



Atlantic Salmon Federation

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State of North American Atlantic Salmon Populations, June 2021

The 2021 State of Wild Atlantic Salmon report is a summary of North American population estimates for 2020.

Source materials include the latest report from the Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon, part of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), plus information from provincial, state, and federal governments in North America. Links to online sources are provided at the end of this document.

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NOTE ON COVID-19 AND ATLANTIC SALMON ASSESSMENTS

The Covid-19 pandemic affected the collection of data on Atlantic salmon abundance in 2020. In the Atlantic provinces, where Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is primarily responsible for monitoring and assessment, juvenile and adult salmon surveys were limited.

As a result, 2020 population estimates were based on past averages for the Gulf region, which includes all rivers in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island that empty into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the Maritimes region, which includes all Canadian rivers emptying into the Bay of Fundy and the Atlantic Ocean and the island of Newfoundland.

In Quebec, where the provincial government conducts monitoring and assessment, activities proceeded as usual. Although the installation of some counting facilities was delayed in Labrador, DFO was able to provide population estimates to ICES using 2020 information collected.

Despite the lack of official estimates, some monitoring activities did take place in 2020 and results are included in the regional highlights section below.

In the U.S.A., population monitoring activities were affected, with no smolt monitoring occurring. Adult monitoring was unaffected.

ICES ADVICE ON THE HARVEST OF ATLANTIC SALMON FROM NORTH AMERICA

- No mixed stock fisheries
- River specific management

ICES provides non-biased, scientific advice on Atlantic salmon fisheries to member countries of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), including Canada and the United States. For the period 2021 to 2023, the council recommends no mixed-stock fisheries should occur and all fisheries for North American salmon should only take place in rivers where populations are meeting conservation objectives.

Labrador Indigenous and resident food fisheries intercept migrating salmon from other regions of North America, including endangered populations in southern Canada and the United States, and are in contravention of this advice. Additionally, the French fishery at Saint Pierre and Miquelon and the Greenland salmon fishery, both mixed stock, are carried out against the advice of ICES.

NORTH AMERICAN ATLANTIC SALMON RETURNS IN 2020

According to ICES, the estimate for two sea-winter and small salmon returning to North America increased in 2020. The estimate for grilse was the 18th highest in the past 50-years (1971-2020) and the 30th highest for two sea-winter salmon.

ICES WGNAS ESTIMATE OF RETURNS

2020	2019
Small salmon 456,000	Small salmon 394,000
Large salmon 155,600	Large salmon 103,900

HARVEST AND FISHERIES

Fisheries for North American Atlantic Salmon occur throughout Atlantic Canada, Quebec, and in the coastal waters of Greenland. The largest fisheries are the Indigenous and recreational fisheries in Canada, followed by the Inuit subsistence and domestic commercial fisheries in Greenland. Some North American Atlantic Salmon are also intercepted by the net fishery at St. Pierre and Miquelon, a French archipelago off Southern Newfoundland.

Note on fishery reporting: The quality of Atlantic Salmon fishery information for Canada is generally poor and harvest estimates include the use of past averages and other assumptions. ICES notes recreational fishery data is not regularly collected in Atlantic Canada and only Quebec has an enforceable mechanism to compel angler reports. Indigenous fishery data is also sparse and sporadically available. ICES considers the recreational and Indigenous harvest estimates for Canada to be provisional.

2020 NORTH AMERICAN ATLANTIC SALMON HARVEST

Canada reported harvest total: 103.9 t, or approximately 31,500 small salmon and 10,200 large salmon

Indigenous: 58.7 t, a slight increase over 2019 estimates (54.7 t)

Recreational: 43.5 t, the third lowest figure since 1974

Labrador resident: 1.7 t, or approximately 633 fish

Saint Pierre and Miquelon fishery: A total 1.7 t Atlantic Salmon harvest was reported as catch for the French territory in 2020. There were 86 recreational salmon license holders and five professional license holders participating in the fishery, the latter with nets. The reported catch is roughly equivalent to 600 fish according to ICES.

Illegal fisheries in Canada: Poaching in Canada continues to kill thousands of small and large salmon each year. In 2020, an estimated 27 t was lost to illegal and unreported fisheries, a significant increase from an estimated 12 t in 2019. Like catch reporting, data on illegal Atlantic Salmon fisheries in Canada is incomplete and figures should be considered approximations.

Greenland fishery: 31.7 t, equal to approximately 9,500 large salmon, was the reported catch for Greenland in 2020. That compares to reported landings of 29.8 t in 2019, 39.9 t in 2018.

Commercial: The 339 professional license holders that participated in the domestic Greenland commercial fishery reported a 22 t harvest in 2020, or approximately 6,600 large salmon. 82% of license holders reporting their catch.

Private: The 418 individual license holders in Greenland reported 9.7 t harvested for personal subsistence, or approximately 2,900 large salmon. 81% of license holders reported their catch.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

QUÉBEC

Monitoring and assessment activity in Quebec, which is conducted by the provincial government, was uninterrupted in 2020 and official population estimates were provided to ICES.

In 2020 there were 38 monitored rivers in the province and on those 30,291 returning large salmon and 8,703 returning small salmon were counted. The large salmon returns were a 27% increase over 2019 and 13 of the 38 monitored rivers exceeded optimal spawning targets.

Among these, the Cascapédia had 31.03M eggs deposited, where optimal target was 7.16M. The Bonaventure had 7.93M deposited vs. 3.93M required. The Matapédia had 21.4M eggs deposited while 10.41M were required to reach the optimal target.

ICES notes that Quebec reached 78 per cent of the Conservation Limit (per cent of management objective). Grilse returns increased in 2020 over the previous year.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Monitoring activities were delayed on the island of Newfoundland due to Covid-19 and population estimates provided to ICES were partly based on previous year averages. In Labrador, the installation of some counting facilities was delayed, however data collection was sufficient for DFO to provide an up to date population estimate to ICES for the region.

Data from the 17 counting facilities on insular Newfoundland, once operational, led DFO to conclude that in 2020 that seven rivers were in the critical zone, two were in the cautious zone, and five in the healthy zone according to the precautionary approach for fisheries management. Six of those monitored rivers experienced declines greater than 30% compared to the most recent five-year average.

Meanwhile, estimated large salmon and small salmon returns to Labrador were the 8th highest and ninth highest respectively since monitoring began in 1971. Large salmon returns to Labrador represented a 70% increase compared to 2019.

GULF REGION (N.B., N.S., P.E.I.)

Fisheries and Oceans Canada was unable to perform its regular assessment activities in the Gulf region due to Covid-19 in 2020. No updated population estimates were provided to ICES.

Some monitoring activities did take place however, including the DFO-led snorkel survey of the Restigouche River which counted 10,500 large salmon, double the 2019 figure and the most since the survey began in 1999.

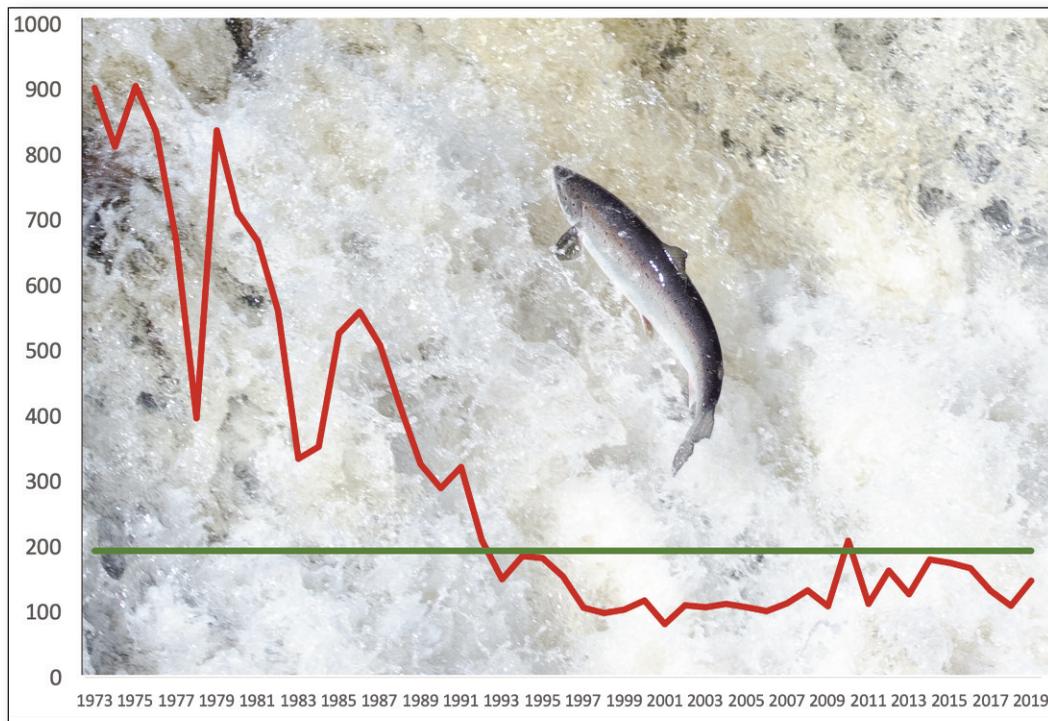
MARITIMES

Assessment activities in the Maritimes region were also affected by Covid-19. At the Mactaquac Dam on the Saint John River, where migrating fish are trapped for truck transport upstream, 144 large salmon and 340 small salmon were counted, among the lowest on record and nearing extirpation.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Assessment activities in the United States were not affected by Covid-19. Returns to the Penobscot River in Maine, home to the largest Atlantic Salmon population in the United States were the highest in a decade at 1,440 fish counted. On the Kennebec, 50 Atlantic salmon were counted, down slightly from 56 in 2019.

PRE-FISHERY ABUNDANCE – NORTH AMERICAN SALMON



*Pre-fishery Abundance (PFA) is a measure of abundance at sea before any harvest takes place in a given year. The green line is the total number of 2SW salmon required to meet the Minimum Conservation Limit in North American rivers at the time PFA is estimated.
ICES 2021 report of the Working Group on North Atlantic Salmon*

REFERENCES

2021 Report of the Working Group North Atlantic Salmon (WGNAS)

https://www.asf.ca/assets/files/wgnas_2021.pdf

ICES Advice – North Atlantic salmon stocks

<https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2021/2021/sal.oth.nasco.pdf> **ICES**

Advice – Atlantic salmon at West Greenland

<https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2021/2021/sal.wgc.all.pdf>

ICES Advice – Atlantic salmon from North America

<https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2021/2021/sal.nac.all.pdf>

ICES Advice – Atlantic salmon from the Northeast Atlantic

<https://www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2021/2021/sal.neac.all.pdf>

Review of salmon exploitation in Quebec in 2020 (French)

<https://mffp.gouv.qc.ca/nos-publications/bilan-exploitation-saumon-2020/>