a mix of community expertise including housing and infrastructure, Elder participation, community representation and other expertise as determined by leadership. These CAC directs the team on community inclusion, as well as participating and reviewing risk data and scoring.
- To complete the phases of PIEVC, climate change data is researched and then vetted for correction through our Community Advisory Committees (CAC) as well as through broader community meetings, to ensure data represents their real world experience. This is important as historical and available climate change data is sometimes not site specific.
- To highlight the Cultural understanding of impacts, MNCC also undertook the Cultural Values and Vulnerability Mapping in communities

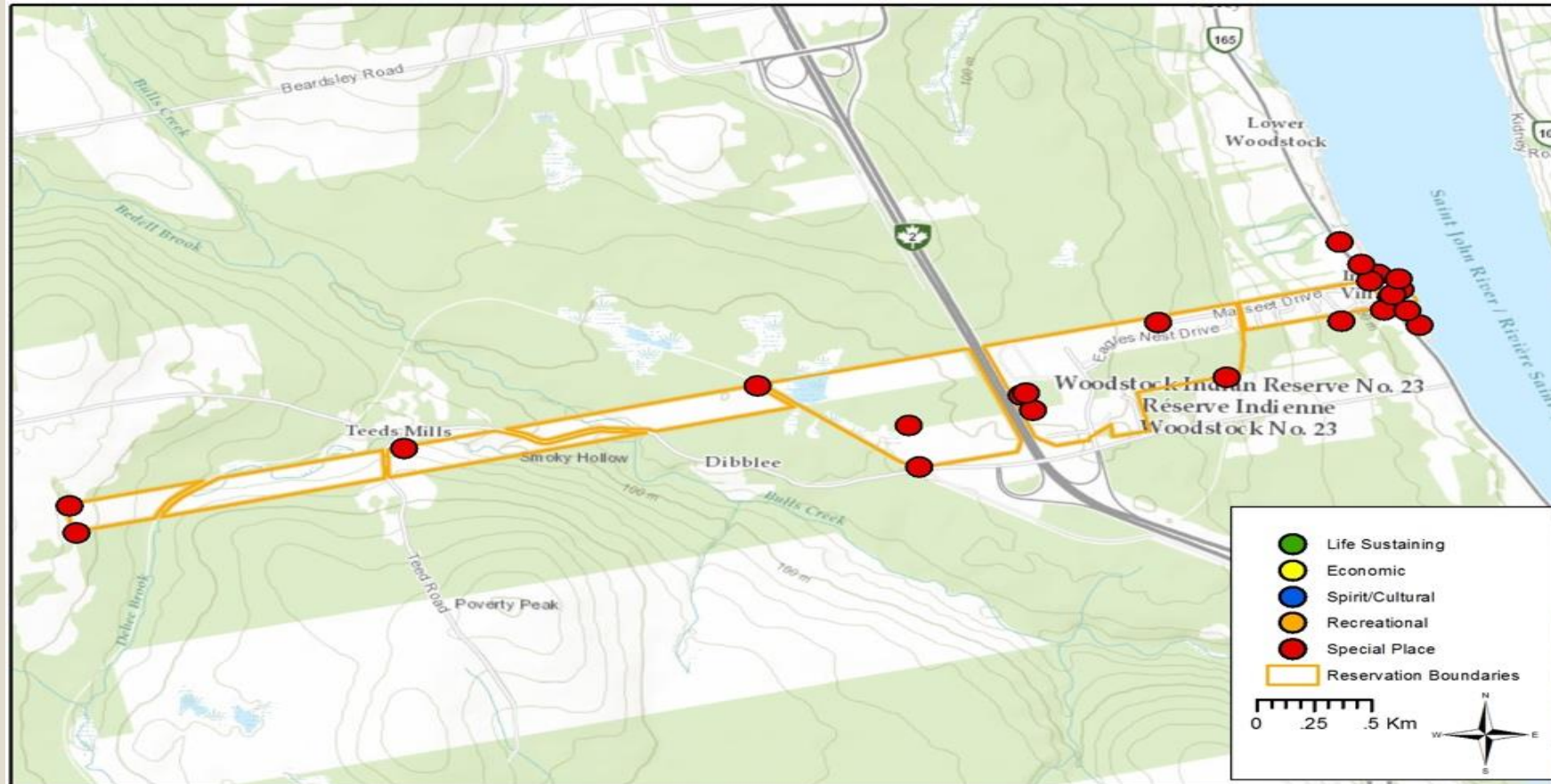
Climate Change Study continued

- **It was found that varying geologic influences are present from community to community; having community input ensures that the risk analysis takes into account the specific pressures in a specific community, as well as in depth knowledge contained in that community.**
- **The engineering assessment is based on site visit and document analysis related to identified areas of risk. When these are evaluated, information is then taken back to the CAC to determine risk assessment to the community based on a numerical scale.**
- **It is important to note that in the case of New Brunswick Maliseet communities, concerns regarding climate change risk were heightened due to hydroelectric dam activity which, on a regular basis, imitates climate change events in terms of drought and flood patterns, thereby potentially exacerbating actual climate change trend impacts.**

As part of the Climate Change Study: Cultural Values and Vulnerability Mapping (CVVM)

- **The CVVM piece allows researchers to study the place attachment and landscape values of any community at multiple scales and sites. Using history circles and survey methods to create the data and GIS and spatial analysis to process it, this project helps us identify and understand the areas that are culturally significant to an entire community or to representative groups within it. Phase 2 of the CVVM project conducted some of this research among three Maliseet communities on the upper Wolustog (St. John River valley). It demonstrated that riparian landscapes and river islands are critically important to the local community's sense of place and place attachment. Since these are ecologically sensitive areas and susceptible to some of the harmful effects of climate change, communities would benefit from further studies on the cultural importance and climate vulnerability of groups in these communities.**

Special Places, Sample Woodstock First Nation



Special Places continued

- **Special Places in these communities seemed to indicate special natural features and wetlands. In Woodstock the Special Places were more heavily clustered along the St. John River than any other value. In Tobique virtually all of the Special Place values appeared on the banks of the St. John and Tobique Rivers. In Madawaska, the Special Places were more dispersed, and rather than the river front, the highest concentrations (5 values) appeared on the Snake Stream wetland and walking trails.**
- **This serves to remind where these places are and the nature of how important our relationship remains to our home**

What can be learned by using these tools?

- **Salmon is regarded by many to be an indicator species of health in a river and the relationship with the river is still in the minds and hearts of the Wolustoq People**
- **Salmon have been choked off of the Wolustoq by Dams and other impediments to their volitional passage**
- **The government has not pressed for fish passage that works with crown owned hydro facilities, told it is too costly**
- **MNCC commissioned a study through its Coastal Restoration Fund project to look at habitat restoration for salmon and other species on the Wolustoq and the options for volitional fish passage, it is possible**

Learning continued

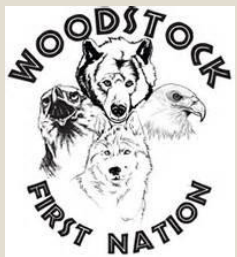
- **It takes will and resources to meaningfully address the fish passage on the Wolustoq and climate change is only going to exacerbate a worsening situation, action is needed now**
- **MNCC and the Houlton Band of Maliseets have been bringing the US and Canadian governments to the table to talk about the transboundary river that is the Wolustoq and to bring attention to the plight of our salmon and other species at risk dependent on volitional fish passage like the American eel which is also culturally significant to Wolustoq People**
- **Other than an Interim Statement on Cooperation that was signed by both Governments and Wolustoq First Nations and Tribal Government, we are still in the process of establishing what needs to be done to help salmon and other species survive the hydro development before its too late**



U.S. Army Corps of Engineers®



Fisheries and Oceans Canada



Madawaska Maliseet First Nation



Kingsclear First Nation



Environment Canada



Much work left to do

- **Salmon have been and remain to be a culturally iconic species for the Wolustoq People; what happens to them, will happen to us, as long as we remain, we must seek their survival. The best of science, technology and innovation is needed here.**
- **Salmon do not have a voice to intercede in the decision making, we must speak. We need to have a voice in the NASCO process, we need a seat at the table.**
- **Devastating sense of loss at a cultural and spiritual level is pervasive and significant in Wolastoqiyik/Maliseet communities.**
- **Loss of Wolustoq language tied to the loss of salmon and other relations that we traditionally relied on for sustenance like caribou which is extinct in our Territory.**
- **Decision making is being driven by the need for profits and energy even though the impending reality of climate change can not be denied.**
- **OBOF Atlantic Salmon have not been listed as endangered under the Canadian Species At Risk Act (SARA) yet were listed as endangered under the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) which is a scientific and independent Advisory Panel to the Canadian Minister of the Environment.**

Where there is life, there is hope

- **We are told by our Elders to speak for those with no voice, through our treaties, we are shown what our Ancestors valued which was our way of life, our lands, our waters, our relatives who gave us sustenance and our continued survival.**
- **One such Maliseet Elder who passed on over 20 years ago today, gave a prophecy to his family. Before he died, he told his family that God had come to him in a vision. In that dream, God asked the man if there was anything he wanted to ask. The Elder said yes, and asked, why are we here? God said that is an easy question to answer...to be happy. God then showed the Elder a river full of salmon and asked the man, do you see those salmon? The Elder said yes. God said that is how man is to be happy, like the salmon in the river. God then told the man, the Salmon will save the world. That man was my father, and I live by those words.**
- **I am honoured to sit with you to share this work to make our world a happier, better place for our children.**
- **Woliwon, Psiw ntolnapenok, All my Relations**