

North American Commission

NAC(04)8

*Review of Atlantic Salmon Management Measures
for 2004*

(tabled by Canada)

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Introduction

The outlook for Atlantic salmon stocks continues to be generally poor throughout Atlantic Canada. 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.

Management measures are tailored to the needs of specific areas (rivers and watersheds) while striving for an overall Precautionary Approach.

Aboriginal Food Fisheries

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

The Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) seeks to develop food fishery licences with Aboriginal groups that identify allocations, monitoring system requirements (guardians/logbooks, etc.) and scientific projects such as tagging or gear trials (such as the use of trapnets instead of gillnets), where practical.

In the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence rivers, Aboriginal fisheries in 2003 generally occurred in accordance with agreements and communal fishing licences. The quota was negotiated at 2,801 - MSW and 13,212 - 1SW. It is expected that the agreements will be negotiated at approximately the same levels for 2004.

The Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) food fishery is managed under a communal licence. LIA reported landings of 14.6 t (preliminary) compared to 10.1 t in 2002. The increased catch was primarily associated with the implementation of the designation process. Corrective measures have been established for the 2004 fishing season.

The Innu Nation food fishery is managed under a special management plan for Lake Melville. The Innu Nation is allocated a quota of 1,500 salmon, with 2003 reported landings of 1.5 t (preliminary) compared to 1.3 t in 2002.

Both Aboriginal Food Fisheries were strictly monitored by DFO assisted by Aboriginal Guardians. Management measures include tagging and mandatory log returns along with reduced seasons and selected closed areas.

The Resident food fishery programme was implemented in Southern Labrador four years ago following the closure of the commercial salmon fishery in 1998. The fishery is managed under a special management plan, which permits the retention of four salmon as a by-catch in the trout and charr fishery. Recorded landings (preliminary) for 2003 were 6.1 t compared to 5.2 t in 2002.

Similar to management measures imposed on the Aboriginal food fishery, the resident food fishery has reduced seasons to permit early-run (MSW) salmon to escape to the rivers. In addition, tagging and mandatory log returns are part of the management strategy. Guardians employed by the Labrador Métis Nation assist DFO in monitoring and enforcement of the fishery. For 2003 about 95% of the fishing logs were returned to DFO, which is exceptional compared to other commercial and Aboriginal Fisheries.

A communal food fishery for the Labrador Métis Nation may be established in 2004. This will result in a significant reduction in the effort (80-90%) associated with the all resident food fishery. However, a quota of approximately 10 tonnes of salmon may be allocated as part of any communal licence issued to the Labrador Métis Nation.

Commercial Fishery

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

Commercial fisheries moratoria in Labrador and insular Newfoundland remain in place indefinitely.

Recreational Fisheries

Insular Newfoundland

2003 was the second year of a new multi-year (2002-2006) salmon management plan.

The plan features a River Classification and Adaptive Management Strategy for Insular Newfoundland and areas of Southern Labrador. The plan permits different retention limits based on the health of individual river stocks. These limits range from retention of six grilse on a Class I river to catch and release only on a Class IV river. The retention of one MSW salmon is only permitted on selected rivers in Zone 1 and 2 in Labrador.

Other key management measures include the mandatory use of barbless hooks on all scheduled salmon rivers, river closures based on Environmental Protocols (i.e. low water levels or high water temperatures), as well as selected river closures for the entire season for conservation reasons.

In 2002, in response to extremely low returns of salmon to Harry's River and Northwest Port Blanford, DFO in consultation with local stakeholders developed a pilot project for both watersheds, including community involvement in an education and public awareness campaign. This stewardship initiative, including educating the public on conservation and ownership of the resource, led to a significant increase in the salmon returns to both rivers. In 2003 the salmon returns on Northwest River doubled from the previous year along with

significant increase on the Harry's River. As a result of the success of this initiative, DFO has expanded the stewardship programme in 2004 to Ragged Hr. River along with several rivers in Bay St. George.

In Insular Newfoundland, 2003 recreational catches included 37,953 salmon, down from 41,946 in 2002. However, angling effort in rod days remained virtually unchanged for both years.

Labrador

Conservation management measures implemented for the past two years in Southern Labrador for the recreational salmon fishery will continue in 2004. These measures include a river classification system for rivers impacted by the construction of the Trans Labrador Highway which have a class three designation (2 grilse seasonal limit). No retention of large fish (greater than 63cm) is permitted on these rivers. For all other salmon rivers in zones 1 & 2 the seasonal bag limit of three grilse and one large salmon will apply.

In Labrador in 2003, recreational catches totaled 9,695, an increase from 8,308 in 2002. Angling effort increased in 2003 by approximately 5,000 rod days.

Maritimes Region

The Maritimes Region consists of five Salmon Fishing Areas (19, 20, 21, 22 and 23). Again in 2003, there were no salmon rivers in the Region that achieved spawning requirements. Rivers in two of these Areas (20 and 21) are negatively impacted by acid rain and are generally of low productivity. Given the stock status and the forecast for similar returns in 2004, management options remain limited. Complete closures are applied to most rivers in the Region with some limited hook and release angling opportunities and Aboriginal harvests limited essentially to hatchery-origin fish. Angling licence sales have declined in Nova Scotia by 74% within the past decade.

Rivers in the Inner Bay of Fundy portion of Areas 22 and 23 remain closed to salmon fishing (since 1990) and salmon stocks in this area were listed as "endangered" under the Species at Risk Act, promulgated in 2003. The Act prohibits any harm or capture of listed species. A live-gene bank programme for Inner Bay of Fundy salmon stocks was initiated in 1998, and includes the release of smolts. Unfortunately, marine survival of the released fish is such that none are found to return to the rivers. A multi-faceted recovery plan for these stocks has been developed. Portions of this plan have been implemented, i.e. the live gene bank, with full implementation likely in 2005, once the full plan has received final approval.

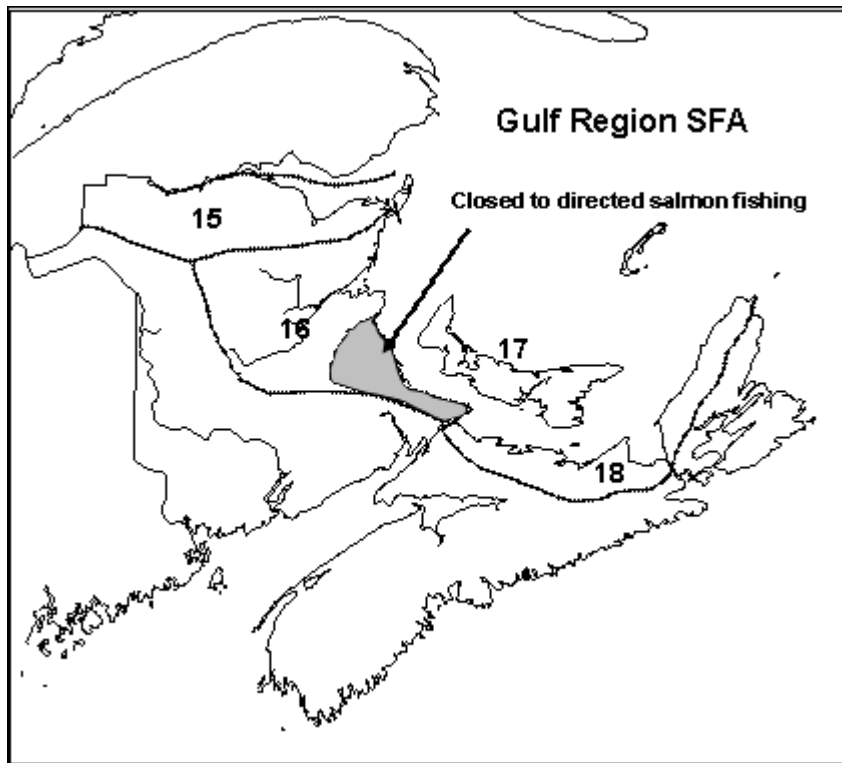
Gulf Region

The Gulf Region consists of four Salmon Fishing Areas (15, 16, 17 and 18). Overall, large salmon abundance in 2003 was higher than in 2002, which translated into higher large salmon catches than the previous years. Small salmon returns were down from 2002 and in some cases among the lowest observed. Consequently, grilse catches were lower in 2003 than the previous year. All commercial fisheries for Atlantic salmon in the Gulf Region remain closed in 2004.

As in 2003, Atlantic salmon will be harvested by two user groups in 2004: Aboriginal peoples and recreational fishers. Aboriginal peoples are given first access to salmon (after

conservation requirements) based on communal needs for food, social and ceremonial purposes.

All angling fisheries for large salmon are mandatory catch and release fisheries. Retention angling fisheries for small salmon (grilse) during 2004 will be allowed in most rivers of the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence with the exception of a southeast corner of SFA 16 which remained closed to all directed salmon fisheries.



The daily grilse retention limit in the Miramichi River (SFA 16), Prince Edward Island (SFA 17) and the Nepisiguit River in SFA 15 is one fish. In the Restigouche River system (SFA 15), and Gulf Nova Scotia, Margaree River system (SFA 18) the daily retention limit of grilse is two fish. The maximum daily catch-and-release limit is four fish of any size for SFA 15, 16, 18 and two fish for SFA 17. The season bag limits of 8 grilse in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia (SFA 15, 16 & 18), and 7 grilse in PEI (SFA 17), remain unchanged from previous years.

As in the past the angling seasons vary on a river-by-river management scheme for 2004. In essence it includes various periods starting with a spring April 15 (black salmon) fishery in the Miramichi and Restigouche river systems to a general summer (bright salmon) fishery on all the salmon rivers with the exception of the southeast corner of SFA 16 that is closed. Some late-run rivers are open until late fall, October 31 in the SFA 18 Rivers of Nova Scotia, and November 30 in the SFA 17 in PEI. As was the case in the fall of 2003, a hook and release experimental fishery will be permitted for one week beyond the end of the season on the Nepisiguit, Mill Stream and lower portion of the Main Southwest Miramichi.

In summary, the 2004 management measures for SFA 15, 16, 17 and 18 – **Status quo.**

Province of Quebec

Quebec has developed a multi-year salmon plan 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. In 2003, an on-line catch reporting system has been implemented to provide timely information on catches (date, length, weight, location). Managers will be able to make better management decisions more quickly with this information.

On the Upper and Mid North Shore of the St. Lawrence River, stocks stayed at a low level, but on the south shore, many stocks exceeded their conservation limits. River survival is being maintained and at-sea survival is increasing. For 2004, a small decrease in large salmon is expected.