



February 14, 2025

Honourable Diane Lebouthillier
Minister
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
200 Kent Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0E6

Minister Lebouthillier:

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) of New Brunswick, I would like to thank you and your officials for meeting on February 4, 2025 to discuss the precarious existence of the Atlantic salmon in New Brunswick's rivers. The Government of New Brunswick is greatly concerned by the sparse salmon returns, particularly in the Miramichi Watershed. I am heartened to have learned, from our exchange, that you are personally of the same mind.

The Atlantic Salmon is not only an integral part of our heritage, but also plays a vital ecological, cultural, and economic role in our region. Stakeholders in the Province of New Brunswick have deep, and growing concerns given the sharp declines in Atlantic salmon populations in the Miramichi and Restigouche rivers and across New Brunswick.

We both understand that the Federal Department of Fisheries (DFO) is the jurisdictional lead on this challenge. Nonetheless, DNR recognizes that we have an important supporting role. In fact, there needs to be an urgent and collaborative effort from not only DFO and DNR, but also from outfitters, conservationists and First Nations.

I share the perspective of leading stakeholders and experts that the Atlantic salmon is facing virtual extinction in our rivers. We agree that the near extirpation of the Atlantic salmon in the region is greatly due to DFO's striped bass enhancement strategy that is now out of balance and harmful to the existence of Atlantic salmon.

While it may be unfair to suggest that DFO has adopted a "single-species" management strategy, it is reasonable to conclude that DFO must take immediate action to combat the threat from striped bass predation on the remaining fragile salmon populations in our rivers.

Minister/ Ministre

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Honourable Diane Lebouthillier
February 14, 2025
Page 2

The frustration and fear over the Atlantic salmon crisis continues to escalate. Your department is aware there are stakeholders who believe that DFO's current management of the Atlantic Salmon is inadequate to the point that they are prepared to initiate legal action against DFO.

These groups and individuals are well intended, they are merely desperately pleading for action.

An important step would be the release of DFO's Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Strategy (WASCS), that was planned for release in November. As noted, the strategy must include information on salmon in New Brunswick, reference to specific watersheds (e.g. Miramichi) and potential causes of population decline, such as predation, and well as mitigation measures. There have been concerns raised that the language of the draft document is currently inadequate in the details needed to have a meaningful impact on the ecosystem, specifically in the Miramichi area.

DNR actively engaged with DFO in the development of the WASCS. Implementation of the WASCS requires transformative investments in the areas of conservation, stewardship, salmon enhancement and stock rebuilding. The Government of New Brunswick (GNB) has the expectation that DFO will appropriately resource implementation of the WASCS, similar to investments made to support the Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative.

In the absence of secured funding, DNR recommends release of the Strategy to provide direction, alignment and cohesion to the diverse array of Atlantic salmon conservation plans and initiatives. However, a commitment to future funding is required.

The Government of New Brunswick and stakeholders are willing to collaborate with the Federal government in sharing data and/or collecting data. I ask that you encourage DFO to continue to work with all stakeholders on the issue in an expeditious manner.

It is the time for bold, decisive action.

Sincerely,



Hon. John Herron
Minister of Natural Resources

c.c. Cade Libby, Deputy Minister, Natural Resources and Energy Development
Butch Dalton, President, Miramichi Salmon Association
Nathan Wilbur, Vice President of Regional Programs, Atlantic Salmon Federation
Jim Ward, General Manager, Anqotum Resource Management
John Bagnall, Science Coordinator, Save Miramichi Salmon Inc.