



Northwest Miramichi River: Catch and Release Only

As of June 30th, 2010, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans imposed a catch-and-release only policy this summer on the Northwest Miramichi River.

This federal action was in response to grave concerns from several conservation groups about declining large salmon stocks in the Northwest Miramichi River. DFO predicted that the number of large salmon would be extremely low this season, based on the low grilse numbers from 2009, but DFO does not have a model to predict the grilse run. The good news is that the salmon numbers have been good so far this season and the grilse run has been fantastic, but salmon enter the NW Miramichi all season and it is the total count at the end of the year that is important for conservation. As a matter of fact, for the past two years, the fall run of salmon has not appeared, so the fish that came in early were the bulk of fish for the whole season.

The MSA is a salmon conservation organization and when DFO states that we are only to achieve 20% of the spawning requirements on the NW Miramichi, this organization is duty-bound to try to save as many salmon as possible. DFO restricted the NW Miramichi to hook-

and-release after urging by the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the NB Salmon Council, the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee and MSA. MSA is not opposed to the harvest of grilse by anglers, but when the number of large salmon in the river is predicted to be very low, then the female grilse eggs become very important to meeting the conservation target and the grilse must be set free.

A barrage of media coverage had surfaced prior to DFO's decision for a number of weeks on this very topic, including an editorial that appeared in New Brunswick's Telegraph Journal newspaper on June 5 "Give salmon a break until stocks recover". In that editorial, it was suggested to "close all fisheries on this branch of the river system until stocks recover". Mark Hambrook, in his capacity as President of New Brunswick Salmon Council, responded to that article (which appeared in the same leading newspaper on June 25) as follows:

Closure not needed to save Miramichi

"Closure of the Northwest Miramichi system is a drastic and unnecessary measure. First, some basic Atlantic salmon biology that has been simplified for the purpose of clarity. A salmon smolt year class travels from the river to the ocean to feed, grow and mature. The adults then return to the river to spawn. Adult Atlantic salmon come in two basic sizes, less than 63 cm (25 inches) long (grilse) that are mostly males, and greater than 63 cm (25 inches) long (salmon) that are mostly females. Grilse spend one winter at sea and salmon spend two winters at sea. The salmon that you see in the river in one year are from the same smolt year class as the grilse that you saw the year before. So, if there are low numbers of grilse in one year, it can be assumed that survival at sea was poor for that smolt year class, and low numbers of salmon can be expected the next year.

What is important is the number of eggs being deposited in the gravel; as these come primarily from large salmon, it is this size class that needs to be better conserved. The low number of returning grilse last year

*in the Northwest Miramichi is an indication that the returns of large, mainly female salmon in 2010 will **probably** not come close to meeting spawning requirements to ensure sustainability of the stocks. Therefore, priority should be placed on ensuring that large salmon (females) returning this year are protected. To this end, the NB Salmon Council has recommended that angling on the Northwest system be entirely catch and release for salmon and grilse when in past years anglers have been allowed to retain grilse. The Council also recommended that anglers be required to use barbless or pinched barb hooks. The use of barbless hooks makes it easy for anglers to quickly release salmon and grilse which virtually ensures the survival of the released fish. Recent research conducted by DFO indicates that hook and release for Atlantic salmon causes little mortality in cool water (<20°C). The accepted survival of caught and released salmon by DFO is 97% (Reference: DFO, 2010) and barbless hooks will make the survival of released fish even better. Another important management measure would be for*

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the Native fishery to target only grilse. As gill nets do not differentiate between salmon and grilse, this would be possible only if gill nets are abandoned and the fishery is conducted with trap nets from which the large salmon could be released alive. Some of the Native fishing effort could be shifted from the Northwest Miramichi system to the Main Southwest Miramichi where the salmon stock is strong enough to sustain a harvest of grilse.

Closing the river would be a financial and social disaster for the Miramichi area where almost every business is suffering. Anglers generate significant revenues to the local economy and it is their passion for the sport that make them the eyes and ears on the river to report harmful or illegal activity. If they are not present then the resource will be left unprotected. Besides, we

can gain virtually all of the desired conservation benefits without closing the Northwest Miramichi River system. Anglers can still enjoy their sport through a live-release fishery, and the First Nation community can continue to have first priority to the resource by harvesting grilse wisely, and by releasing large female salmon. It is easy to say "close the river", but this incurs a lot of pain to the users of the resource in exchange for little or no gain in conservation benefits to the Atlantic salmon. Moving to a well managed and responsible recreational and FN fisheries in 2010 with the proposed changes will be the biggest step we can all take toward protecting these precious fish in the NW Miramichi."

Reference: DFO. 2010. Assessment of Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi River (NB), 1998 to 2009. DFO Can. Sci. Advis. Sec. Sci. Resp. 2010/005. 20 p.

Kelt Tracking Updates for 2009 and 2010

By Jenny Reid

The 2010 kelt tracking program is off to a great start! We were very concerned with ice-out occurring at the end of March and figured all of the kelts would be exiting the river earlier than normal. The colder weather mid-April kept the river from warming up too fast. During the last week of April, we were able to tag 21 kelts from the Southwest Miramichi; and 29 from the Northwest Miramichi. The kelts moved through the river mouth between May 1st - 14th, with most of them leaving approximately a week earlier than in 2009. All 50 of the kelts that were tagged survived and made it to the river mouth and estuary! Hopefully, we will see some of the kelts make it through the Strait of Belle Isle or Cabot Strait, or come back in 2010 as consecutive spawners (spawn each year).

Looking back at the year 2009, four kelts returned to spawn. Three of the four kelts successfully over-wintered and went back out to the ocean. We are looking forward to hopefully seeing these and some other kelts that were tagged in 2009 back again this year.



Sea-run Brook Trout Tagging Experiment

By Jenny Reid

All anglers are familiar with those light blue plastic Carlin tags that are put on adult salmon by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. However, if you catch a sea-run brook trout, you may notice a dark blue plastic Carlin tag attached to the front of the dorsal fin. In 2008, MSA tagged 900 of 6-7" sea-run trout with these Carlin tags; in 2009, we tagged 200 adult sea-run trout that had not yet spawned.

We are currently doing a study to look at the survival and movements of stocked sea-run trout. We have stocked some of the sea-run trout raised at the hatchery into the headwaters near Juniper, as well as some lower down in the river near the head of tide. Since sea-run trout spend time both in freshwater and in the estuary, we are not sure when or where they have the best growth or survival. We have stocked tagged fish for two years with these Carlin tags, however most stocked sea-run trout raised at the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre are marked by removing the adipose fin or have no mark at all.

Of the juvenile fish tagged in 2008, one tag has been returned. Of the adults tagged in 2009, four have been returned. In the spring of 2010, three of the fish tagged in the previous year were captured in the Blackville area and one at Millerton. If you do happen to catch a trout, please look to see if it has an adipose clip or has a Carlin tag attached in front of its dorsal fin. If you would send the tag to the MSA office, we will then send you the date, location and size of the fish when it was released. This important information will also be added to our database.

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Chairman's Report



Doug MacDonald

to take management actions to optimize the populations of juvenile Salmon stocks in the Miramichi River.

This issue of the Salmonletter contains the written Annual Report of 2009, which was presented at the Annual General Meeting in Boiestown on May 1st, 2010. You will see from the following reports that MSA had another extremely busy year carrying on the numerous important projects to fulfill the MSA mission:

The 2009 production statistics demonstrated the high number of salmon returns and very few grilse. I was extremely pleased to see such a high angler presence on the river in 2009 and look forward to seeing similar activity in 2010.

As I reflect on this past year and all that the MSA has had to address, one of the biggest threats to the Atlantic salmon is that of the illegal introduction of smallmouth bass to Miramichi Lake. The presence of this species in the lake was discovered in the fall of 2008 and temporary containment measures were implemented late that year and into 2009, while an assessment of its population size and distribution was conducted. The results of the 2009 assessment show that the smallmouth bass have become firmly established in Miramichi Lake and the threat is they will migrate downstream to the Southwest Miramichi. There is no species that can compete with or evade predation of smallmouth bass; their preferred diet is small bodied fish and in the Miramichi system the most abundant small bodied fish

include juvenile Atlantic salmon and brook trout. We will be anxiously awaiting word from DFO to learn how this issue will be handled.

We continue to work with other conservation groups such as the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF), Miramichi Watershed Management Committee (MWMC), Northumberland Salmon Protection Association (NSPA) and New Brunswick Salmon Council (NBSC). We are pleased to note that our own Chairman Emeritus, Bud Bird, is the Canadian delegate for NASCO (North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization), that among other projects, sponsors the concept emerged among North Atlantic salmon-producing countries for concentrated and collaborative research about the mysteries of the salmon at sea (SALSEA). We cannot discount the serious trend of declining salmon stocks returning from the ocean to North American rivers. The entire conservation movement on both sides of the Atlantic must intensify its efforts to discover the causes and to find the solutions.

I look back on 2009 with great pride. We had an extremely active year, and I thank the MSA Board of Directors for their continued enthusiastic participation and advice. I equally thank all MSA members, the various dinner chairs and committees, donors and industry partners, and last but certainly not least, President Mark Hambrook and staff Jenny Reid, Jo-Anne Linton and Nola Chiasson. Your dedicated support and assistance during this past year is greatly appreciated.

President's Report



Mark Hambrook

years. The Conservation Corps has been a successful program with the hiring of eight people from the local First Nations.

One of the conservation challenges this year was the invasion of smallmouth bass in Miramichi Lake, requiring many hours of Jenny's and my time in providing the assessment on the lake and dealing with the options to combat the invasion, quite often resulting in feelings of immense frustration with respect to lack of action. The actions in 2009 amounted to a containment and assessment exercise and not an eradication program. An eradication plan was submitted by DFO in the fall of 2009 and we

The 2009 season was a good year for field activities, but a challenging year for salmon conservation. The SW Miramichi Smolt Study was again successful in obtaining an accurate estimate of smolts migrating from the SW Miramichi that saw numbers come back to the level they should be. MSA staff assisted DFO with adult seining to obtain mark and recapture information that should result in a better stock assessment than in past

have some reservations on the effectiveness of the plan, but at least there is a plan to eradicate this species from the lake.

The number of large salmon that were present in the SW Miramichi in 2009 was encouraging, but the low numbers of grilse is a concern for the future.

Cooke Aquaculture of Black's Harbour, NB has offered to provide technical services to the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre in light of the disease issues at the hatchery in 2009. Some significant improvements have been made at the hatchery with the donation of equipment, including 20 oxygen concentrators through the Atlantic Salmon Museum.

We have had occasion to meet with the new Regional Director for DFO, Mr. Serge Theriault, and I am quite pleased with the response and look forward to the development of a strong relationship with him and his department.

In summary, MSA enjoyed a good year and will continue to participate in research activities in 2010 to implement strategies to meet our goal in increasing salmon numbers, all within the direction of an active Board of 57 Directors, and relying on a strong membership.

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Membership Report

The membership committee, co-chaired by MSA Directors Dan Cain in Canada and Stephen Hibbard in the United States, are constantly working to build its membership. There is a great strength in numbers, and every member can help. MSA membership really does make a difference. One of the most important things members can do is to constantly remind governments and the general public that the Atlantic salmon and the Miramichi River are symbols of a healthy environment. Taking good care of these resources is fundamental to sustaining our environmental heritage. We also rely on our existing members to recruit new ones so we ask again to please speak with your friends, neighbours, fishing companions. We hope that one day everyone who ever

fishes on the Miramichi River will be a member of the Miramichi Salmon Association!

At year-end 2009, MSA had 933 active members in a variety of membership categories. There has been a good response to the Life Member Program with the addition of eight new Life Members and nine Pledge Life Members for a total of 323 in this category.

The Miramichi River is one of the best salmon rivers in North America. Your membership dues are crucial to the MSA operations - please help us continue our programs so we can see the River grow for our future generations to enjoy. Thank you for your cooperation.

Financial Report

Finance Committee chairman Carl Ash, FCA reports that the Miramichi Salmon Association, from an organizational viewpoint, is a complicated entity, made so by the participation of members raising funds in two tax jurisdictions. Additionally, the lease arrangements with the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee for the operation of the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre adds another layer of complexity. Because of these factors, the Miramichi Salmon Association is made up of three legal entities: Miramichi Salmon Association, Inc, a Canadian registered charity; Miramichi Salmon

Association (U.S.) Inc., a US registered charity; and Miramichi Fisheries Management Ltd., a NB limited company which operates the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre, formerly DFO's South Esk fish hatchery. Although the three legal entities that make up the MSA have individual financial statements, approved by the Board of Directors, a consolidated statement better demonstrates the size, scope and results of operations. The following is the consolidated statement of operations for the Miramichi Salmon Association for the year ended December 31, 2009.

**MIRAMICHI
SALMON
ASSOCIATION, INC.
CONSOLIDATED
STATEMENT
OF OPERATIONS
FOR THE
YEAR ENDED
DECEMBER 31, 2009**

	2009	2008
Revenue		
Fundraising Dinners	184,397	191,140
Transfers from MSA (U.S.) Inc.	65,252	104,943
Membership and Donations	43,422	69,140
Government Grants	128,921	87,942
Fish Sales	232,242	269,739
Investment Income	46	1,882
Rental Income	27,864	24,623
Miscellaneous Income	6,599	7,331
MWMC Joint Income	<u>21,355</u>	<u>-</u>
	710,098	756,740
Expenses		
Salaries and benefits	337,047	291,215
Office expenses	86,778	90,786
Publicity and newsletter	8,370	9,849
Travel	11,187	23,773
Fund raising expenses	4,789	8,098
Hatchery Operations	201,859	192,619
River projects	115,482	137,333
Jack Fenety Scholarship	<u>10,200</u>	<u>10,200</u>
	775,712	763,873
(Deficiency) Excess of Revenue over Expenses	(65,614)	(7,133)

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Report on Conservation Activities in 2009

There are three meetings of the Conservation Planning Committee (CPC) each year. The first meeting is in February in Boston, MA where CPC members discuss what field programs the MSA will pursue in the upcoming year, which are subject to the board's approval. The second meeting is a joint MSA/MWMC (Miramichi Watershed Management Committee) workshop at which presentations are made on the status of Atlantic salmon on the Miramichi or other research taking place on the Miramichi River. These presentations often give ideas for MSA programs that could be developed in the future. At the CPC meeting in Freeport, ME, we discuss the results and implications of the data collected over the course of the field season. The Conservation Planning Committee strives to implement science-based programs for the river and encourages research to provide the basis for the programs.

MSA had an extremely busy year in 2009 with field programs continuing to expand. For more information on any of these programs please visit the MSA website under programs. The highlights of those programs are summarized as follows:

Smolt Production on the Southwest Miramichi

The 2009 smolt season was difficult due to high water conditions in the spring. The smolt wheels and trap couldn't be fished the first week of May due to the high discharge in the river. Smolt production targets for the Miramichi River are 3.0 smolts per 100m². Smolt production on the Cains River in 2009 was 51,600 smolts, or 1.1 smolts per 100m². The smolt estimate for the Dungarvon for 2009 was 48,700, or 2.2 smolts per 100m². In 2009, smolt production on the Cains River was low and on the Dungarvon River was moderate. Smolt production on the Southwest Miramichi in 2009 was 1.1 million smolts (3.1 smolts per 100m²). Smolt production on the Southwest Miramichi overall seems to be good, as in most years the production targets are met. However in general the Cains River seems to produce low numbers of smolts per habitat unit and the Dungarvon produces moderate numbers of smolts per habitat unit. However the Southwest Miramichi as a whole appears to be maintaining a level around the desired smolt production of 3.0 smolts per 100m² over the past few years. This program is funded in part through the New Brunswick Wildlife Trust Fund, Canada Summer Jobs and DFO.



Photo Credit Nelson Cloud

Kelt Tracking

In 2009 we did the second year of the kelt tracking program, which was very successful in 2008. We were able to tag 50 kelts, 25 on the Southwest Miramichi and 25 on the Northwest Miramichi. Forty-six of the kelts made it through the river and inner Miramichi Bay, while four were lost in the river upstream of the river mouth. Nine of the fish that survived through the estuary made it to the Strait of Belle Isle and four other fish returned in 2009 as consecutive spawners (spawning each year). Three of those fish that returned to spawn successfully overwintered and three of them successfully exited the river mouth in the spring of 2010. We look forward to some of the fish tagged in 2009 returning to spawn again in 2010. This program is in cooperation with the Atlantic Salmon Federation and DFO.

Juvenile Electrofishing Surveys

The juvenile electrofishing survey looks at the abundance of wild salmon fry and parr in the river and compares yearly abundances to historical levels. Good fry numbers were seen in 2009. In some cases the high water in 2008 allowed salmon to access headwater areas that they may be unable to access in low water years. High fry numbers were found in most of the large tributaries above Boiestown, the Renous and Dungarvon Rivers, headwaters of the Northwest and Sevogle, however moderate to low fry numbers were found on the Cains River, Barnaby, Taxis and Bartholomew, Little Southwest and main stem areas of the Northwest Miramichi. We also electrofished an additional 60 headwater tributaries to assess whether or not they should be stocked with fry in 2010. This program is in cooperation with DFO and funding provided in part through the New Brunswick Wildlife Trust Fund.



Photo Credit Nelson Cloud

Adult Seining Program

The adult seining program attempts to improve the adult estimates for the Northwest and Southwest Miramichi, by increasing the numbers of marked (tagged) and unmarked fish for the adult assessment. The adult seining program captured a large number of salmon compared to grilse in 2009 however this was indicative of the proportions of salmon versus grilse in the river. We were able to get good numbers of tag recaptures for grilse and salmon on the Southwest Miramichi, however were not able to get enough recaptures on the Northwest Miramichi for confident separate branch estimates. This program is in cooperation with DFO.

Beaver Dam Removal

Most of the MSA's efforts for beaver dam removal were spent on the Southwest Miramichi. Tyler Storey, our field technician removed beaver dams from Porter Brook, Betts Mills Brook, Big Hole Brook and Doak Brook. The dam removal season was cut short by high discharges which would have allowed salmon to access areas above beaver dams.

Stocking and Satellite Rearing

Less fish were stocked in 2009 relative to other years. Eleven camps/organizations participated in the satellite rearing program in 2009 and added ~25,000 fall fingerlings to the juvenile salmon population. All of the juvenile salmon were clipped to identify them in the 2010 electrofishing survey. The Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre also stocked an additional 37,000 fall fingerlings into headwater tributaries all over the Miramichi River.

Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre

MSA continues to operate the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre to enhance salmon and brook trout. The MSCC has been raising brook trout for the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources for its lake stocking program. This program is shared with Charlo, another non-profit hatchery facility in northern New Brunswick. MSA, J.D. Irving Limited, Miramichi Headwaters Salmon Association and Northumberland Salmon Protection Association have also been working to stock sea-run brook trout in the Miramichi River.

Passing the "Torch" (or in this case, the "Fishing Rod")

New MSA Chairman Elected at Annual General Meeting

By Doug MacDonald

I am extremely pleased that Manley Price agreed to accept the nomination to become the next MSA Chairman at the annual meeting in May of this year. Manley has been a Director since 1996 and has proven to be a major force of active assistance and sound judgement in the affairs of MSA. His contributions have included chairing the Miramichi Ice Breaker to 14 years of great success; serving as a member of the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre negotiating committee; serving as President of the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee; and being appointed as MSA representative to the provincial Fish and Wildlife Council. Manley is truly a Miramichi salmon professional in his position with International Paper managing its Rocky Brook Camp. I am proud to express recognition and appreciation to Manley Price for his important work and contribution on our behalf. I will be pleased to continue to work with Manley and do anything I can to support him and the MSA Board.



Doug MacDonald, outgoing Chairman (l) congratulating Manley Price, incoming Chairman.

Honourable Gail Shea, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to Deliver Keynote Address at Conservation Dinner



The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, The Honourable Gail Shea, will deliver the keynote address at the annual Miramichi Conservation Dinner to be held at the Fredericton Inn on Wednesday, September 15, 2010.

The primary role in the conservation of Atlantic salmon in Canada is held by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. The Miramichi Salmon Association is therefore extremely pleased on this occasion to welcome the Honourable Gail Shea, and to recognize the critical responsibilities that she and her department (DFO) have for the preservation of all marine species, especially of course the wild salmon stocks. In order to sustain the high priority which this species deserves from our federal government, it is vital that MSA members and DFO representatives work in close collaboration in every possible way.

"The cause for Atlantic salmon conservation grows more critical every year", said Bud Bird, chairman emeritus of MSA, "and the problems of declining salmon stocks go well beyond the boundaries of the Miramichi watershed. Therefore, it is vitally important to conserving this great resource that the MSA join forces with the Minister and DFO in meeting the many challenges which wild salmon face both in the rivers and at sea. This is a conservation partnership that must not be allowed to fail."

Despite many decades of dedicated conservation activity throughout the Atlantic salmon world, including effective management of juvenile stocks in virtually all parts of the Miramichi watershed, the returns of spawning salmon remain relatively low and in decline. The large number of smolt leaving the river for the ocean each year are simply not returning in the abundance to be expected, and the mystery of the mortality at sea continues to be a research challenge for scientists from all salmon-producing nations. Canada continues to play a major role in this search for solutions to the salmon's recovery, and Minister Shea through DFO provides strong support to these efforts.

"At a time when we badly need national leadership to bring action to the serious decline of Atlantic salmon stocks, it is an inspiration to have Minister Shea join us to lead the conservation cause", said Mark Hambrook, president of both the MSA and the New Brunswick Salmon Council. "We are all fortunate to serve as stewards of one of the world's great rivers, and it is essential that we work together with DFO in preserving wild salmon runs in the Miramichi."

The fundamental purpose of Atlantic salmon conservation is to help ensure that the unique life cycle of this magnificent fish continues in perpetuity as a vital element of our environment. The reality of salmon returning to the Miramichi River is a telling signal of our stewardship performance on behalf of all of the natural resources with which we are blessed.

Annual Miramichi Salmon Classic Attracted Anglers to the Area

The Miramichi Salmon Association was pleased to host its fifth annual *"Miramichi Salmon Classic"* recently. This event kicked off with a dinner and auction at the Rodd Inn, Miramichi on Sunday evening for 125 people, including the 43 participants enrolled, guides and local members and guests. The anglers enjoyed three days of angling on the Miramichi River on a rotation basis, allowing them to fish different pools each time on different branches of the Miramichi.



Two Classic Fishermen, John Pretola (l) Russell, MA,
Tom Largy (r) Wayland, MA

This year's event took place at the peak of the heat wave but that didn't seem to keep everyone from enjoying themselves, even though the fish were not taking. In speaking with the anglers, they all seemed to be extremely happy with the event and it's always nice to be reminded that *"fishing is not all about the catching!"* They had a great time in any event just sharing in what this great river and its precious resource has to offer!

We were both pleased and proud to have many repeat participants back again. In fact, four of those participants have registered in all of the five years this "Classic" has taken place (shown here in photo). We also look forward to having new members next year. It's a great way to get out and fish many different pools, for the novice and skilled angler alike, and share each others stories and experiences at the wonderful meals provided as part of the package. A sincere thank you is extended to Debbie and Dale Norton at Upper Oxbow Adventures in Red Bank and Sharmon Buggie of Nine Pines in Blackville for the delicious noon dinners served. The event wound up with a final barbeque at the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre on Wednesday. Appreciation is also extended to all the volunteer guides - without you, we could not have properly hosted so many anglers.



Enrolled in all of the five Salmon Classics (l. to r.) Bill Westaway of Andover, MA; Paul Daigle of Saint John, NB; Mac Ray of Damariscotta, ME; and Chip Richards of Moultonborough, NH.

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