

## Wild Atlantic Salmon - State of the Populations 2007

The International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES) compiles annually scientific information used to estimate the health of Atlantic salmon populations, and provide advice to Member Governments of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) for conserving and restoring the species. This report is based on the data of ICES.

At-sea survival remains the top concern for wild Atlantic salmon, with increasing mortality among southern and northern European runs, and no further expected rebound among North American Atlantic salmon for 2007-2009. The large salmon make the long migration to Greenland waters where they spend two winters at sea, and are particularly susceptible to mortality at sea. On return to rivers they provide a large numbers of the eggs required to maintain healthy salmon runs. At-sea survival rates now are considerably less than they were 20 years ago.

### UNITED STATES

- United States: The salmon population is at only 6.4% of the basic large salmon conservation requirement, a slight improvement over last year's 4%.
- The total return of salmon to US rivers in 2006 was 1480, a 13% increase from 2005 returns (1313).
- The Penobscot River remains the anchor for Atlantic salmon populations in the United States. However, in 2006 only 1,044 returned, far below the high in 1986 of 4,137, but more than the 2005 return of 985.
- ICES has noted fish passage is a major impediment to a return of Atlantic salmon populations to self-sustaining numbers. ASF and conservation partners together with PPL Inc., Penobscot Nation, and governments, have in place a plan to remove dams and improve the Penobscot River's health.
- In Maine, the Penobscot reached more than 10% of the conservation minimum for egg deposition. Other rivers had between 0 and 1% of their large salmon requirement.

### CANADA

- Only Newfoundland reached basic conservation requirements in 2006, and ICES notes it faces reduced reproductive capacity.
  - The Bay of Fundy and outer Nova Scotia Coast: The salmon reached only 10% of their basic minimum requirement. There are 54 Nova Scotia rivers impacted by acid rain, and the inner Bay of Fundy salmon are reduced to fewer than 200 returning adults each year, from 40,000 in the 1980s. Only one river (Middle River) met basic conservation requirements.
  - Gulf of St. Lawrence, including the vital Miramichi watershed: Salmon populations achieved 81% of basic conservation limits. Twenty to 25% of all salmon returning to North America return to the Miramichi River system. Three of the four rivers assessed met the basic conservation requirement (Margaree, River Philip and West River – Antigonish).
  - Quebec, including both Gaspé and North Shore, is at risk with 65% of the conservation limit reached. Only 54% of the rivers met conservation minimum levels.
  - Labrador: only 40% of the basic conservation requirement was met, and despite these very low populations, there are significant salmon fisheries.

- Newfoundland: Salmon remain at risk of suffering reduced reproductive capacity, but did achieve 112% of the basic conservation level. On the island, 63% of rivers met minimum conservation requirements.

## EUROPE

- Northern European salmon runs (Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and Iceland) are at full reproductive capacity.
- Southern European salmon populations (Ireland, UK (England & Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland), France, and Spain, reached 82% of minimum conservation targets. In 2006 the pre-fishery abundance figure was 483,700, and in 2007 455,400. Predictions are for continuing declines until 2010.
- Some of the Southern European salmon travel to West Greenland feeding areas, where in 2006 they made up 28% of the salmon as determined from analysis of harvested salmon – the other 72% being of North American origin.

## NORTH AMERICAN CONCERNS

- North American wild Atlantic salmon remain at distressingly low levels, among the lowest in history.
- The vitally important large salmon that travel to and from Greenland feeding grounds have declined from 917,000 in 1975 to about 113,000 in 2007, a decline of 89%. Predictions for 2008 are 118,000 and 114,000 in 2009.
- It is estimated that fewer than 74,000 2SW salmon actually returned to North American rivers in 2006, while the basic conservation minimum was 152,548 fish.
- ICES' prime recommendation for 2007 is that since the predicted number of 2SW salmon is substantially below the 2SW conservation target, there should be no harvest where salmon from various rivers are mixed together, such as in coastal migration areas or Greenland waters.
- ICES strongly recommends that ALL taking of wild Atlantic salmon, be closely monitored and details provided. Canada reports 56 tonnes of unreported or illegal catch.
- The continued taking of multi-sea-winter salmon is distressing:
  - In Greenland, the food fishery for salmon increased to 21 tonnes in 2006 from 14 tonnes (2005), and 9 tonnes in 2002. The 2006 harvest included approximately 4,000 salmon from North American rivers.
  - The French islands of St-Pierre et Miquelon increased their fishery to 3.55 tonnes in 2006, the highest on record. There is no information on unreported or illegal catches. This fishery intercepts salmon bound for Canada and the U.S.
  - In North American rivers the harvest by First Nations was 58.9 tonnes in 2006, of which 41% were large salmon important to spawning – approx. 10,000 large salmon, a harvest level similar to other recent years. In Labrador, 20% of the food fisheries are coastal and can intercept salmon bound for the U.S. and Canada.
  - The Canadian recreational angling harvest of large salmon in 2006 was approx. 3,000 large salmon, second lowest in history.

For further information:

ATLANTIC SALMON FEDERATION  
 Sue Scott (506) 529-1027, [policy@nb.aibn.com](mailto:policy@nb.aibn.com)  
 Muriel Ferguson (506) 529-1033, [asf@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:asf@nbnet.nb.ca)