



**INPUT TO THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ON ATLANTIC SALMON: MARCH 10, 2015**

Wild Atlantic Salmon (WSU)

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Executive Summary:

Wild Salmon Unlimited is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is: to fund the restoration of wild Atlantic salmon to their native Nova Scotia rivers. We do this in partnership with universities, river associations, governments, First Nations and other like-minded non-government organizations (NGOs). Basically, we want to see salmon put back in rivers, and contribute to their conservation and protection. By doing so we'll help them be, once again, a significant contributor to the economic benefits of our rural communities. Although a relatively new organization we've received considerable support for our mission from: First Nations, all levels of government, corporations and NGOs.

Conservation is and will always be a vital component of salmon management but, unfortunately, despite our best efforts we are losing ground. Our methodologies have to change dramatically to address the challenges of our current world. Climate change, open pen aquaculture, ocean mortality and other effects of human activity, both legal and otherwise, are obvious examples. For too long we've ignored the fact we need to supplement our efforts with new methods that include the use of hatchery reared wild Atlantic salmon. If we don't, in the not too distant future, there'll be no wild Atlantic salmon to conserve. "Smart Stocking", which involves the use of re-conditioned kelts and conditioned smolts is a process that should be more widespread.

Enforcement In the enforcement area much work must be done to enlighten our governments to the need for increased funding. More collaboration, coordination and cooperation is needed amongst agencies responsible for the protection of our species, in this case wild Atlantic salmon.

Predation has been with us since the big bang and will be forever. We ourselves are predators and compete with all other predator species for diminishing resources. We've long ago intervened, perhaps recklessly, in our attempts to manage this natural process. Somehow we've got to re-think how we can control one species for the benefit of others and sell this to a skeptical world. Our re-intervention must be well planned and communicated. For example "how do you control mergansers?" Do you issue guns to kill them or step ladders to destroy their eggs? How will ornithologists or birders react? How about the family canoeing down the

river witnessing birds being shot? Although we all might feel it necessary we've got to think about it carefully. The use of re-conditioned smolts, released to rivers at optimal times, somewhat reduces, the impact of predation.

The international unsustainable fishing for wild Atlantic salmon is a huge challenge and must be addressed by the highest levels of our Federal government and the governments of offending nation states. If they are not already, attempts must be made to focus the attention of offending nations away from harvesting wild Atlantic salmon that originate in North American rivers. Efforts to reduce the commercial catch must continue and perhaps those nations should be encouraged to use trap nets, if they're not already doing so, begin hatchery programs and introduce land based aquaculture if feasible.

Focused areas for advancing science. Like all aspects of life, science is paramount. Universities, and DFO in collaboration with NGOs, like WSU for example, should be encouraged to investigate methods of improving hatchery environments in order to increase their efficiency. Research into new methods of rearing wild Atlantic salmon should be explored. An example is the Joint project on Fundy National Park Rivers involving DFO, Cook Aquaculture and Parks Canada. Efforts must be increased to investigate and address ocean mortality.

All of the challenges we face with respect to the decline of wild Atlantic salmon cannot be fixed without a significant funding commitment from all areas of government. Volunteer organizations cannot continue to carry the heavy load. However, we at Wild Salmon Unlimited will do our share and, although I'm not speaking for them, I'm sure ASF, its affiliates and other like-minded organizations will continue their efforts.

Anonymous:

"If you always do what you always did then you always get what you always got"

Committee's mandate:

Conservation and Enforcement measures.

Predation.

Strategy to address international unsustainable fishing.

Focused areas for advancing science.

Conservation: (In Atlantic Canada)

1. Introduce authentic "River Specific Management" co-managed by Provincial and Federal governments that accommodates donor stocking from acceptable systems.
2. Introduce kelt re-conditioning and smolt conditioning in hatcheries to increase salmon numbers.
3. Introduce catch and release angling for "wild fish" universally on all rivers. The retention of hatchery reared adipose fin clipped salmon, under 63.0cm in length, be reduced to 2 fish/season. This policy to remain in place for a 4 year period. Review after the 4 years to evaluate success. Consider changes if conservation levels are exceeded.
4. Introduce a universal "no gill net policy" and replace with trap nets. First Nations are key players in the change to this policy.
5. Universally introduce a "barbless" hook and fly fishing only policy on all scheduled Atlantic salmon rivers during the entire angling season. In tidal waters, angling be restricted to fly fishing and barbless, single hook, lures only. No bait of any type be permitted.
6. Introduce a salmon license requirement for anglers fishing a scheduled Atlantic salmon river regardless of the targeted species.
7. Increase monitoring of river conditions for low water and high temperature periods and introduce closures where conditions dictate.
8. More attention be directed towards forestry practices that are removing buffer zones around rivers and tributaries and affecting water flow and metal release from soils. Floods and droughts are more common as a result of climate change making the regulation of forestry practices more important than ever. An example of extremely poor forestry practices is that of Nova Scotia's biomass harvest.

9. Make funds available for habitat protection and consider a liming policy on rivers with known acid/aluminum problems.
10. Increase public education on wild Atlantic salmon conservation beginning at the elementary school level.
11. Where open pen aquaculture exists, insure there is a transparent system of strict environmental monitoring. Encourage a land based only aquaculture policy.
12. These suggestions address the conservation of current populations. However, in future, to increase and maintain salmon numbers, significantly, more hatcheries programs need to be developed. This will not only help salmon but local economies as well.

Enforcement:

1. Better cooperation, collaboration and coordination amongst regulatory bodies be developed in the enforcement area.
2. Increase funding for enforcement.
3. Introduce a guardian system on rivers during angling seasons. Again this will also contribute economic benefits to communities.
4. Increase minimum fines for poaching and, for those convicted, have licence privileges removed for longer periods. Minimum of 3-5 years.
5. The implications of poaching be added to public education programs.

Predation:

1. Address, and better manage, the striped bass and other predator species to reduce the impact on wild Atlantic salmon.
2. In areas close to Atlantic salmon rivers and estuaries consider the Introduction of a predator control program targeting seals, double crested cormorants and mergansers.

International unsustainable salmon fishing:

1. Address with other nations the commercial fishing of Atlantic salmon originating, specifically, in North American rivers. Either a complete ban or significant reduction.
2. If it isn't happening now have the Federal fisheries minister directly involved in the negotiation process with equal status ministers in countries where we are engaged regarding Atlantic salmon.
3. Canada and the US make funds available for an international monitoring/regulatory program.
4. If commercial fishing cannot be stopped in these nations then the use of trap nets "only" be introduced and fish above (63.0 cms) be released.

5. Nations should be encouraged to set up hatcheries in their own countries and introduce land based aquaculture where feasible.
6. Barring successful negotiations with offending nations to reduce, or eliminate, commercial fishing other methods, including tariffs, be considered.

Focused areas for advancing science:

1. Increase funding for hatcheries now raising wild Atlantic salmon and increase the number of hatcheries.
2. Provide funding to enable scientists within the DFO and in Universities to investigate and collaborate on methods to address ocean mortality.
3. Investigate new methods of rearing wild Atlantic salmon to increase their numbers. (Parks Canada/Cooke Aquaculture initiative in Fundy National Park rivers is an example.) Increase funding in this area as well.
4. Develop accurate wild Atlantic salmon and predator population statistics.

General Comments:

We at WSU want to make it clear that our primary role is as a fund raising organization. The funds we raise will be directed to river associations to help them put conditioned smolts in rivers. Smolts that will be the progeny of hatchery re-conditioned kelts. We're currently working with Universities, First Nations and other NGOs to make it happen. A trial program on two rivers in Nova Scotia is awaiting DFO approval. In fact that process is underway according to a letter recently received from Minister Shea.

Wild Salmon Unlimited, feels wild Atlantic salmon is an iconic species in Atlantic Canada but gets little attention until there is a crisis. To counteract that a large public relations campaign needs development to stress its importance from a cultural, recreational and economic perspective. The latter is particularly important to our rural communities.

We all need to be reminded that our salmon associations don't necessarily represent the broad general "public." Far too often now we hear significant negative commentary about salmon associations being elitist groups. Rich folks wanting to keep control of salmon for their own benefit both recreationally and economically. To counter those attitudes there has to be better communication to the public by all of us involved with Atlantic salmon. That public must be motivated to participate in the decision making process and encouraged to engage their political representatives. After all it's the general public who vote and it's vital to have them onside.