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NB Salmon Council calls for dam removal, river restoration

Logical consequence of NB Power's Consultation on the Future of the Mactaquac Dam and the Canadian Rivers Institute's Recommendations for Fish Passage

Fredericton -The New Brunswick Salmon Council (NBSC) is encouraged by the results of NB Power's public consultation on the future of the Mactaquac Dam. They note that more than 10,000 people responded, and that the environment was picked as the top overall priority, with cost concerns a close second.

The NBSC maintains that removing the dam and restoring the river is the best option for fish, wildlife, and the ecosystem, and is the only sensible course of action from the perspective of cost.

They note that there are at least nine sea-run fish species that require upstream and downstream passage at the dam. There are also three other dams (Beechwood, Tobique Narrows and Tinker) in the upper St. John River system, dams at which many of these species require assisted passage, or the benefits of effective fish passage at the Mactaquac Dam are greatly discounted.

The NBSC asserts that fish passage must not only occur physically, but that fish have to arrive at specific locations on time so that they can meet their environmentally-established migration schedules. For example, the NBSC references Department of Fisheries and Oceans' publications that contend that Atlantic salmon smolts (young salmon) travelling downstream from the Tobique River on their way to the Labrador Sea must move past the tip of Nova Scotia by early July or they become trapped in the Bay of Fundy by a mass of warming water. They also point to studies commissioned by NB Power that have shown that, on average, smolts travelling downstream through the Mactaquac headpond in the Spring take two weeks longer to complete their journey than they would under free-flow conditions. It is obvious according to the NBSC that this likely-fatal delay would have to be addressed under any fish passage plan for options that maintain the Mactaquac headpond.

The NBSC acknowledges the Canadian Rivers Institute's plan and capital cost estimates for fish passage solutions, but they assume that these interventions would be implemented at the Mactaquac Dam site only. The NBSC questions whether the \$100 million order-of-magnitude cost estimate for this plan includes the aforementioned additional impacts on fish passage. The NBSC contends that, even if marginally acceptable fish passage were achieved at the Mactaquac Dam, the additional cost to address cumulative impacts might make any option that maintains the headpond financially prohibitive.

The NBSC maintains that it would be better to achieve acceptable fish passage by removing the dam and spending money elsewhere where environmental mitigation cost is much lower. They suggest that meeting public expectations for environmental stewardship is not feasible, and probably not even possible if the Mactaquac Dam is not removed.

The New Brunswick Salmon Council (NBSC) is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization, dedicated to protecting wild Atlantic salmon and supporting restoration and enhancement activity on all watersheds in New Brunswick (NB). The NBSC is comprised of, and represents 31 affiliated salmon angling/conservation organizations throughout New Brunswick, and the NBSC is itself affiliated with the Atlantic Salmon Federation.

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