

Restore, Maintain, Thrive:
Canada's national strategy to ensure the future of Atlantic salmon
2024-2036

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Fisheries and Oceans
Canada

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Glossary

Ecologically Significant Area: Ecologically Significant Area is an area-based conservation tool established under the [Fisheries Act](#) with defined geographic boundaries. ESAs are proactive tools that offer long term conservation and protection to key areas of fish and fish habitat that are highly productive, sensitive, rare, and/or unique and ensure effective restoration of these areas when needed. ESAs provide transparency and certainty on what work, undertaking or activity are prohibited or not in the areas where they have been established.

Project Lifecycle Approach: Organizing collaborative place-based approach projects into a framework that includes sequential phases from the inception to the conclusion of the project. This could include setting the goals of the project at the beginning, monitoring progress, and sharing best practices throughout.

Collaborative Place-Based Approach: Collaborative place-based (CPB) approaches address complex social, environmental, or economic issues through tailored collaborative interventions at varied geographical scales, taking into consideration the local and unique environment present.

Two-Eyed Seeing: A concept developed by a Mi'kmaw [Elder Albert Marshall](#) describing people coming together to view the world through an Indigenous lens with one eye, while the other eye sees through a Western lens.

Executive Summary

Wild Atlantic salmon is an iconic species in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. Central to the cultural identities of Indigenous peoples, crucial to the health of the ecosystem, and prized by recreational anglers, Atlantic salmon is woven into the fabric of many East coast communities. Atlantic salmon is also a species in decline, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has heard a growing sense of urgency and concern from Indigenous peoples, partners, and a broad range of stakeholders about the state of Canada's Atlantic salmon.

The first-ever national strategy to restore and maintain Atlantic salmon populations sets out a vision for the future of this species across its Canadian range. Paramount to this vision is creating space for the knowledge of Atlantic salmon accumulated by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. Underlying all areas of this strategy is a commitment to work collaboratively to create the conditions necessary for Atlantic salmon to thrive. Through its vision, strategic outcomes, and outputs, the strategy serves as a guide for all aspects of Atlantic salmon restoration, science, and management, and is an important accountability document for Canadians as to how the species is stewarded.

DFO did not develop this strategy alone; discussion and collaboration with Indigenous peoples and the broader Atlantic salmon community, consisting of provincial governments, partners and stakeholders, was instrumental in shaping the strategy's direction. Taking into consideration the knowledge shared through ongoing conversations with Indigenous peoples, extensive feedback received over the course of nearly two years of engagement, and the expertise gained over decades of study through a scientific lens, four strategic outcomes have been identified to guide the future of Atlantic salmon activities for the next twelve years:

Strategic outcome 1: A collaborative place-based approach to restoration supports healthy, climate resilient Atlantic salmon populations.

Strategic outcome 2: Atlantic salmon-related processes and policies are aligned with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and its supporting Action Plan.

Strategic outcome 3: A vibrant, inclusive, and knowledgeable Atlantic salmon community is positioned for success.

Strategic outcome 4: Practices that support the management and protection of Atlantic salmon are transparent, well-informed, and responsive to the needs of salmon in a rapidly changing world.

Lastly, the strategy sets a path for how Indigenous peoples and the Atlantic salmon community will be kept up to date through progress reporting on its implementation over the 12 year cycle, which corresponds to roughly three salmon generations, and how Indigenous peoples and the broader Atlantic salmon community with an interest in and passion for salmon can get involved.

1.0 Introduction

In 2018, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) revised the [Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy](#) (the *Policy*) to provide a framework for the Government of Canada to meet its objectives for the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon. The goal of the *Policy* is to “restore and maintain healthy wild Atlantic salmon populations”. The “Restore, Maintain, Thrive: Canada’s national strategy to ensure the future of Atlantic salmon” (the *Strategy*) is intended to create the conditions necessary for this goal to be achieved over the next 12 years and beyond. To do so, the *Strategy* will draw on the experience, knowledge, and dedication of Indigenous peoples, as well as the provincial governments, partners, and stakeholders that constitute the Atlantic salmon community. The *Strategy* aims to provide a common thread amongst the many stewardship activities that support this species.

In light of evolving relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Government of Canada, as well as “what we heard” through engagement with Indigenous peoples, a review of the *Policy* itself is also proposed to better reflect the needs and expectations of Indigenous peoples in the context of reconciliation, including the [United Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) (*UN Declaration Act*) and the [United Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action plan 2023-2028](#).

2.0 Significance of Atlantic salmon

Wild Atlantic salmon is an iconic species in Atlantic Canada and Quebec that has held cultural and spiritual significance to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial, as well as being an important part of Canadians’ lives over many generations. Over forty Indigenous communities fish Atlantic salmon for food, social and ceremonial (FSC) purposes. In central and coastal Labrador, Atlantic salmon is also an important source for local community subsistence fisheries. Salmon angling is a popular recreational activity, for residents and visitors alike, promoting tourism and a sense of connection to nature. A Gardner-Pinfold study conducted in 2022 estimates the GDP value of Atlantic salmon recreational fishery to be \$218M¹. However, the social-cultural value of Atlantic salmon far exceeds its economic and subsistence value: wherever people and salmon coexist, the connection is deep. Expressions of our interconnectedness to salmon are frequently made through science, literature, and the arts. Ecologically, Atlantic salmon are an indicator of environmental quality and ecosystem health and are important to maintaining the connectivity of nutrients derived from marine to freshwater ecosystems.

3.0 Management context

3.1 Indigenous Rights and reconciliation

The diverse cultural relationships of Indigenous peoples with Atlantic salmon are of the highest importance to many Indigenous peoples across Atlantic Canada and Quebec. Indigenous peoples hold rights to access Atlantic salmon for FSC purposes and have told the Department through engagement that their rights have been impacted by the continued decline of Atlantic salmon populations across much of its range.

The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (*UN Declaration*) was adopted in 2007 and describes a comprehensive international human rights instruments on the rights and the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous people around the world. In Canada, the *UN Declaration Act* came into effect in 2021, advancing the implementation of the UN

¹ Economic Value of Wild Atlantic Salmon. Prepared by Gardner Pinfold for the Atlantic Salmon Federation (2022).

Declaration in the country and ensuring that laws in Canada are consistent with the UN Declaration. To achieve the objectives set forward in the UN Declaration, Canada released in 2023 its *UN Declaration Act* Action plan 2023-2028 providing the roadmap for its implementation.

The development and implementation of the Restore, Maintain, Thrive Strategy for Atlantic salmon will be guided by [Principles respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous peoples](#). These Principles are rooted in section 35 of the Constitution, recognizing Indigenous and treaty rights, and guided by the *UN Declaration Act*. The Government of Canada is committed to achieve reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, recognizing the rights and acknowledging the wrongs of the past, knowing the true history, and working together to implement Indigenous rights.

3.2 Atlantic salmon Fisheries

Responsibility for the protection and management of Atlantic salmon is shared across multiple jurisdictions and levels of government, hence the importance of pursuing the goal of restoring and maintaining healthy Atlantic salmon populations collaboratively. The federal Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard has the authority and tools under federal legislation (i.e., *Fisheries Act*, *Species at Risk Act* and *Oceans Act*) to manage Atlantic salmon and protect its habitat, including the management of FSC fisheries and some recreational fisheries. Parks Canada assumes management authority where Atlantic salmon occur within its boundaries, under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) and the *Canada National Parks Act*.

Provincial governments also have powers with respect to the management of this species and their habitat in inland waters. Fisheries management regimes vary between provinces: in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, the provincial governments issue licenses for recreational angling and provide support for science, restoration, and stewardship activities. In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, further roles and responsibilities with respect to the conservation and management of Atlantic salmon are specified for each province and the federal government in their respective Memorandum of Understandings. In Newfoundland and Labrador, DFO manages the Labrador Subsistence Fishery and recreational fishery, the province is responsible for access, and both DFO and the province have a shared responsibility over the fisheries in non-tidal waters. Further consideration to the operation of recreational fishing camps is given in the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement. In Quebec, the management of migratory fish, including Atlantic salmon, was delegated to the province in 1922.

In addressing the impact of human activities on fish and their habitats, provinces contribute essential regulatory oversight for actions like watercourse alterations, mining, forestry, and agriculture, working in tandem with the *Fisheries Act* protection provisions led by DFO. In addition to management activities directed at Atlantic salmon fisheries, there are also many DFO programs and activities that support Atlantic salmon and their habitat in partnership with Provincial governments, for example: the Aquatic Species at Risk Program, Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program, Aquatic Invasive Species program, and aquaculture management.

3.3 Species at Risk

Under SARA, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard is the competent Minister with respect to aquatic species, other than individuals occurring in or on lands under the administration of Parks Canada Agency. Currently, one population of Atlantic salmon (i.e., Inner Bay of Fundy) is legally listed on Schedule 1 of SARA. SARA aims to prevent wildlife species from

becoming extirpated or extinct, to provide for the recovery of wildlife species that are extirpated, endangered, or threatened because of human activity, and to manage species of special concern to prevent them from becoming endangered or threatened. Whereas conservation strategies under SARA focus on listed populations, the Strategy aims to restore and maintain all Atlantic salmon at the species level, including the at-risk and SARA listed populations. The Strategy articulates a unified vision that aligns with the 2018 *Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy* and offer a strategic and coordinated species-wide conservation response for all populations.

3.4 International cooperation

In an effort to ensure alignment between domestic and international goals for wild Atlantic salmon in Canada, the Strategy acknowledges and integrates Canada's work and commitments at the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO). NASCO is a regional fisheries management organization that contributes to the conservation, restoration, enhancement, and rational management of salmon stocks in the North Atlantic Ocean. All eight parties (Canada; Denmark - in respect of the Faroe Islands and Greenland; the European Union; Iceland; Norway; Russia; the United Kingdom; and the United States) implement NASCO's mission using the best available science and in collaboration with non-governmental organizations.

4.0 Development of the Strategy

DFO drafted the elements of the Strategy through engagement with Indigenous peoples and the Atlantic salmon community. In addition to reflecting feedback received through engagement, the Strategy builds upon the work already undertaken through the *Policy*, the [Wild Atlantic salmon conservation: Implementation plan 2019 to 2021](#), the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans report "[Wild Atlantic Salmon in Eastern Canada](#)" (2017), the Minister's Advisory Committee "[Special Report on Atlantic Salmon in Eastern Canada](#)" (2015), as well as the extensive body of work on Atlantic salmon that speaks to the perspectives of Indigenous peoples, the scientific community, anglers, and others interested in this species. A full summary of the engagement process and 'what we heard' is available in the report, "[Engaging on a Strategy to restore and rebuild Atlantic salmon](#)" (2023).

5.0 Vision

The Strategy envisions a future state where our rivers sustain Atlantic salmon and Atlantic salmon sustain our rivers, the cultural identities of Indigenous peoples, and the connections that many Canadians share with nature. It is through this community that Atlantic salmon populations are understood, restored, and rebuilt as an integral part of the ecosystems they inhabit. Building on the iconic status of Atlantic salmon and its prevalence in cultural, socio-economic, and academic domains, this species motivates stewardship actions at local and global scales and inspires the pursuit of a sustainable future for generations to come. In order to move towards this desired future state, the Strategy will be guided by the following vision over its 12 year lifetime:

The vision of the Strategy is to create the conditions necessary for Atlantic salmon, Indigenous peoples, and the broader Atlantic salmon community to thrive.

6.0 Strategic outcomes

The Strategy places emphasis on the achievement of conservation gains in freshwater habitats within Canada through collaboration. The management of Atlantic salmon in the high seas will continue to be influenced through the actions of NASCO, and through partnerships that can address conservation issues at large geographic scales. Four strategic outcomes frame the direction for the Strategy over the next 12 years. The strategic outcomes and corresponding outputs focus on achieving the current *Policy* goal – “to restore and maintain Atlantic salmon” – through an integrated approach for science, restoration, stewardship, and management activities. Strategic outcomes represent the change in state for salmon and the salmon community over the lifetime of the Strategy. Each strategic outcome will have corresponding outputs that represent the actions or products that are generated as a result.

Strategic outcome 1: A collaborative, place-based approach to restoration supports healthy, climate-resilient Atlantic salmon populations.

With roughly 1,000 Atlantic salmon rivers within its jurisdiction, decisions on where and how to prioritize resources and efforts need to be made across the species range; it will not be possible to invest everywhere. Taking a collaborative place-based (CPB) approach in priority places can help. A CPB approach is one that addresses complex social, environmental, or economic issues through tailored collaborative interventions at varied geographical scales, taking into consideration the local and unique environment present. CPB approaches have a common overarching goal, while integrating appropriate contexts and regional differences. This approach is meant to be developed and implemented collaboratively by Indigenous peoples and local communities, governments, partners, and stakeholders who all share the same goal and accountability on the CPB program. Working to restore and maintain Atlantic salmon and its habitat through a CPB approach allows a national strategy to be tailored to appropriate local contexts and communities. Decisions on which rivers will be selected will be made collaboratively with Indigenous peoples and the Atlantic salmon community and will consider a diversity of knowledge sources (e.g., Indigenous knowledge, science, socio-economic factors, etc.).

Output:

- Atlantic Salmon Partnership Roundtables or advisory committees are established in each province where they do not currently exist, and facilitated on an annual basis, to support better communication and coordination amongst federal and provincial governments, Indigenous peoples, and stakeholders.
- Priority places will be established based on input from Indigenous peoples and the Atlantic Salmon Partnership Roundtables or advisory committees and be informed by long-term predictions for how Atlantic salmon and its habitat are likely to respond to climate change.
- CPB plans (for example, Integrated watershed management plans) are collaboratively developed for each priority place, to include consistent measures and best practices, while also allowing for flexibility in approaches to reflect local threats.
- Resources and capacity are aligned towards mitigation of priority actions outlined within CPB plans.

- A project life-cycle approach to permitting and funding is introduced to support the implementation of CPB approaches in a way that is predictable and transparent.
- Management tools such as Critical Habitat, Ecologically Significant Areas, and Indigenous Protection and Conservation Areas will be explored in collaboration with other jurisdictions to enhance the protection of Atlantic salmon in freshwater areas where critical life processes occur.

Strategic outcome 2: Alignment of Atlantic salmon-related processes and policies with *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and its supporting Action Plan.

Many Indigenous peoples' everyday lives are interconnected with Atlantic salmon. At a species-wide level, Canada establishes its position on Atlantic salmon domestically, through the *Policy*, and internationally, through the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO). The Rights, values, and perspectives of Indigenous peoples have not been adequately reflected at this overarching federal level, where the Government of Canada discusses and makes decision on Atlantic salmon. Indigenous-led organizations and communities are well-positioned to play a leading role in Atlantic salmon stewardship and research; however, specific barriers exist to their inclusion. For example, Indigenous peoples' rights to control and access their data and knowledge remains limited, as does its integration into decision-making processes for Atlantic salmon.

Outputs:

- Canada will champion an increased role for Indigenous peoples at NASCO and create space for meaningful consideration of Indigenous perspectives in Canada's work at NASCO through the creation of an Indigenous advisory process.
- The *Policy* will be reviewed and updated to better align with the *UN Declaration Act* and its supporting Action Plan 2023-2028.
- Partnership tenants and/or common data sharing agreements will be actively supported in their development and respected in their implementation, through DFO's Aboriginal Aquatic Resource and Oceans Management (AAROM) program and other Indigenous organizations that are actively involved in Atlantic salmon monitoring and research.
- The application of Indigenous knowledge and/or two-eyed seeing approaches are meaningfully considered and applied in Atlantic salmon science, research and management activities.
- DFO's processes, decisions, coordination will be enhanced and aligned to better support the *United Nations Declaration of on the Rights of Indigenous peoples Act* and its supporting Action Plan 2023-2028.
- DFO staff involved in Atlantic salmon programming will actively seek opportunities for Indigenous participation in their work, be supported to train and enhance their awareness of reconciliation and promote Indigenous inclusion across their professional networks.

Strategic outcome 3: A vibrant, inclusive, and knowledgeable community on Atlantic salmon is positioned for success.

With a range spanning five provinces, four DFO regions, and over forty Indigenous communities, as well as countless conservation groups and associations, the Atlantic salmon network is large, complex, and diverse. Recognizing the many diverse ways in which Atlantic salmon bring value to the social, cultural, and economic lives of people across this network – including fisheries, scientific research, restoration activities, and cultural expressions – will ensure that salmon continue to motivate positive ecological gains across the species range. Connecting people, projects, and data can enhance the benefits of what we learn to better serve salmon and encourage the level of partnership and collaboration necessary to better understand the challenges faced by salmon at sea.

Outputs:

- Through partnership and collaboration, DFO will work beyond Canada's borders to understand and mitigate pressures, where feasible, that impact Atlantic salmon in the marine environment.
- The Atlantic Salmon Research Joint Venture (ASRJV) will work to establish priority areas of western scientific research and will steward Atlantic salmon data sharing, making it available according to the Government of Canada's open data policy.
- Atlantic salmon population monitoring data collected by DFO and/or is funded by the Government of Canada is publicly available according to the Government of Canada's open data policy.
- Canada will report on the population status of its Atlantic salmon stocks internationally, through the NASCO Salmon Atlas.
- A strong, inclusive conservation economy to support Atlantic salmon is understood and valued for its contribution to diverse, inclusive, and sustainable economies in areas of science, stewardship, fisheries, and arts.
- Create spaces for an Indigenous people to achieve research excellence in the advancement of Indigenous knowledge systems (or other related fields) for Atlantic salmon.

Strategic outcome 4: Practices that support the management and protection of Atlantic salmon are transparent, well-informed and responsive to the needs of salmon in a rapidly changing world.

People's sense of connection to Atlantic salmon motivates many valuable stewardship and restoration activities for this species across Atlantic Canada. In fact, evidence suggests that Canadians are willing to invest more in the conservation of Atlantic salmon compared to any other aquatic species at risk in the country². For many people, that sense of connection comes from recreational angling, and from opportunities to directly interact with salmon. Maintaining those opportunities is important and is supported by the mandate of DFO; however, of equal importance is ensuring that those interactions do not pose a significant threat to the restoration or maintenance of Canada's Atlantic salmon populations.

² [National values for regional aquatic species at risk in Canada](#)

Outputs:

- Federal-Provincial Memorandum of Understandings or Agreements that define roles and responsibilities with respect to Atlantic salmon recreational fisheries will be reviewed, renewed, or explored, to better reflect current contexts and relationships.
- Temperature monitoring and implementation of warm water/environmental protocols will be expanded in scheduled rivers where recreational angling occurs, to minimize harm.
- Enhanced angler education will improve catch-and-release techniques and reinforce importance of warm water protocols.
- Collaboration between local law enforcement agencies, Indigenous communities, and stakeholders will be explored to deter poaching, especially during warm water periods when salmon are most vulnerable.
- Policy guidance to support decision making for Atlantic salmon stocking activities will be developed collaboratively with Indigenous peoples and the Atlantic salmon community, taking into consideration a range of knowledge and evidence sources, including Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, scientific research, international best practices, socio-economic, and other human dimensions.

7.0 Get involved

The achievement of the Strategy's vision – *to create the conditions necessary for salmon, Indigenous salmon peoples, and the broader Atlantic salmon community to thrive* – depends on the collective knowledge and expertise of everyone: Indigenous peoples, provincial and other orders of government, partners and stakeholders must be included. There are different ways to get involved, and opportunities to contribute are not limited to what is suggested below. As a start, consider the opportunities that are most relevant to you or your organization:

Indigenous Organizations and Communities

- Get organized through your local AAROM or within your community and consider how the Restore, Maintain, Thrive Strategy can support your aspirations and goals, as well as how you'd like your work to be reflected in reporting.
- Lead stewardship and restoration activities for Atlantic salmon: explore and apply for funding for projects that support the implementation of the Strategy through various DFO Grants and Contribution funding, including those specifically intended to support Indigenous peoples, or through the Foundation for the Conservation of Atlantic Salmon (FCAS) annual funding program.
- Develop Partnership Tenants to clearly define terms of partnership and collaboration with Government and non-government organizations, including how you want your knowledge and data to be shared.
- Contribute to international management and conservation efforts through consideration of Indigenous peoples perspectives to the development of Canada's approach at NASCO on an annual basis.
- Participate in local, regional, and national Atlantic salmon consultation processes that matter to your organization and/or community.

Non-Government Organizations

- Get organized through your local watershed group or in your community and consider aligning your organizational programming, strategies, and reporting with Restore, Maintain, Thrive so that your actions can contribute to its annual reporting and review cycle.
- Explore and apply for funding for project that support the implementation of the Strategy through various DFO Grants and Contribution funding, or through the FCAS annual funding program.
- Participate in the networking and partnership forums facilitated through the FCAS, including: provincial salmon roundtables or advisory committees, provincial symposia, or interprovincial symposia.
- Get trained in the First Nations Principles of OCAP³ (ownership, control, access, and possession) and open data sharing, to improve your organization's understanding and management of data and knowledge according to best practices. Be open to others also sharing their knowledge and perspectives to support strong partnerships and collaborations.
- Stay informed and participate in future engagement opportunities that support achievement of the Strategy's outcomes; for example, the development of stocking policy guidance.
- Learn about Indigenous history, Treaties and Rights, the UN Declaration, and the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports](#), along with its 94 [Calls to Action](#). See how you can further advance reconciliation, adopt a two-eyed seeing approach, and engage with your local Indigenous community.

Individuals

- Support, advocate and participate through your local watershed group, provincial salmon association, or other organizations that share your vision and can help keep you informed Atlantic salmon.
- Practice responsible angling by learning and practicing safe catch-and-release techniques, photography techniques, and by staying informed and respecting local warm water and/or environmental protocols.
- Learn about Indigenous history, Treaties and Rights, the UN Declaration, and the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports](#), along with its 94 [Calls to Action](#).

8.0 Implementation lifecycle

Recognizing that priorities, resources, and the needs of Atlantic salmon will change over the next 12 years of the Strategy, opportunities for periodic review have been built into its implementation lifecycle: every four years the Strategy will be reviewed in collaboration with Indigenous peoples and the Atlantic salmon community, to ensure its relevancy over the long-term. Status reporting every two years will allow progress to be measured against its strategic outcomes and outputs. The status report will measure the progress made towards each output using specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timebound performance indicators that will be set based on current activities, future opportunities, and the capacity of DFO, Indigenous peoples, and the Atlantic salmon community. DFO will make a callout

³ First Nations Principles of OCAP: [The First Nations Principles of OCAP® - The First Nations Information Governance Centre \(fnigc.ca\)](#)

for Indigenous peoples and the broader Atlantic salmon community to add their progress to these reports.

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