

North American Commission

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Review of Atlantic Salmon Management Measures for 2002

(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 Fishery

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 Department of Fisheries and Oceans 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.

The Aboriginal food fishery for Atlantic salmon for both the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) and the Innu Nation in Labrador was approximately 14 tonnes (adjusted for non-reported landings). Neither Aboriginal group reached their assigned quotas for the food fishery. Aboriginal fisheries were managed under communal licences including a monitoring plan assisted by Aboriginal guardians.

For the 2002 season, a communal licence will again be issued to the LIA, with a quota of 10 tonnes. Negotiations concerning a communal licence for the Innu Nation were not successful, but a management plan has been established with a quota of 1,500 salmon and reduced season (June 15 – July 31).

A resident food fishery was implemented in Southern Labrador in 2000. Residents were permitted to retain four salmon as a by-catch in the trout net fishery. Preliminary estimates indicate approximately 5 tonnes were harvested in 2001. The 2002 resident food fishery will be managed as part of the trout and char fisheries, with one licence per household and retention of 4 salmon permitted. Once 4 salmon have been caught, fishers are required to remove their trout nets from the water.

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 Fishery

Newfoundland and Labrador

2002 is the first year of a new multi-year (2002-2006) salmon management plan.

The plan features a river classification system for insular Newfoundland which allows different retention limits based on the health of the river in question. 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 MSW salmon is not permitted.

To address declining salmon stocks in 2001, river classifications were adjusted for the 2002 angling season on 49 salmon rivers, resulting in decreased retention limits from four fish to two fish for those rivers. Major rivers along the northeast coast have shown stock decline in 2001, resulting in the Gander and Exploits Rivers being reduced to four fish retention in 2002.

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

New conservation management measures implemented for the 2001 recreational salmon fishery for southern Labrador will be continued. These measures include the introduction of a river classification system for selected rivers. All rivers being impacted by the construction of the Trans-Labrador Highway will 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 will apply.

Recreational catches totaled 45,986 salmon in 2001 compared to 57,149 in 2000.

Maritimes Region

The Maritimes Region consists of five Salmon Fishing Areas (19, 20, 21, 22 and 23). In 2001, there were no salmon rivers in the Region that achieved spawning requirements. Rivers in these Areas are negatively impacted by acid rain and are generally of low productivity. Given the stock status and the forecast for similar returns in 2002, management options for will again be limited to hook and release angling, fishing for hatchery-released fish, or closures. Angling licence sales have declined in Nova Scotia by 77% within the past decade.

Area 19 was open for hook and release only. In Areas 20 and 21, under a pilot river categorization scheme introduced in 2001 and continuing in 2002, seven rivers were open to

hook and release, and five rivers had food fisheries for fin-clipped hatchery grilse. This limited access in Areas 20 and 21 is not expected to contribute to any a further decline in the stocks.

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 have now been listed as “endangered” by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. A gene banking program for Inner Bay of Fundy salmon stocks was initiated in 1998 and work is ongoing with regard to developing a recovery plan for these stocks.

Gulf Region

The Gulf Region consists of four Salmon Fishing Areas (15, 16, 17 and 18). In 2001, the Miramichi River system and Southwest Miramichi River just exceeded conservation requirements, for the first time in five years. The Restigouche River probably met its conservation requirement in 2001, but not in 1999 or 2000. Also, the Margaree River returns were again above the conservation requirements, but at a lower level than in recent years.

Warm water conditions in 2001 led to a high level of incidental mortalities (392 on Miramichi River). In-season fishery closures did occur in the Miramichi system due to warm weather and low water levels in 2001.

Management measures in 2002 are similar to those that were in place for 2001. New Brunswick has implemented a live release Atlantic salmon licence for 2002. The retention of MSW salmon is not permitted.

A multi-year management plan is being developed in conjunction with the Maritimes Region. This plan will feature a river classification system, consultations for which are currently being held with stakeholders.

In 2001, allocations for aboriginal bands on the Miramichi River were 11,000 grilse and 665 salmon. Preliminary estimates of removals were 2,076 grilse and 460 salmon. Allocations for 2002 are still under negotiation.

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 to 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.

Stocks continue to decline, especially on the Upper and Mid North Shore. River survival is being maintained, but at-sea survival is declining. It is expected that 2002 will be relatively poor because the number of grilse in 2001 was low.