

SAEN Newsletter
February 2023



Welcome to 2023 SAEN supporters!

Many things have been happening so we thought it was a good time to do another update and fill you in. Since Covid hit our shores in 2020 things have been far from “normal”. With the ever-changing challenges of Covid and other respiratory ailments, it has been difficult to carry on with our normal social events that so many members enjoy, and that are also critical to our fundraising efforts. As many of you know, we did manage to complete two on-line auctions via Facebook in 2022 and that does help a little bit. But we are really missing the social interactions. But we are very happy to announce that this Spring we are going to go back to having a live dinner and auction. It will be Saturday, April 29th at the Legion ballroom in Pleasantville. We are just in the early stages of planning but things are moving along. Stay tuned in the coming week(s) for more details on the event via our Facebook page and member emails. We of course always welcome donations of items in support of the Auction. Should you wish to contribute a donation, please contact any Board member or our office (info@saen.org or 722-9300).

Of course, as we are now in the new year, it is that time for our annual membership drive. We know times are tough and we certainly appreciate all who have taken memberships and renewed over the years. If not already done, there are several ways that new or renewed memberships can be completed:

- Contacting the SAEN office at the coordinates listed above (note that our office administrator only works part time so responses may be delayed a day or two).
- Via a link on our website that can be accessed here <https://www.saen.org/membership.html>
- Our friends at Atlantic Rivers Outfitting on Water Street, St. John’s have generously offered to make it possible to do your membership at their store as well.

We greatly appreciate the support of our members and your membership is very important to the overall cause. There is strength in numbers and that strength is very important when we are at the table with government talking about the many issues that challenge Atlantic salmon and having a healthy, sustainable fishery for current and future generations.

What Do You Think?

SAEN, like other groups, has a Board of Directors that plays an administrative management role, including financial issues and representation of the group in public, with decision makers and to other like groups. The members of SAEN, however, can and should have the opportunity to contribute to the association's activities, offer their input with respect to making suggestions for the Board to consider and their input to Board decision processes on specific issues, as appropriate. To facilitate this process, it is proposed that the minutes of Board meetings be circulated, to all Board members for their information, prior to the next Board meeting. The members of SAEN undoubtedly represent a source of much knowledge, many ideas and expertise in various areas that could benefit the group as a whole if presented for consideration. Input into this proposal and on subsequent issues should be forwarded to Board members as you see fit. You may not want to participate in this way and that is ok but if you do, tell us what you think!

SAEN in action

With coming of Spring, inevitably there is always a new surge of misinformation about SAEN's position on salmon retention and the practice of catch release in the Province. This year's annual campaign seemed to focus on spreading false information/ conclusions regarding the recently released NL government Catch & Release study. Our President was quick to write in a rebuttal to that letter and addressed the facts point by point. We were fortunate this year to have the study lead, Blair Adams, make a presentation on the study at our 2022 AGM on April 12th, which seemed to be well received by attendees.

Of course, the other never-ending battle is with the aquaculture industry. We have been involved in supporting a few court challenges, which have been successful. Sadly, the government just keeps on plugging away in rolling out the red carpet. We are keeping a close eye on how things are unfolding in Placentia Bay, and to no one's surprise we are seeing things being done at Grieg that are contrary to what was identified in the Environmental Impact Statement that government quickly ushered through approvals. And now we have real threats that the industry may expand westward on the south coast. Future challenges are no doubt possible with the way things are done. To be clear, contrary to industry messaging, SAEN is not opposed to aquaculture. We in fact recognize that it is a critical part of the world's food security. What we do expect though is an aquaculture industry that practices in a safe and environmentally sustainable manner. We are sure that we don't need to tell you all that this is not what we believe to be happening in this Province and despite setbacks we have to keep fighting the battle for the sake of wild salmon populations.

In what may seem like a rare big win, SAEN Board member Barry Fordham along with some of his colleagues were successful in lobbying for an extension of the river guardian contracts later into the season this year. Hopefully it is here to stay. Kudos to Barry and friends!

Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation (ASCF)

SAEN representatives attended a workshop put off by the Foundation in Grand Falls in September for the purpose of seeking feedback from various groups on where to best spend funding they commit to wild salmon conservation. Founded in 2007, their mission is to promote enhanced community partnerships in an effort to attain healthy and sustainable wild salmon populations throughout Eastern Canada. Presentations were also given at the workshop on various DFO science initiatives and currently ASCF funded projects such as the Terra Nova River Mollyguajack falls fishway, the Rattling Brook Restoration project and various projects in the Indian Bay ecosystem.

The presentations by DFO salmonid and science sections included:

- Fish passage study on the Exploits River
- The effectiveness of the Rattling Brook restoration
- A proposed 3 year catch and release study on 3 rivers in central NL
- Real time water temperature monitoring
- Work by Dr Sarah Lehnert on the thermal tolerance of salmon and adaptation to climate change
- Work by Dr Ian Bradbury using geonomics to predict responses to climate change in biodiversity
- A proposed 3 year project to begin in 2022 regarding the impacts of sea lice associated with at sea aquaculture on wild salmon (SAEN eagerly awaits the results of this one!!!)

The workshop concluded with two Panel discussions:

1. Conservation planning – addressing NL issues. A discussion of what the key issues are, how they should best be addressed and identification of the shortcomings.
2. Partnerships, Priorities and Planning – the way forward. A discussion of how best to structure partnerships and allocate funding.

Following the ASCF meeting, the Salmon Council of NL held its AGM. SAEN VP Kevin Power stayed on to attend that meeting. The key outcome from the AGM was agreement that SCNL needs to do a renewed look at their strategic plan and how they will continue to support the affiliates in their conservation efforts. This session is currently planned to happen in early Spring 2023.

DFO Inland Compliance and Resource Management Salmon Workshop

This meeting, November 23-24 in Gander, was attended by SAEN Board director Dave Downton. Some of the highlights included:

- **Enforcement activities.** There were 9 DFO special operations, which resulted in two charges. In addition, from routine DFO operations 164 violations were recorded (with a few more pending), which was up from the 2021 number of 154. Improper tagging and netting were the two most common violations. Provincial enforcement officers reported an additional 38 salmon violations and 12 for trout. Miawpuket First Nation also has a river guardian program, although they would like to have more legal authority to enforce all of the regulations.
- **Angler's Guide update.** DFO are proposing to do a major reorganization of the angler's guide to reduce the clutter and improve the layout of it for better readability, more set format, and more use of online tools. One major change is to put all salmon info in one section of the guide, all trout info in another section, and all other species info in another section. They also plan to enhance maps and add color coding to make the info there clearer. DFO was seeking input from user groups about the proposed changes to the guide such as what to leave in, leave out, or change.
- **Resource management update.** It was noted that the 2023 management plan was to be released prior to Christmas season (which it was, with little change from 2022). No surprise to any of us but for environmental protocols it was a bad year with heat and drought resulting in about 60% of our rivers being closed for extended periods this past summer. DFO were given feedback on the inconsistent application of the protocols.
- **Temperature and telemetry.** DFO scientists Travis Van Leuwen and Curtis Pennell have a paper that is currently being finalized for publication called "Consideration for the Use of Warm Water Temperature Closures in Recreational Atlantic Salmon Catch and Release Fisheries". It was observed that morning angling water temps were usually about 1.7 degrees C lower than average daily water temp. Using morning angling only (to 10 AM) reduced angling in water temps over 20 degrees C by 64%. Coupled with Curtis Pennell's telemetry data, they calculated a mortality rate of 0.4% to 2.6% over all protocols.
- **Introgression of European Salmon DNA into Wild Atlantic Salmon In Southern Newfoundland.** DFO biologist Ian Bradbury has published a recent paper documenting that escape events of farmed salmon are still occurring on a regular basis, which cause continued threats to at risk wild salmon stocks worldwide. On Newfoundland's south coast a lot of first generation salmon hybrids showed up in 2014 because of a major farmed salmon escape years earlier which resulted in some interbreeding of those fish with wild salmon in local rivers. There have been less in the years since. He noted the bigger the difference between wild salmon and farmed salmon, the bigger the impact will be on wild stocks. In 2021 in the Canadian Maritime provinces, they analyzed 186 fish and some had at least 10 % European ancestry. Further sampling of salmon from Conne and Long Harbour Rivers in Newfoundland showed significant introgression of European ancestry salmon genes from those fish. European gene introgression will probably have a much greater negative effect on the North American wild salmon stocks than if it was only gene introgression from farmed North American stock.

- **Current and Future Catch and Release Research by NL Government.** They plan studies on salmon relating to:

- 1) movement and behaviour
- 2) habitat selection
- 3) survival of offspring from angled fish released.

They are using radio telemetry from tags on salmon for a lot of current work on C & R effects. The data is not all tabulated yet so info is very preliminary at this point and not ready for release.

In conclusion, a little story to get us thinking about the joys of summer!

A Memorable Day on the Conne River

Early in the summer of 1976, I had just turned 21 and I was working as a summer student with DFO in St. John's. But by late June the call of the Conne River was too hard for me to resist so I took a day off to start my drive there. I wanted to have one day fishing before the many weekend anglers got there on Friday afternoon so I left St. John's Thursday evening, June 24 and drove to my mother's place in Lewisporte for that night. This was back in the days when I was still getting up early to try and get a good fishing spot; I haven't done that in 35 years. After a few hours' sleep I got up early the next morning and drove on the TCH to the Bay D'Espoir highway and then south, arriving at the trailhead to the Dashwood area of Conne River at 4 AM. The Dashwood Steady is a long, wide and slow-moving part of the river that has decent fishing but the head of it and the area above that is faster and provides better fishing in many places. I walked the half hour trail to the river and saw it was running at a normal level on this cloudy day. There were only 14 anglers fishing this productive one kilometer section of the river this morning, which often had up to 50 rods on it in the past when I was here. This year the daily retention limit was 4 salmon of any size. Almost no one released salmon back in those days.

Although Conne River salmon were generally small grilse averaging 3 pounds in weight, they readily took large white winged flies under good fishing conditions. I tied on a #4 White Blue Gray, a fly of mine with a big white calf tail wing, blue under hackle, and silver body that somewhat resembles a Silver Grey. I

started fishing the vacant head of the Steady at 430 AM. Ten minutes later I rose a fish and on the next cast hooked it. After a fine tussle I beached the shiny 3 ½ pounder, a wonderful start to the day. I put the fish in a cool pool of water at the riverside and resumed fishing in the same area. Half an hour later I rose another fish and on the next cast I hooked it, playing out and beaching a fresh 3 pounder. After a short break I waded back out to the same area to try again. It took a bit longer this time but an hour later I rose another salmon. And again, on the next cast, the salmon took the same fly, and 4 minutes later I had a fresh 2 ¾ pounder on the beach. It was about 730 AM and I took a break. A guy I knew from the Lewisporte area was walking by and stopped to look at the 3 shiny fish in the storage pool; he was impressed. I gave him one of my White Blue Grays and walked down below Dashwood Steady with him to a spot he knew that I was not familiar with. He took the tail of the nice-looking pool and I decided to try in the center of it with the same fly in size 6. I was only fishing for 2 minutes when a salmon inhaled the fly and jumped; I saw it was huge by Conne River standards. It made several big runs and jumps before I beached it, a fresh 6 ½ pounder. It was by far the biggest salmon I ever caught in the Conne. I had my 4 fish limit retained before 9 o'clock in the morning, the only day in my life when the daily retention limit was 4 salmon that I did that, a spectacular day of fishing for me. I intended to fish Saturday so I hung around the river and observed other anglers today until 2 PM. By then, out of the 14 anglers fishing this area, 12 had retained 4 salmon each while the other 2 had kept 2 salmon each. It was phenomenal fishing, a wonderful memory from a different time. The last year I fished there was for 2 days in 1991 with no hookups, the first year the run there crashed. Sadly, because of the sorry state of the run there now, I will probably never fish it ever again. I learned how to salmon fish on the Conne in the late 1960s in the company of my father. It is a beautiful river that was teeming with small salmon up to the late 1980s and it holds many pleasant memories for me.

Tight lines all,

Dave Downton