



Date: 27 August 2020

To: The Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick  
New Brunswick Liberal Party  
Green Party of New Brunswick  
People's Alliance of New Brunswick

On behalf of the New Brunswick Salmon Council (NBSC) and the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF) we are sending you the attached regarding wild Atlantic salmon that we would appreciate your written responses to our questions. Your responses, and those of the other party leaders running in this election, will assist our constituents and the voting public in understanding party positions on wild Atlantic salmon in our province.

The NBSC is one of seven regional Councils in the broader ASF family of conservation partners ranging from Maine to Labrador and covering the range of wild Atlantic salmon in North America. The ASF, established in 1948, is a world leading advocacy organization dedicated to conserving and restoring wild Atlantic salmon and their ecosystems. ASF's international headquarters are in Chamcook, NB with our federation comprised of regional councils like the NBSC as well as 103 affiliated groups representing more than 25,000 members and volunteers.

The attachment provides background information and questions regarding several areas in which we feel the Province can play a key role in the conservation, protection and stewardship of wild Atlantic salmon and their ecosystems. We are reaching out to each of the provincial political parties with the same questions in hopes of assembling and sharing this information (verbatim and unedited) with our constituents, the thousands of anglers and salmon and trout conservationists in New Brunswick.

Your responses to the questions prior to the election will strengthen our understanding of your party's positions in relation to wild Atlantic salmon conservation.

Thank you and best regards for the upcoming election.

Sincerely,

Kevin Davidson  
President, New Brunswick Salmon Council  
P.O. Box 533, Fredericton, NB E3B 5A6

Nathan Wilbur  
New Brunswick Program Director  
Atlantic Salmon Federation  
PO Box 5200, St. Andrews, NB E5B 3S8

## **Background**

Atlantic salmon are an iconic species to the province of New Brunswick supporting culturally and socio-economically valuable Indigenous and recreational fisheries. The Atlantic salmon recreational fishery alone in New Brunswick contributes \$40 Million annually to the GDP. Three of the most famous and largest Atlantic salmon river systems of North America are found here, Restigouche, Miramichi, and St. John, with dozens of other rivers once home to abundant and thriving wild Atlantic salmon populations. However, overall returns of Atlantic salmon to North American rivers have declined by 67% since the 1970s, with declines higher in more southerly rivers including New Brunswick.

Causes of these widespread declines include changes in ocean ecosystems likely because of climate change, impacts of open net pen aquaculture, land use impacts exacerbated by climate change, and invasive species establishment. All these drivers have significant impacts on Atlantic salmon and their ecosystems in an around New Brunswick.

Clearly, conservation actions are urgently required, coupled with proactive and effective recreational fishery management. Atlantic salmon are uniquely a barometer of ecosystem health, productivity, and resilience due to their life history integrating connections from the land-freshwater interface in headwaters streams, through rivers and estuaries, to marine environments stretching to the Davis Strait and back again.

## **Land use impacts and management**

Human uses of the landscape, be they industrial or small scale, can have significant impacts on the health and productivity of watersheds within those landscapes. Mechanisms include reduced natural forest cover, altered hydrologic regimes, watercourses being exposed to heightened thermal regimes, altered terrestrial inputs to the aquatic system, etc. All of these will have impacts on Atlantic salmon. Protected areas and regulation of sensitive areas are one key approach to achieving this goal.

### Questions:

Does your party have plans for new land protections and/or changes to land-use practices that will reduce the impacts of land-use on wild Atlantic salmon and NB's aquatic ecosystems? If yes, please provide details.

Does your party have plans to carry out or support any dam removals within the province to re-establish natural fish passage and ecological function? If yes, please provide details.

## **Open net-pen finfish aquaculture**

The research is clear that traditional open net-pen salmon aquaculture (ONP) has serious impacts on wild Atlantic salmon populations. Mechanisms include transfer of disease and parasites from densely packed pens to wild salmon, impacts of chemicals and therapeutants used by the industry, pens acting as focal points for non-natural predator aggregations that prey on wild salmon, genetic

degradation of wild populations from escaped farmed salmon (non-native and poorly adapted to local conditions) leading to collapsed wild salmon runs. In Canada, everywhere ONP occurs, salmon populations are listed as Threatened or Endangered by the Canadian government. Only one salmon population not near ONP is listed (Anticosti Island).

#### Questions:

What is your stance on land-based aquaculture, and do you feel the New Brunswick salmon aquaculture industry should move to land-based aquaculture systems?

Do you support having Cooke Aquaculture's planned expansions at Beaver Harbour and Mace's Bay undergo a full environmental impact assessment (EIA)?

### **Climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency**

The science on climate change is clear. Climate change due to human activities is happening and predictions for the future scenarios are incredibly serious. Efforts to cut down on carbon emissions continue in international and national agreements and plans (mitigation), while trying to simultaneously "climate-proof" against the predicted impacts (adaptation). For Atlantic salmon, climate change impacts operate through warming weather and warming waters, severe high flows or droughts in our river systems, changes to timing of salmon migration and finding suitable growth and living conditions, changing ocean temperatures and currents, and changing ocean ecosystems (prey and predators). Helping rivers become resilient to climate change through land protections is not just beneficial to the aquatic ecosystems but important for people as well by mitigating impacts such as severe flooding.

#### Question:

What is your Party's plan to help New Brunswick's rivers become resilient to climate change?

### **Eradication of invasive species and how to stop future illegal introductions**

Invasive species are the number one threat to aquatic ecosystems worldwide after habitat loss. These species, once established, often lead to declines in abundance of native fish species. Invasive species become established through range extensions due to changing environmental conditions but more problematic is the deliberate introduction by humans to non-native watersheds. Invasive smallmouth bass were discovered in Miramichi Lake in 2008 and pose a serious threat to the ecosystem and wild Atlantic salmon. The Canadian government recognizes the threat of invasive species and has established national Aquatic Invasive Species Regulations. However, in New Brunswick, neither the federal nor the provincial governments have taken action to eradicate invasive smallmouth bass. Our partnership of Indigenous organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) have put forward a science-based plan and formal application to eradicate smallmouth bass from the Miramichi watershed. This is an urgent conservation action that will prevent permanent and irreversible impacts to the Miramichi ecosystem and socio-economic benefits supported by Atlantic salmon: Indigenous food fisheries and a recreational fishery valued at

\$16 Million annually to the provincial GDP and supporting 640 full time equivalent jobs in rural communities.

Questions:

How will your Party help support the eradication of invasive smallmouth bass from the Miramichi watershed in 2021?

What will your party do to deter people from endangering New Brunswick's fish and wildlife resources by moving and/or introducing invasive fish and wildlife species?