

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



Conseil du Saumon Nouveau Brunswick
C.P 533, Fredericton, NB, E3B 5A6

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Editor
Telegraph Journal
P.O. Box 2350
210 Crown St.
Saint John, NB E2L3V8

Via e-mail: tjletters@brunswicknews.com; opinion@brunswicknews.com

Dear Sir / Madam:

RE: NB Salmon Council Response to Sept. 14 Telegraph Journal Editorial: Time to Sell Larry's Gulch

The New Brunswick Salmon Council (NBSC) wishes to comment on the future of Larry's Gulch, the classic provincially-owned fishing lodge on the Restigouche River. The lodge was intended to serve as an idyllic setting in which to promote the province to potential outside investors. The comfortable accommodations and excellent service at the lodge itself partially contribute to the value of Larry's Gulch. However, the *raison d'être* for the existence of the operation at the Larry's Gulch site lies in the excellent fishing quality for Atlantic salmon that is afforded by the adjacent stretch of the Restigouche River. The wild Atlantic salmon, and the sport fishery for it, are NB icons for which the province is world-renown. Without the excellent salmon fishing that is provided exclusively to guests at the lodge, Larry's Gulch would generate virtually zero revenue.

The article states that Larry's Gulch is a money-losing operation. Using the cost figure which has been given as \$300,000 per year, and the revenue figures for the years 2003-4 to 2014-15 as listed in an article by Adam Huras in the February 20, 2015 Moncton Times & Transcript, we have calculated that, from 2003-4 to 2014-15, Larry's Gulch incurred an average annual deficit of only \$14,000.00. This is a pittance when taking into account the salaries, local purchases, possible spin-off benefits to the Province, and the financial benefits received by the charities and other volunteer groups who have received trips for auctions, raffles etc. To get a true picture of the revenue stream, one needs to address the reasons why some years produce a deficit and others don't.

The referenced article, along with previous articles in other Brunswick News publications, are intended to gain public support for the complete privatization of the Larry's Gulch infrastructure including the river lease. The NBSC is particularly opposed to the privatization of any water that is currently publicly owned. Article 1 of our policy on the privatization of public fishing rights is: "The New Brunswick Salmon Council is opposed to the sale, conveyance, trade, barter, exchange or lease (renewable or on-renewable), exceeding 20 years, of Crown Angling Rights or Public Waters, by any Department of the New Brunswick Government".

Public-access fishing is practically non-existent on the Restigouche River. Currently, only 3% of the entire length of the Restigouche is Crown Open Water available to anglers. The remainder of it is tied up in Private Water, Crown Leases, Crown Reserves and Crown Closed reaches. Fish and wildlife in the province are collectively a common property resource - owned by the citizens of the province. The public therefore should be consulted on any decisions affecting the future of Larry's Gulch, particularly the fishing lease.



Perhaps, like other stretches of the Restigouche, the Larry's Gulch river reach could be converted to a regular Crown Reserve stretch, access to which is assigned in a public lottery. Of course, given normal Crown Reserve daily rate charges, and as asserted above, the value of the lodge and its property would then be reduced to practically nothing. Without money for maintenance, the buildings, except for a few retained to serve as basic Crown Reserve accommodations, would have to be demolished as was done with the former Red Bank Lodge downstream on the Restigouche. This would be tragic.

The subsidized arrangement at Larry's Gulch provides some opportunity for public access, but, we agree, at prohibitive cost for most. We advocate increasing the subsidy so that the cost for a two-or-three-day trip would fit the budget of average New Brunswickers. Perhaps a few days could even be reserved for the facility's original intent – to promote the province to outside interests. The subsidy for such an arrangement would of necessity be greater than at present, but with competent management, and a modest increase in daily fees over those charged for regular Crown Reserve stretches, the losses could be limited, and as stated previously would be offset by benefits to the provincial economy. Such an annual deficit would be a drop in the bucket in terms of the provincial budget, and would generate goodwill among the populace.

Whatever the arrangement, we oppose the transfer of public fishing water to private interests, and advocate that more private salmon fishing water be converted to public access.

Sincerely,

John Pugh
President, NB Salmon Council