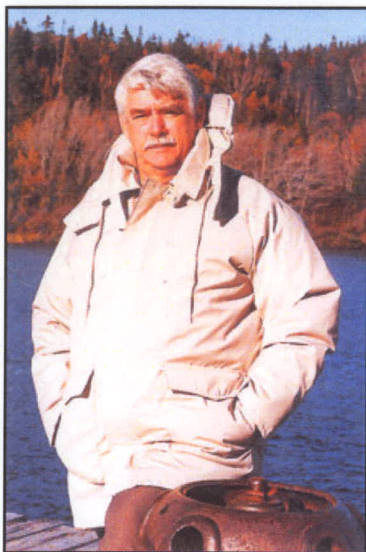


Tight Lines ... The Len Rich Memorial Award for Up and Coming Writers



It has been a year since Len Rich passed away on April 13, 2009 at the age of 71 after a brief, but courageous battle with cancer. His many friends in the angling and writing world continue to miss him, and will never forget him. As a columnist, author, photographer and mentor of up and coming writers, Len Rich left a profound legacy, touching the lives of many throughout the writing and fly fishing worlds. One of his greatest gifts was his capacity to see the extraordinary in the ordinary and share it with others through his columns, books and encouragement. His voice and his passions live on through his writing and the people he touched, inspired and mentored.

A prolific and award winning writer, Len was recognized by the Outdoor Writers of Canada and the New England Outdoor Writers Association for his books and articles. In 1991, he received the coveted Canada Recreational Fisheries Award from the Governor General, in recognition of "writing that influenced a generation of recreational fishers."

Len authored several books, including *Newfoundland Salmon Flies and How to Tie Them*, *Best of In the Woods*, *Fly Fishing Tips and Tactics*, *Rivers and Woods*; *So You Want to Be an Outfitter*; *Memoirs of a Fly Fisher*, *Tales of Christmas*; and his latest *Bill Bennett: Pioneer Bush Pilot and Outfitter*. He also wrote hundreds of articles for various national and international publications and ASF's Atlantic Salmon Journal.

In 2007, he was selected to receive the OWC's Jack David Mentorship Award for his work with up and coming writers. He led the OWC Mentorship Program and served as the Eastern Director of OWC for several years. In 2008, Len chaired one of OWC's most successful conferences ever.

At his memorial service, a fellow writer paid tribute to Len's generous and selfless contribution to his other writers:

"We knew Len's generous spirit and that he loved to share what he had learned over the years. He had a true desire to see everyone develop their gifts. He had the gift not just of writing. Along with nature photography, tying flies and fly fishing, he had the remarkable ability to see potential; potential for a story in any situation; see the story that anyone's life could tell; potential in people to do things they didn't think they could; how to reach beyond our existing goals; how to dream big and set about making that happen. He showed us the nuts and bolts of 'how' and I'm sure that's true for the fly fishers just as much as the budding writers. He believed so much in us and what we could achieve, that we had no choice but to believe it too."

Miramichi Salmon Association Inc.
www.miramichisalmon.ca

Doug MacDonald, Chairman
(506) 853-6235

J.W. Bud Bird, Chairman Emeritus
(506) 462-6666

Mark Hambrook, President
(506) 622-1781

Manley Price, Vice-Chairman
(506) 369-1890

J. Louis Newell, Vice-Chairman
(617) 426-1196

Staff:

Mark Hambrook, President
Jenny Reid, Biologist
Nola Chiasson, Office Administrator
Tyler Storey, Field Technician

Miramichi Salmon Association
485, Route 420
South Esk, NB
E1V 4L9
Phone: (506)622-4000
Fax: (506)622-6111
E-mail: miramichisalmon@nb.aibn.com

Jo-Anne E. Linton
Fund Raising Coordinator,
Salmonletter Editor
Miramichi Salmon Association
125 Whiting Road, Suite 200
Fredericton, NB E3B 5Y5
Phone: (506) 457-2220
Fax: (506) 457-1114
E-mail: jlmsa@nbnet.nb.ca

U.S. Office:
Miramichi Salmon Association (U.S.), Inc.
c/o Seaward Management Corporation
265 Franklin Street, 20th Floor
Boston, MA 02110
Phone: (617) 426-1196

Production by
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Fredericton, NB



Miramichi Salmon Association

MSA CONSERVATION SALMON LETTER



Volume 15 Issue 2

Celebrating 57 years on the Miramichi River

April 2010

A Look at DFO Annual Assessment for Salmon Returns to the Miramichi by Mark Hambrook, President

Jenny Reid and I attended a Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) workshop to review the way that DFO arrives at estimating the annual returns of Atlantic salmon to the Miramichi River. The information below has been summarized from its draft assessment document for 2009.

Annual assessments of the Atlantic salmon stock of the Miramichi River have been prepared by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) since 1982. The status of the resource was assessed on the basis of whether the conservation requirement of 2.4 eggs/m² of available habitat (54.6 million m²) was attained or exceeded. Since 2001, estimates of returns of salmon have been provided to user groups and managers but the data, methods, and results have not been peer reviewed or published.

In the context of the Miramichi, estimates of returns to each branch are desired. It is not possible to obtain absolute counts of salmon in the Miramichi due to its physical size. As a result, the use of partial capture techniques to sample the runs, necessitates the use of mark and recapture models to estimate run sizes.

In 2008, the assessment was provided to the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee but the estimates from the model used by DFO Science did not conform to the perceptions of the abundance of grilse that year. In response to low counts of grilse at numerous monitoring facilities in 2009 and the discrepancies in perceptions from previous years, DFO Fisheries and Aquaculture Management requested that the assessment model and the recent year assessment be peer reviewed. DFO Management is also asking whether the present management measures are sufficient to meet the objective of attaining the conservation requirements for the river. A special science response process was initiated to consider these questions.

The result of the review in the assessment model is sufficient to estimate the returns to the Miramichi, as long as sufficient input is provided to the model throughout the season. In years when there is a lack of

data, the model will factor in previous year's data to help provide an estimate.

Some of the concerns raised at the meeting include the following: The late May and early June run of salmon are not being captured at the index trap nets because of the high numbers of gaspereau in the nets. Once the gaspereau catches diminish, a higher percentage of salmon are captured in the traps. As a result, the total number of salmon returning early in the season is underestimated and this appears to be a bigger factor in the Northwest Miramichi than the Southwest Miramichi.

The 2008 sampling year remains a problem due to frequent washouts at the index trap nets and a very large washout at the Southwest Miramichi headwater barriers on Sept 29, 2008. An early removal of the barrier in the Southwest Miramichi in 2009 likely also underestimated the abundance of salmon at that site. The model cannot reconcile these biases. As a result, returns are underestimated when the estimates are based exclusively on catches using estimated proportions of the runs at trap nets and barriers from previous years.

Some years there have been too few salmon and grilse tagged or recaptured to provide a reliable estimate. Efforts to tag additional fish at the Eel Ground marking trap and examine more fish at the Red Bank recovery trap is essential for a more reliable estimate.

Returns of large salmon to the Miramichi in 2009 were estimated to be 22,000 fish, equivalent to the estimated abundance in 2001 and 50% higher than in 2008. The grilse returns in 2009 were estimated at 12,400 fish, 60% below 2008 and the lowest number since the 1998-2009 time period.

Estimated returns of large salmon in 2009 remained low (3,000 fish) in the Northwest Miramichi but were high in the Southwest Miramichi (18,700 fish). Grilse return estimates in 2009 were 3,000 fish in the Northwest and 9,300 fish in the Southwest, the lowest of the time series in both branches. The abundance in the

continued on page 2

DFO ANNUAL ASSESSMENT continued from page 1

Northwest Miramichi may be underestimated because some of the run may be missed by the assessment traps; as discussed above, catch ability may be lower in the early part of the season. The run timing to the Northwest Miramichi is earlier than the Southwest Miramichi and the issue of missing some of the early run is considered to be of the same magnitude in the latter branch.

The proportions of the total annual catches of grilse and large salmon at the index trap nets in the Northwest Miramichi and Southwest Miramichi, which occurred before August 1, were exceptionally high in 2008 and 2009. During 1998 to 2006, only 30% to 40% of the large salmon catches at the SW Millerton trapnet

occurred before August 1, but this increased steadily to 86% in 2009. The increase in the early-run proportion was also noted for the grilse catch, passing from 30% to 55% during 1998 to 2006 to almost 80% in 2009.

It is anticipated that there will be a low return of large salmon in 2010 due to the exceptionally low return of grilse in 2009. Since 1998, the ratio of 2SW returns to grilse returns the previous year has averaged 0.38 (one 2SW for every 2.6 small salmon). Including repeat spawners, on average 0.61 large salmon have returned for every grilse the previous year. The most likely scenario in 2010 is for a low large salmon return, in the order of 5,000 to 10,000 large salmon, or roughly 23% to 43% of the conservation requirement for the Miramichi overall.

Estimates of returns of large salmon and grilse to the Miramichi River, to the Southwest Miramichi and to the Northwest Miramichi based on the hierarchical model for 1998 to 2009.

Year	Miramichi River		Southwest Miramichi		Northwest Miramichi	
	Large Salmon	Grilse	Large Salmon	Grilse	Large Salmon	Grilse
1998	16,570	22,680	12,770	14,520	3,570	7,987
1999	15,980	21,730	11,520	12,950	4,386	8,731
2000	16,780	31,890	12,130	20,280	4,579	11,550
2001	21,830	27,290	13,890	18,800	7,809	8,417
2002	11,680	41,880	9,673	25,930	1,937	15,740
2003	19,180	28,160	16,350	21,670	2,786	6,351
2004	20,070	44,280	16,450	31,600	3,522	12,690
2005	18,410	29,220	14,360	19,580	3,848	9,440
2006	19,340	30,900	16,550	25,560	2,665	5,360
2007	17,320	24,820	13,880	18,830	3,384	5,915
2008	14,250	31,580	11,950	23,490	2,178	7,867
2009	21,860	12,370	18,660	9,298	3,049	2,975

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 57th AGM of the Miramichi Salmon Association will be held Saturday, May 1st at the Central NB Woodmen's Museum at 3:30 p.m. All MSA members are welcome and encouraged to attend.

14th ANNUAL MIRAMICHI ICE BREAKER

As always, this event will be a welcome highlight of spring fishing life along the river. Commencing at 4:30, immediately after the Annual General Meeting (May 1st), a reception and Silent Auction will be followed by Dinner at 6:00 PM and an exciting Live Auction. Entertainment provided by Pat Kelly. Tickets \$50

ANNUAL "FREEMAN DUNNETT" MONCTON CONSERVATION DINNER

Mark your calendars to be with us on Thursday, May 20th at the Crown Plaza, Downtown Moncton. Check the MSA website soon to view auction list and get your group together for some competitive bidding on great fishing trips and other auction items!

Schedule of Upcoming Events

Question and Answer Period

As MSA members celebrate the opening of another season on the Miramichi, some questions may come to mind as they anxiously await their first trip to the River after the long winter. In anticipation of a couple of those questions, we put them before MSA President Mark Hambrook for reply.

1. Question: It is understood that MSA supports the practice of total hook-and-release fishing with barbless hooks. How do you expect to get this message across and encourage anglers to adopt this?

Reply: *The MSA does support the practice of hook-and-release fishing with barbless hooks as a sustainable way of enjoying the sport of salmon angling; but at an MSA Board meeting a few years ago, it was decided not to push for mandatory hook-and-release of grilse. The argument at the time was that 85% of grilse are males and since most years we see more males than females in the river, the killing of an occasional grilse is not a serious problem. However, if every angler strived to fill their tags and kill 8 grilse each season, I'm sure more restrictions would be placed on the number of tags available. There are only so many grilse that can be harvested before conservation is threatened. Releasing grilse is a way to enjoy the sport without killing the quarry. Of course, when grilse numbers are low - such as the case in 2009 - then all grilse should be released.*

Anglers who use barbless hooks find that they land just as many fish as they do with barbed ones, often leading them to wonder why anyone would ever want to use the latter type. Ever get a fly caught in your clothing - or even worse, in your skin? With a barbless hook, the fly will come right out, but with a barbed hook you may ruin a treasured piece of clothing or require a trip to the hospital to get the hook removed from your skin. Removing a barbed hook from a salmon usually requires a bit of effort, sometimes even the need to use pliers or forceps, whereas a barbless hook easily slides out. Being able to release fish quickly and not having to remove them from the water helps to ensure its survival. Regulations are now in place that enforces the use of barbless hooks in the spring salmon fishery from April 15 to May 15 on all Crown Reserve Live Release waters, as well as the estuary of the Miramichi River from the Centennial Bridge in Chatham upstream to the commencement of Scheduled Fly

Fishing waters. As people become used to fishing with barbless hooks and experience the ability to quickly release salmon parr and adults, the practice will catch on and anglers will be thankful that a favorite fleece or hat wasn't ruined from forcing a barbed hook out of the material. Our health care system will also benefit too! I recall many years ago having to go to the old Miramichi Hospital to get a hook removed from my hand, and the doctor asking me if he could keep it to add to his ever growing collection of hooks that he had removed from other anglers!

I do feel that once anglers accept the use of barbless hooks, this practice will eventually become a mandatory regulation. To promote live release, the MSA is giving support to the ASF program of Special Recognition to camps that decide to go totally hook-and-release and we are working with government to ensure that the allocation of tags is fair and reasonable.

2. Question: Due to the mild winter and probability of early ice out, there has been some concern among spring fishermen that the black salmon season will be affected? What is your prediction?

Reply: *Many seasoned anglers that I have talked to indicate that an early ice-out means a quick end to the spring salmon season. My thoughts on the matter are not fully based on experience, but in any event, here is my two-cents' worth. When the ice goes out, salmon will slowly move downstream feeding as they migrate. Once they encounter the huge biomass of smelts migrating upstream to spawn, they stop and feed intently on this food source. As the smelts move further upstream or into small brooks to spawn and the water begins to warm above 10^o C, the kelts move quickly through the estuary and out into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, usually the second week of May.*

With the ice out early this year, the kelts should start moving downstream earlier but once they encounter the smelts and if the temperature stays cool, they may stay in the river until the normal time to migrate into the ocean. This means that spring salmon angling in the Doaktown/Boiestown area may end earlier this year, but Quarryville and Red Bank areas may have a normal spring angling season, as long as the water doesn't heat up too quickly.

Welcome to *First Cast MSA*

MSA is pleased to introduce *First Cast MSA*, an initiative designed for members to actively participate as Mentors to new anglers (Apprentices) to the sport of fly fishing for Atlantic Salmon on the Miramichi River. Modeled after the highly successful First Cast Program developed by Trout Unlimited, it provides an opportunity for current MSA members to help draw new anglers of all ages to our ranks, who can enroll in the full session or can conveniently complete the final day of a variety of activities being sanctioned by MSA this summer. Participation in *First Cast MSA* allows new Apprentices to be comfortably initiated in the company of his or her Mentor.

First Cast MSA events are in the planning stages for this summer. As well, a condensed one-day version is being offered on two Fridays in July (the 2nd and 30th) as part of the Atlantic Salmon Museum's Youth Camp for ages 10-16; and at its Ladies Fishing Retreat from June 18th to 21st; at the Miramichi Classic July 12th to 14th; and at the Adult-Youth Camp at Black Rapids Lodge August 22nd to 25th.

A special outreach to the Big Brother chapters in the cities of Miramichi, Fredericton, and Moncton is being developed to offer underprivileged youth, in the company of their current mentors, the opportunity to participate in this *First Cast MSA* program on Saturday, July 3 and Saturday, July 31 (with the opportunity to fish the day after on both occasions).

(Sincere appreciation is extended to MSA Directors Paul Valeri, Bob Kenny, Kenny Kyle, and Andrew Clark for developing this program, and to the growing number of members who have volunteered to help out at the events.)

First Cast MSA is a three-part program:

- One day of instruction (ideal for Mentors to attend with Apprentice) at one of the sanctioned venues. Sessions will include "Conservation and River Etiquette", "Fly Casting Instruction" and "Introduction of MSA" by member volunteers.
- One day of fishing on the Miramichi for the Apprentice to enjoy the company and support of his/her Mentor. It is expected that all Mentors will make special effort with their Apprentice to demonstrate the simple pleasure of spending time on the River, absorbing the beauty and enforcing why it is so important to protect the Atlantic Salmon species.
- Concluding with Apprentice and Mentor each writing a simple letter telling of their experience through the program with particular emphasis on what they learned while on the River in terms of appreciation of the environment, points of interest in nature and their own expectations about returning to the River. Apprentices are given their first year of membership into MSA, and encouraged to continue coming to the river and maintaining their membership, wearing their lapel pins proudly well into the future.

As the planning stages of this program are ongoing, further details will be forthcoming in future SalmonLetter publications. In the meantime, please contact Nola at the MSA office at 506-622-4000 should you wish to enroll in any of the sessions, or obtain further information. Thank you for your interest.

Eradication of smallmouth bass from Miramichi Lake 2010 - 2012

by Jenny Reid, MSA Biologist

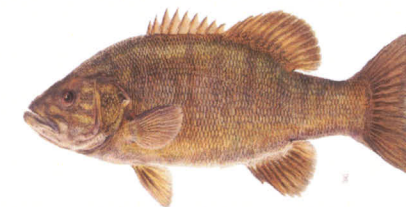
The Miramichi River is one of the few remaining self-sustaining salmon rivers left in North America and we must do everything possible to protect it from an invasive species such as smallmouth bass. Smallmouth bass are not native to New Brunswick and were illegally introduced into Miramichi Lake at least 5 years ago. Smallmouth bass compete with juvenile salmon for food and prey on parr and smolts. Smallmouth bass have the ability to seriously alter the food web structure and reduce the amount of forage fish for other species, especially brook trout. In 2009, the MSA coordinated the field efforts on behalf of the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee to determine the distribution of smallmouth bass at Miramichi Lake and in Lake Brook. The results indicated that smallmouth bass appeared to be confined to Miramichi Lake and the upper 350m of Lake Brook. The fact that they had not distributed themselves farther down Lake Brook to the SW Miramichi means that there is still a possibility that they could be eradicated from the lake and brook.

The federal government is reluctant to use rotenone, a chemical that kills fish, to eradicate the bass, due to a lack of legislation to authorize the use and because it would kill all the fish species in the lake. Therefore a three year intensive plan (2010-2012), was developed to

attempt to eradicate smallmouth bass by mechanical removal from the lake. Smallmouth bass will be prevented from exiting the lake by a fine-meshed net over a steel barrier fence and Lake Brook will be electrofished weekly below the fence to remove any bass that may have escaped and to ensure that the fence is acting as a containment barrier. From 2010-2012 the plan involves the intensive use of a boat electrofisher on the lake, back pack electrofisher on the brook, fyke nets and gill nets to attempt to manually remove all smallmouth bass from the lake, which will reduce the impact on the other fish species in the lake. The plan is to primarily target adult smallmouth bass while they are spawning and guarding nests to remove as many bass as possible to prevent successful spawning. The use of a multiyear plan will allow existing juveniles to attain sizes which can be removed during the spawning/guarding process. This plan will be assessed each year to determine if it will be effective. During that time, legislation changes will be explored to authorize the use of rotenone such that if the removal plan does not work, a back up plan would be in place.

Please Note: A public information session on this very topic will be held on Friday, April 30th at 2:00 PM in the Woodmen's Museum, Boiestown. All are welcome.

Bass on the Miramichi: Which are good, which are bad?



Invasive smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomeiu*)



Native striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*)

Atlantic salmon, striped bass spawn in freshwater, but only in the upper tidal portion of the river and spend most of their life in salt water. The major spawning area for the Gulf of St. Lawrence population is in the Northwest Miramichi River. Striped bass produce between 60,000 to three million eggs per female. Eggs and milt are expelled into the water column when they spawn and adults don't provide any care for the eggs or fry.

Smallmouth bass are native to the Great Lakes region in North America and are not native to New Brunswick. Smallmouth bass achieve smaller sizes than striped bass and typically do not exceed 50 cm, especially in northern areas. Unlike striped bass, smallmouth bass spend their entire lives in freshwater, typically in lakes and slow moving river habitats with lots of boulders and logs. While striped bass can produce millions of eggs per female, smallmouth bass typically only produce 2000 to 21,000 eggs per female. Male smallmouth bass build a nest in the substrate, mates with a female and then he guards the eggs and fry up to four weeks.

These two different species of bass have very different life history characteristics and the bottom line is that striped bass belong in the Miramichi and smallmouth bass do not.



A Request for Donations of Fishing Equipment

Big Brothers Big Sisters

With the new *First Cast MSA* program this season, we are in dire need of fishing gear (rods, reels, lines, flies, etc.), and will gladly accept all donations to help provide equipment for the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization and other children in need. Your assistance in this regard would allow youngsters, many of whom would not otherwise have this opportunity to experience the world of salmon fishing on the Miramichi River. As you can appreciate, the donation of fishing gear is necessary to lend to participants. Please either drop items off at the MSA offices (or call and we will arrange to pick up); drop items off at the Woodmen's Museum in Boiestown (or bring them to the Ice Breaker on May 1st). Your cooperation would be sincerely appreciated. Thank you.

I keep getting the question, what's the big deal with bass in Miramichi Lake, don't we have bass in the Miramichi River already? The truth is that we do have bass on the Miramichi - *striped* bass. Striped bass are native to the Miramichi and have co-existed with Atlantic salmon for centuries, despite being predators of salmon smolts. They can attain sizes of 200 cm, but on the Miramichi typically only attain sizes of 80 cm. Similar to

The following tribute was delivered by J.W. Bud Bird, MSA's Chairman Emeritus on the occasion of MSA's 56th Annual Dinner in Boston on February 6th this year, 2010.

A Tribute to Mark Hambrook President of the Miramichi Salmon Association

There are always special thresholds in the life of any organization when creative steps are taken by daring and dedicated people to bring meaning and substance to its purposes, and to achieve real progress towards its goals.

There was a first such moment when the Miramichi Salmon Association was founded 57 years ago by a group of committed conservationists from both New Brunswick and New England. Four years later in 1961, another profound period commenced when the late Jack T.H. Fenety became MSA's volunteer president, and then made Atlantic salmon conservation his own life's work for the next 35 years.



l. to r. MSA Chairman Emeritus Bud Bird, Mark Hambrook and
Doug MacDonald, MSA Chairman

More recently in the year 2000, which unbelievably is now 10 years ago, another major milestone was reached in the living history of the Miramichi Salmon Association when our guest of honour tonight, Mark Hambrook, committed his own career to the salmon conservation mission of the Miramichi, and in so doing also committed the lives of his wife Barbara and their three sons Mark, Robert and Ian, all of whom are with us this evening. As well, Mark's mother, sister, nephew and cousin are in our audience welcome all!

Mark came to us not just as a well qualified professional salmon biologist; not only as the first full time manager the MSA ever had; not only as a dedicated son of the Miramichi who had deliberately decided to dedicate his life to this river; but also, believe it or not, as a financial partner and investor with the MSA in the acquisition of the hatchery facilities from DFO at South Esk, which have now developed to become the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre. It is a place that Mark proudly calls home, for both his life at work and for the life of his family.

Can you imagine a more complete commitment than that which Mark Hambrook brought to the MSA? An established reputation and a secure career as a senior biologist with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans; a full life's knowledge of the Miramichi River and a lifelong dedication to its Atlantic salmon resource; a successful history of managing the Miramichi hatchery, and a compelling desire to see it preserved and renewed as a symbol of conservation throughout the salmon world; a willingness to accept the relatively modest and insecure financial future offered by a volunteer and charitable non-governmental organization (NGO); and best of all, the willingness to invest his own real money to help drive the MSA's decision to buy that hatchery. What a contribution to our cause!

There is simply no doubt that the arrival of Mark Hambrook and the acquisition of the Miramichi hatchery marked the beginnings of a new and significant era in the life and the work of the Miramichi Salmon Association. With his partnership, experience, professional competence and management support, the MSA stepped beyond its traditional role of just advocacy for salmon conservation, and became immersed in the practice of conservation both in the hatchery and on the river. We were suddenly able to do more than merely

preach and prevail upon our governments to save the salmon; we were able to demonstrate in very realistic ways how the MSA and its members could take action to monitor and assess the state of salmon stocks, to supply and augment those stocks where required, to conduct habitat improvement programs, to engage First Nations as working allies, and to provide knowledgeable opinion and advice to the whole conservation community.

At that same time, we were able to embark upon a long term plan and concept to sustain both the financial and professional stability of the MSA - a plan that has only now been fully realized over the past few years, with Atlantic salmon conservation being supported by the production and sale of much needed brook trout stocks for the lakes and streams of New Brunswick. It has become a full circle process, where the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre has remained the symbol and the reality for salvation of the salmon, but also where the capabilities exist to raise and sell trout supplies in abundance, as one of the most important ways by which the MSA is able to remain financially secure.

For those of us who were MSA Directors at the time, and many are here tonight, the prelude to Mark's engagement with us were indeed days of daring decisions. The budget considerations were obviously daunting, advancing our financial commitments three-fold or more - but there was an underlying mood of positive determination that the time for a quantum leap forward in Miramichi salmon conservation had come, so there was a constructive (though cautious) consensus to proceed. It is worth repeating that Mark Hambrook's own offer to be an investment partner, literally in his own employment, was a decisive factor in the directions that were eventually taken.

Looking back over these past 10 years, Mark's performance has not only been great for conservation, but he has vindicated the judgment of all Directors, and has likely salvaged the reputations and relationships among some of us. It has certainly turned out to be an exciting and gratifying journey for everyone involved.

I know we all take great pride in the leadership that Mark Hambrook brings to the MSA. He adds professional substance to our volunteer efforts, and helps to make them more practical and meaningful on the river. With his positive and friendly attitude, he engages and communicates with all the players in the salmon world on a knowledgeable and constructive basis, and moves the conservation process forward in innovative and lasting ways. His loyalty and dedication to the Atlantic salmon, to the Miramichi River, and to this Miramichi Salmon Association inspires trust and confidence that the cause of conservation will be sustained, and that these great fish will continue to run in our wonderful river for decades, and hopefully for centuries, to come.

To Mark, and also to Barbara and their three sons, I wish to say thank you for joining us in the Miramichi Salmon Association 10 years ago, and for making your lives such a vital element of this organization and its purpose. We want you to know that you have our deep appreciation for the significant contribution you have made to our mission during that time, and you have our strong support for the challenging conservation goals that lie before us in the years to come.

J.W. Bud Bird