



New Brunswick Salmon Council (NBSC)

Report for the ASF Board of Directors Meeting November 10-12, 2009 – New York City

It is a pleasure to submit the report of the NBSC and to provide a brief description of some of the issues facing the wild New Brunswick Atlantic salmon and NBSC efforts to address them:

Salmon Restoration

- 1) **Downstream Salmon Smolt Passage – Tobique Narrows Dam** – Efforts continue by the NBSC and an affiliate (SJRBSRI – Saint John River Basin Salmon Recovery Inc.) to propose improvements to downstream passage of salmon smolts on the Tobique and Saint John Rivers in response to the significant kill that occurs every season at each dam site. The committee has seen significant and increasing involvement from Tobique – Mactaquac MP Mike Allen. Although the committee met with NB Power CEO and President David Hay and Vice Presidents Wayne Snowden and David Bishop in February, NB Power remains concerned that the solution to downstream passage could set a precedent for other dams, and other utilities like Hydro Quebec. They have since received a letter from DFO stating they are in contravention of Section 32 of the Fisheries Act, but are not convinced that the downstream passage proposal will be the final solution. NB Power commissioned a third party review to be done on the downstream project plan that was developed and reviewed by DFO – the SJRBSRI awaits the results of this study. DFO and NB Power met with SJRBSRI on Sept.30 (a first for both all organizations to meet together). The outcome of this meeting is an agreement between DFO and NB Power to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that commits to the establishment of fish passage for all native anadromous fish species in all directions at all hydroelectric dam sites on the St. John River system. DFO will be providing monthly updates to SJRBSRI on MOU progress starting immediately.

- 2) **Renewed Participation in IBOF Planning and Recovery Teams** – NBSC has continued to step up its involvement in this file. There was impressive representation by the NBSC, local affiliates and other local groups at the April Recovery Team meetings in Amherst. Our groups collectively voiced great concern over a lack of focus on the Petitcodiac River in DFO's Recovery Strategy in light of the planned opening of the causeway gates in 2010. All local stakeholders present suggested that the opportunity to begin restoration work on such a critical watershed in the IBOF region was too important to pass up. The NBSC sees the Petitcodiac as being critical to IBOF salmon recovery because of its extensive pristine spawning and rearing habitat. DFO quickly added the Petitcodiac to their agenda for the Planning Team. An informal partnership of 10 groups, including the NBSC, five area affiliates and other local organizations was announced to the media in May as the "Petitcodiac Fish Recovery Coalition" (PFRCC). Work began immediately on developing a restoration proposal for wild Atlantic salmon in the Petitcodiac that was presented to DFO's IBOF Planning Team. NBSC Director and fish passage expert, John Bagnall, has been a key player in the development of this proposal. While DFO has not committed to adding the Petitcodiac to its 5-year recovery plan, they have committed to establishing a working group/committee that will include DFO and members of the coalition and to provide support to the group's efforts to establish meaningful in-river monitoring, research and recovery programs.

Salmon Conservation

- 1) **Live Release Angling** – The NBSC has continued its promotion of live release angling throughout 2009. New Brunswick anglers are encouraged to purchase “no kill” licences and those who do are entered in a draw for a Grand Prize of a premiere angling opportunity at Larry’s Gulch on the Restigouche River. But the NBSC is concerned at numerous signs that the Live Release licenses are poorly promoted by DNR. License vendors (local stores, Service NB, etc) are often unaware of the Live Release license option, often do not have them on-hand in case they are requested resulting in what would be a shortage of these licenses being sold to resident anglers. Following the March AGM, an ad-hoc sub-committee comprised by Board members and affiliate reps was formed to take a closer look at the problems opportunities surrounding angling licenses, their pricing (which will all be increasing by 31% in 2010) and how to better promote the Live Release option. We have also met with the new Minister of Natural Resources, Wally Stiles and Fish and Wildlife Manager Mike Sullivan in efforts to increase support for live release angling. As well, we have requested the province institute a process to identify salmon waters as private or public to enhance resident angling opportunities.
- 2) **Gill Netting of Atlantic Salmon** – Gill netting by First Nations continued in 2009 in both the Restigouche and Miramichi watersheds. NBSC affiliates, particularly the Restigouche River Watershed Management Council (RRWMC), the Miramichi Salmon Association and the Northumberland Salmon Protection Association are working to develop better working relationships with First Nations, with the intent of promoting trap netting versus gillnetting to facilitate selective and controlled catches. There were many concerns raised by camps, outfitters and local anglers in the Restigouche this year that gill-nets were being set on the NB side of the river counter to the agreement that exists whereby the FN can fish the Quebec side of the river 5 days out of 7. In these circumstances, the Band Council were notified of the situation and nets were removed by Band enforcement. In the Miramichi, there were concerns that while the FN groups agreed to implement trap-nets, they began the season by fishing gill-nets citing the high water as preventing the set-up and operation of the trap-net facilities. With this issue comes the concern about whether the harvest has stayed within the allocations that have been negotiated with DFO. The NBSC wrote letters to the Regional Director General encouraging DFO to negotiate harvest allocations that are based on population and escapement characteristics and to provide appropriate levels of monitoring and enforcement where necessary.
- 3) **Strong MSW run, weak grilse run in 2009** – Despite near perfect water height and temperatures in most rivers throughout NB in the early portion of the season, the run appeared to be delayed in getting started. Once the runs got underway, however, it was clear that the predictions made that this year would be a strong year for MSW (large spawner) salmon seemed to be accurate. Unfortunately, after the banner run of grilse in 2008, this year has been quite disappointing throughout NB for 1SW fish. The magnitude of the drop has caused concern – are the grilse simply just late, or are they not coming? As in 2008, higher than average water conditions throughout much of June and July meant maintaining operation of the counting facilities has been a challenge. The fence in the Nepisiguit River for example, did not begin operating until August 8th. There continues to be concern about the accuracy of counts on the DFO web-site for this reason, NBSC submitted a letter to DFO indicating concern about the count accuracy and suggested that the web-site be updated with appropriate disclaimers about this fact. No changes have been observed on the site to date although the response from DFO on this matter appeared to be positive.

As of the date of this writing, the rivers in NB have dropped to their lowest levels of the season. There are good numbers of fish in many systems but they are pooled up and awaiting a raise in water levels to get them moving again. We are looking forward to the coming weeks to see how the anticipated fall run will take shape.

Outreach & Education

- 1) **Webpage** - The NBSC's webpage continues to gain popularity and is frequently updated with information from our affiliates and with information from events and initiatives in NB – see it at www.nbsalmoncouncil.com. As we look ahead to the next year, we are planning to review the site and to seek ways in which the site can be streamlined for easier content management and more frequent updates.
- 2) **Information Display and Brochure** – NBSC unveiled a display panel focusing on the promotion of live release for anglers of all ages. A color brochure has also been produced and is now being used to increase public awareness of the NBSC.
- 3) **Youth Affiliate/Involvement** - In response to interest by a number of young anglers in NB, the NBSC launched a group called the “NB Youth Salmon Council” on the social networking site Facebook. The goal is to promote this Facebook group to NBSC affiliates so that their youth members have a place to share information, stories, pictures and plans with one another in the province. Conversely, we hope that affiliates will find new youth members approaching them to join as local volunteers. We will continue to develop this initiative. There is an opportunity for the NBSC to sponsor the creation of high school fly-fishing clubs similar to what has been developed at the Miramichi Valley High School by a teacher, guide and lifelong conservationist.

Government Relations

- 1) **Outbacks to the Crown Reserve system** – During the summer NBSC learned that DNR had made a decision that maintaining the infrastructure accompanying the Crown Reserve stretches was no longer a “core” departmental responsibility and that the annual maintenance budget of \$137,000 was struck from the provincial budget. DNR would be looking for ways to pass this responsibility on to external organizations, preferably NGOs. NBSC communicated this message to its affiliates and soon after this issue hit the media on numerous occasions with the central message delivered by NBSC, the NB Wildlife Federation, etc, that this decision is not acceptable and that maintaining the CR infrastructure (i.e. camps, sites, trails, etc) must remain a responsibility of the government. A meeting was hosted by DNR staff in Boiestown on Sept. 1 where they presented the situation and asked for ideas and interest by external organizations to take this responsibility on. The NBSC, the NB Wildlife Federation and numerous affiliates were all very well represented, were very outspoken and conveyed the message that this decision must be reversed and that the Province of NB must retain this responsibility. There was also a strong belief that DNR has not communicated all the facts about revenues and expenses associated with the overall Crown system because the discussion has only focused on those of the Crown Reserve, without accounting for the large revenues gained from the Crown Angling Lease program. The NBSC and NBWF are actively working with affiliates to meet with, call and write letters to the Minister of DNR, the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and all MLAs. This issue is a concern to all resident anglers in NB and as such, the NBSC is working diligently with the government to have this decision reversed.
- 2) **Smallmouth Bass** – an infestation of Smallmouth Bass was discovered on Miramichi Lake in the fall of 2008. Miramichi Lake is a 520-acre lake on the headwaters of the Main Southwest Miramichi, feeding into the system via Lake Brook. The MWMC and NBSC affiliates have been deeply involved in the ongoing assessment and mitigation planning and have been showing great leadership on this file. Unfortunately, there is growing frustration that the same level of leadership is not being shown by DFO and DNR. Although the DFO Science report earlier this year recommended eradication because SMB, a top-predator, would pose a high risk to the lake and a moderate risk to the Miramichi River, other branches within DFO have not allowed applications to be filed for rotenone suggesting that further assessment is necessary before any actions of this type are taken. The opportunity to eradicate in 2009 has long since passed. Further assessment throughout the season by MWMC/MSA, DNR and CRI have shown that the

numbers of SMB appear to be fairly limited in the lake, several year-classes have been found, including 0+ which indicates that there was successful spawning in 2009. Lake Brook – the outfall to the Southwest Miramichi – has had small number of SMB found during extensive electro-fishing with all being very near the outlet from the Lake. SMB have not been found in the mid to lower portions of Lake Brook where additional containment facilities exist. Plans are now being put in place on how to proceed over the fall and winter months knowing that eradication is off the table for the time being. MWMC is hoping to engage an eradication expert (with expertise in rotenone application) to get an assessment of its feasibility. Both DFO and DNR have declined to provide financial support to obtaining assistance from the consultant and as such, MWMC has decided to take this step themselves. This is yet another source of frustration with the lack of action and leadership by the decision-makers at both DFO and DNR.

- 3) **Didymo** – Blooms of what is believed to be Didymo were observed in the Upsalquitch River in 2009 making it the last of the major tributaries of the Restigouche to be affected. NBSC will monitor the situation through the RRWMC and will continue to encourage proper sanitation techniques to prevent the spread of this or any other such invasive species. The NB Department of Natural Resources also launched a publicity campaign to promote public awareness of the risks of invasive species.
- 4) **Lieutenant Governors Award** - Planning is underway for the 2009 award ceremony with Graydon Nicholas, the recently-announced Lieutenant-Governor.

Habitat

- 1) **Restoration of St. Croix Alewife runs** – NBSC continues to work with the Maine Council and its various stakeholders to reverse 1995 legislation by the Maine State Legislature to close key dams to alewife passage. Since 1995, alewife populations in the St. Croix have plummeted from millions to mere thousands. The legislation was originally enacted based on an inaccurate presumption that the large alewife runs were causing damage to the smallmouth bass populations, for which there is an active sport fishery in Maine. Studies have shown that there is no scientific basis for this conclusion. Alewives serve an important role as a cover species for migrating spring smolts, and bring significant volumes of nutrients from the oceans to nutrient-poor headwaters. Recovery of alewives on the St. Croix is a foundational issue for a future recovery of this river for salmon. The NBSC has been very active on this file and was able to garner the support of 26 conservation organizations in NB for petitioning the International Joint Commission on this topic. On June 17th, the NBSC, some affiliates and many other concerned organizations attended a public forum in MacAdam hosted by the St. Croix Committee of the IJC. Also in attendance were representatives of the recreational smallmouth bass fishery from Maine. The collective message delivered by the supporters of unrestricted passage was strong and clear. As a result, the issue gained media exposure with Canadian IJC Chair Herb Gray being interviewed on CBC. The IJC has since issued a letter to the Maine State Governor John Baldacci recommending that the State Legislature take the appropriate steps to reverse the 1995 decision. Steps are being made and representatives of the coalition have met with local guides. If the government of Maine does not take action in their Legislature, it is understood that the IJC has jurisdiction on issuing the order to open the fishway at the Grand Falls dam.
- 4) **Geodex Tungsten/Molybdenum Mine** –This proposed open pit mine on the Nashwaak River system raises many concerns about risks to the watershed. No new developments on this file.
- 5) **Ocean Spray Cranberry EIA Registration** – NBSC reviewed and provided comments to the EIA Registration for the proposed cranberry farming and processing operation that is being planned for the Black Brook, Salmon Brook and Barnaby River sub-watersheds of the Miramichi. This operation makes extensive use of groundwater and sand. The NBSC is concerned that the first phases of this project have been fast-tracked and continues to monitor the situation.

- 6) **NB Forest Management Plan** – The provincial government released a comprehensive forest management plan in late January, 2009. The details of the plan are currently being reviewed by NBSC with help from RRWMC and MSA, both Council affiliates. NBSC is concerned that the decisions in this plan may have a negative effect upon buffer zones throughout the province which could lead to further sedimentation problems. The NBSC will be attending a workshop hosted by the RRWMC in October about forest management and its effect, positive and negative, on water quality and watershed vitality. RRWMC is taking a lead role on this file because of the concerns about siltation in that watershed in recent years.

Self Governance

- 1) The NBSC has grown over the past year. Although we were disappointed that the St. Croix International Atlantic Salmon Association sadly closed its doors, we are extremely pleased to have added 5 new affiliate organizations to the NBSC making our count stand at 28 organizations. The new affiliates are:
 - a. Dieppe Fly-Tying Club
 - b. Comité de gestion environnementale de la Rivière Pokemouche (CGERP)
 - c. Fredericton Fish and Game
 - d. Club Chasse et Peche St.Leonard
 - e. Oromocto Watershed Association
- 2) Eight rod days at Larry's Gulch were once again secured from the NB Department of Tourism for June, 2010. These angling opportunities are utilized to promote the NBSC live release licence and as fundraising tools for ASF, NBSC and NBSC affiliates. The rotation list will be reviewed in the near future and the affiliates notified who will have rod allocations for their fund-raising efforts. The 2009 allocation was very successful with a total of \$13,440 raised for conservation efforts.
- 3) Significant activity between NBSC and ASF established a joint fund-raising dinner in the Moncton area. The dinner was held Saturday, March 29th, in conjunction with the annual Dieppe Fly-Fishing Forum. Planning has already begun as a decision was made to grow the dinner. In addition to the Larry's Gulch trips, NBSC continues to support affiliate fund-raising efforts through the donation of Sage Launch fly-rods.

Affiliate Accolades and Acknowledgements

- 1) The Big Salmon River Angling Association (BSRAA) is celebrating its 25 year anniversary in 2009. Congratulations to BSRAA on this milestone!
- 2) The Miramichi Headwaters Salmon Federation (MHSF) received a national award from the federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for their outstanding contribution to fisheries conservation and protection in New Brunswick.
- 3) Congratulations to NBSC Executive Committee members Karle Scott and Vince Swazey for being awarded "Friend of the River" by the MHSF (Karle) and by the NSPA (Vince). Our rivers are fortunate to have dedicated individuals like you working for their futures.
- 4) The Hammond River Angling Association (HRAA) was selected by the ASF Awards Committee to receive the 2008 ASF Affiliate of the Year Award at the Moncton dinner. HRAA was commended by ASF President Bill Taylor for their work to protect salmon and their habitat, their education programs and their involvement of the surrounding communities in their programs.
- 5) Jacques Heroux, President of the Dieppe Fly-Tying Club, and organizer of the Dieppe Fly-Fishing Forum, is set to be inducted into the Atlantic Salmon Hall of Fame on September 25th at the Atlantic Salmon Museum in Doaktown. He will be inducted into the fly-tying category.

The NBSC would also like to thank the Atlantic Salmon Federation for their continued support.

Respectfully Submitted, Tom Benjamin
September 18, 2009