



## Submission to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans as part of the consultation on Canada's Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy

Presented by the Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique (FQSA)  
The Quebec Outfitters Federation (QOF) and  
The Société des établissements de plein-air du Québec (Sépaq)

April 29, 2022



## **1. A Collective Work**

The salmon world in Quebec has a wide variety of stakeholders and organizations. The Fédération québécoise pour le saumon atlantique (FQSA) is responsible for Atlantic salmon conservation issues in Quebec and is among the organizations recognized by the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP) as key partners, along with the Quebec Outfitters Federation (QOF) and the Société des établissements de plein-air du Québec (Sépaq). In the context of writing this submission, the FQSA additionally surveyed outfitters for recreational Atlantic salmon angling (represented by the QOF) and all salmon fishing management delegates (NPOs). The Fédération des Chasseurs et Pêcheurs du Québec (FédéCP) was also included in the discussions.

## 2. Executive Summary

Quebec's management system for Atlantic salmon incorporates many distinctive aspects. First, the Management Plan of the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP) serves as a solid foundation allowing a "river by river" approach, supported by the collaboration and commitment of local partners, such as river management organizations (represented by the FQSA), outfitters (represented by the QOF and FQSA) and the Sépaq. In addition, the engagement of these parties translates into an important mobilization of anglers, also represented by the FQSA, who are another essential link in the protection and conservation of Atlantic salmon populations.

As part of the review of Canada's Atlantic salmon conservation policy, we were consulted by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) on three subjects:

- Collaboration, strategic planning, and funding

Canada's wild Atlantic salmon conservation policy is a sound policy, with strong objectives, based on guiding principles supported by the FQSA. The focus is on making the policy more structured and effective, rather than on making new provisions for the policy itself. Moreover, this "flexible and reactive" policy is considered quite ambitious and proactive, by insisting not only on the need to have adequate and coherent regional management plans, but also by emphasizing the need to develop longer term conservation and restoration plans for salmon populations and their ecosystems.

Funding is indeed an important component in implementing a strategic plan for the conservation and restoration of salmon populations. It is essential to have an overall long-term vision, but also a short- to medium-term perspective in order to provide a substantial effort to significantly increase salmon populations. **The FQSA estimates requirements of at least \$50 million over the course of 20 years for Quebec to develop and implement a strategic plan for the conservation and restoration of Atlantic salmon populations.** The long-term vision will have to be developed in parallel over a more extended time frame.

These regional programs must be developed with non-governmental stakeholders and organizations that represent the community in order to adequately respond to specific needs and priorities, while remaining flexible:

- Integrated and strategic action plan for the conservation and restoration of salmon populations, both in terms of habitat restoration, habitat connectivity, habitat protection, and the adaptation to climate change (long and short term)
- Includes major projects, community projects, scientific research, citizen science, communication, outreach, and awareness.
- Accessibility to programs for all stakeholders involved in conservation (national organizations, river managers, outfitters and Sépaq)
- Federal and provincial government involvement
- First Nations involvement

While the implementation of such projects, programs and strategic plans presents management, collaboration and communication challenges, the FQSA, with its expertise and status, is a valuable partner for initiatives related to Atlantic salmon conservation in the province of Quebec. The FQSA can also be an important contributor at the national and international levels in support of the Government of Canada.

### **3. Quebec's Atlantic Salmon Management System**

One of the major characteristics of Quebec is that the management of sport fishing is delegated from the federal government down to the provincial government. By virtue of this delegation of power, the Quebec government has created, since the 1940s, structured wildlife territories (controlled harvesting zones (ZECs), wildlife reserves, etc.). The management of these territories is then delegated from the Ministère des Forêts, de la Faune et des Parcs (MFFP) to local non-profit organizations or to the Sépaq. The agreements that are signed between these organizations enable them to generate revenues through the sale of rights of access, but also through other activities or the rental of accommodations. In addition, they also carry specific duties and responsibilities. In the case of Atlantic salmon, the organizations delegated with the management of the sport fishery must generally conduct salmon counts, operate infrastructures such as fishways, collect various data (length/weight of salmon, DNA samples, etc.). It is also important to mention the significant involvement of outfitters (with and without exclusive rights), who are an essential link in the development and conservation of Quebec's Atlantic salmon and who, in many cases, have equally important responsibilities with respect to the implementation of the MFFP's Management Plan. The MFFP recognizes the FQSA as the leader in matters regarding salmon among its national partners, and acknowledges the leading role played by the QOF and Sépaq in these matters.

The MFFP has also implemented the 2016-2026 Atlantic Salmon Management Plan. This plan is based on scientific knowledge and uses an approach based on local knowledge and expertise, generally referred to as the "river by river" approach, which is recognized internationally. The Atlantic salmon stewards represent a strong network of non-profit organizations, outfitters and a Crown corporation that has a proven track record of ensuring the conservation and sustainable development of Atlantic salmon and its rivers.

The Quebec system represents a tremendous success story of integrated sustainable development that respects the principle of subsidiarity, including the relationship between government and regional organizations/companies, information sharing, broad involvement of local communities, development of self-sustaining operations, respect for century-old traditions, conservation of the natural environment, and a high degree of acceptability of the governance and rights allocation system.

### **4. The Quebec Federation for Atlantic Salmon (FQSA)**

The Quebec Federation for Atlantic Salmon (QFAS) is a non-profit organization created in 1984 to bring together and represent the interests of all salmon stakeholders in Quebec. The conservation and protection of Atlantic salmon is at the heart of its mission, as it is a prerequisite to another major axis of its mission, which is to promote sustainable and ethical sport fishing. Uniting all salmon river management organizations as well as close to 1200 individual members, the FQSA represents the interests of its members from management organizations, sport anglers, indigenous communities and organizations, salmon outfitters as well as any other group with an interest in the conservation and management of Atlantic salmon. It represents not only the 12,000 salmon fishermen, but also, in a more global way, all the stakeholders who have at heart the safeguarding of the salmonid environments and the salmon resource.

The FQSA also manages several programs. The Programme de mise en valeur des habitats du saumon atlantique de la Côte-Nord, which was completed in 2020, and the Société saumon de

la rivière Romaine represent more than \$30M invested by Hydro-Québec as part of the compensation agreements following the construction of the Romaine hydroelectric dams. These programs are administered in close collaboration with the Quebec government (Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte aux changements climatiques (MELCC) and MFFP) and benefit from a specific governance. The FQSA also oversees the salmon portion of the 2017-2023 Salmon and Sport Fishing Development Plan (PDPS), which is the result of investments made by the MFFP, the co-manager of the plan. Nearly \$12 million has been invested in a support program for infrastructures and accessibility, as well as in supporting the operations of salmon fishing delegate organizations, and in several projects to promote sport fishing, awareness and training. This plan is being renewed with more than \$4M in investments for the 2022-2025 period.

The FQSA promotes sport fishing as a valuable tool for the conservation and protection of Atlantic salmon, and advocates for local community management of the resource, consistent with the “river by river” management approach unique to Quebec. In addition to allowing for optimal management of stocks, this approach also allows the Federation to make Atlantic salmon a real lever for sustainable economic development, both regionally and nationally. The Federation’s angler members and affiliates, whether they are from businesses, community organizations or municipalities, are essential to the structure of the federation and the management of the resource and allow for extensive communication and the mobilization of the community. River management organizations also ensure a continuous presence over the territory, providing an important collection of data.

The FQSA is also actively involved in major issues and scientific projects, particularly regarding climate change adaptation, and integrated resource and land management at the watershed scale. Concrete projects are orchestrated around themes such as forest management, characterization and protection of vulnerable Atlantic salmon habitats, restoration of riverbanks, freeing the passage of salmon to enhance migration, and monitoring of river temperatures, to name a few examples. The FQSA is also a partner in the Interuniversity Atlantic Salmon Research Centre (CIRSA).

Through its affiliation with the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF) and its partnership with the Atlantic Salmon Conservation Foundation (ASCF), which serves the northeastern U.S. states and Atlantic Canada, the FQSA is also involved in North American and international management of Atlantic salmon. It is recognized as a non-governmental organization by the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), which includes all the coastal countries of the Atlantic Ocean.

## **5. The Quebec Outfitters Federation**

The Quebec Outfitters Federation (QOF) was created in 1948. It has over 300 member outfitters, many of which offer salmon fishing. This non-profit organization’s mission is to represent and promote the collective interests of its members. Its main objective is to provide outfitters with the tools they need to manage their business and offer expertise and support in various areas such as integrated resource management and administration. It also manages important government programs and helps develop partnerships in the recreation and tourism sector, even stretching internationally.

Outfitters who offer salmon fishing opportunities are often involved in the implementation of the MFFP's Atlantic Salmon Management Plan, particularly through their activities in monitoring salmon populations and protecting the territory. The QOF works closely with the FQSA in representing Quebec salmon outfitters.

## **6. The Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (Sépaq)**

The Sépaq is a government corporation that reports to the Minister of Forests, Wildlife and Parks (MFFP). Its purpose is to administer, operate and develop, for the benefit of all Quebecers, the recreational and tourist facilities and territories entrusted to it by the Government of Québec. Sépaq operates 46 establishments, including 23 national parks, 1 marine park, 13 wildlife reserves, Sépaq Anticosti and 8 tourist establishments in 15 administrative regions, and provides employment to more than 3,500 people. Sépaq manages and develops most of the establishments under its responsibility in consultation with regional authorities. It reinvests all the profits generated by its operations in its territories.

The Sépaq manages the salmon fishery on the territories that are entrusted to it. Sépaq Anticosti manages salmon fishing on four rivers on Anticosti Island. Anticosti National Park also has a salmon river, the Vauréal River, but fishing is prohibited there. Sépaq manages salmon fishing on the Port-Daniel River, which is located in the Port-Daniel Wildlife Reserve. Two salmon rivers cross the territory of Réserve faunique Port-Cartier-Sept-Iles. Fishing in this reserve is managed in collaboration with local partners. More recently, Sépaq was entrusted with the management of the Seigneurie de la Rivière-de-la-Madeleine, which also has a salmon river, the Madeleine River.

## **7. Recommendations on the Conservation Policy for Wild Atlantic Salmon in Canada**

Canada's wild Atlantic salmon conservation policy is based on guiding principles and objectives supported by the FQSA. The focus is on the efficient implementation of the policy through concrete actions and structure, rather than the policy itself. Furthermore, this "flexible and responsive" policy can be more ambitious and proactive, emphasizing not only the need for adequate and coherent regional management systems, but also the need to develop conservation and restoration plans for salmon populations and their ecosystems.

### **Effective Collaboration Among All Stakeholders**

Effective collaboration is a key to success in implementing large-scale action plans and strategies. Having a system in which information flows, data is available at no cost, and all stakeholders can contribute is essential.

Some steps to strengthen collaboration include:

- Build on communications
- Organize information sharing
- Define and consolidate stakeholder roles and responsibilities
- Strengthen governance
- Decentralization

- Build on existing provincial organizations
- Mandatory appointment of one representative from Quebec and one from the Atlantic Provinces to NASCO for Canada

Barriers to better collaboration to ensure salmon conservation include:

- Geographic distance
- Lack of information or poorly defined roles and responsibilities of stakeholders
- Multiplication of similar initiatives
- Sustainability of organizations and succession

Here are some examples of actions to improve communications:

- Create appropriate forums
- Identify key players to deliver common messages
- Adopt an asymmetrical approach
- Harmonize the topics of discussion
- Strengthen collaboration between First Nations and non-indigenous organizations (government and non-government)

### **A Strategic Approach to Atlantic Salmon Conservation**

The development of a long-term vision as well as a short to medium term approach is necessary. Indeed, strong, strategic, and structured action must be taken now to strengthen and enhance Atlantic salmon populations. The timeline for such action is important and could take a minimum of 10 years. However, a 20-year time frame would be more appropriate considering that it represents nearly four life cycles of Atlantic salmon. Indeed, this time frame allows for an interesting follow-up and the possibility of seeing concrete patterns. These actions must also be perpetuated by a much longer-term plan in order to reinforce our present actions. The approach must also allow for cyclical re-evaluation and flexibility.

Quebec benefits from an adequate Atlantic Salmon Management Plan, which has allowed, among other things, a decrease in the retention of salmon being caught by more than 50% since 2016. What we need now is to strengthen the conservation and recovery of our salmon populations, through an ambitious strategic plan, with the same “river by river” approach, so that this plan is integrated into the complex framework of Atlantic salmon management in Quebec.

These are, in our opinion, the most important issues for the protection and conservation of salmon and their habitat in Quebec:

- Involvement of local stakeholders at the front of governmental decision-making processes
- Continuous and updated data collection
- Local decision-making in response to local challenges (decentralization)
- Determined and standardized objectives
- Monitoring and assessment of programs and projects results
- Monitoring of data and knowledge about salmon and their rivers (e.g., population counts, control rivers)
- Flexibility to allow for strategic adaptation



DFO's role in a more strategic approach to the protection and conservation of salmon and their habitat could involve:

- Ensuring communication and synergy among the various federal departments involved (e.g., Environment Canada, Transport Canada)
- Financial resources
- Regulatory tools
- Technical and human resources
- Supporting data sharing
- Support national collaboration and coordination
- Supporting research
- Provide leadership on Atlantic salmon ocean mortality issues
- Develop services and support for provincial organizations

Le rôle de la FQSA pourrait inclure :

- Strategic advice
- Scientific expertise on salmon conservation issues and strategy (provincial, national, international)
- Project coordination and management/program management
- Accompanying local organizations/businesses/suppliers
- Increased collaboration with First Nations
- Relations with Quebec stakeholders, including the MFFP, wildlife federations (QOF, Sépaq, and others) and academic researchers
- Communication, awareness, promotion

### **Access to funding for Atlantic salmon conservation**

The Government of Canada and, more specifically, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Coast Guard have substantial funding and means to adopt a global strategy for actions in Eastern Canada. However, the main difficulties lie in the communication and the sharing of information as well as the access to funding for all potential beneficiaries.

Given that the nature of the projects impacting conservation and protection of the species appeals to several departments of government, it may be appropriate to establish or identify government resources specific to Atlantic salmon in order to assist community organizations in navigating through the available funding programs. In addition, all Government of Canada programs that can serve as leverage to achieve certain objectives should be identified and included in the strategic approach. For example, the inclusion of actions from compensation programs would promote targeted interventions that are consistent with the identified needs.

Funding through these various programs should also be accessible to all salmon river delegates, regardless of their status. As a Crown corporation, Sépaq is often ineligible for the different programs that are offered. It is imperative that Sépaq be able to access the funding available for the protection and restoration of salmon populations on the territory and the rivers it manages.



In terms of financial requirements, the FQSA estimates that, for Quebec alone, funding in the order of \$50M over 20 years will be required, via federal programs, to enable the implementation of the following elements:

- Development and implementation of an integrated and strategic action plan for the restoration and conservation of salmon populations (short- and long-term), both in terms of habitat restoration, development and protection, habitat connectivity, and adaptation to climate change, using a “watershed by watershed”.
- Inclusion of major projects, community projects, scientific research, participatory science, communication, education and awareness, newcomers and the next generation.
- Examples of eligible projects/themes: Restoration of river ecosystems and natural water dynamics, habitat development, restoration/improvement of salmon passage (including dam removal, restoration of problematic culverts and bridges, fishways, etc.), improvement of knowledge of water dynamics, protection of habitats from pressures such as erosion, shoreline restoration (revegetation, rock-filling and de-filling, etc.), habitat characterization, recognition of all Atlantic salmon habitats (regardless of life stage), fish stocking, implementation of solutions for land use issues, development and implementation of climate change adaptation plans, protection of thermal refuges, scientific research, etc.

**While the implementation of such projects, programs and strategic plans presents management, collaboration and communication challenges, the FQSA, with its expertise and status, is a partner of choice for action in the province of Quebec with respect to Atlantic salmon conservation.**

## **8. Conclusion**

The Atlantic salmon is an emblematic species of our rivers, an indicator of the health and soundness of the ecosystems which shelter it, whose ecological, cultural, spiritual and socio-economic value is indisputable. Its status as a great migratory species means that an exceptionally rich and diverse ecosystem can be protected from the river out into the ocean.

DFO can provide leadership on international issues related to Atlantic salmon conservation, such as salmon ocean mortality rates that have increased in recent decades. A horizontal approach by the government with its multiple departments within the Government of Canada will provide the overall vision that is essential to harmonize policy actions. This global vision must also include knowledge and involvement at the provincial level, so that our actions are collectively coherent between the territories. It must therefore be an actor of synergy, open communication and information sharing with provincial organizations.

Quebec has its own particularities that must be taken into consideration in the development of programs and actions. The MFFP and the entire network of national organizations present on the Table Nationale Faune, as well as regional organizations, including river management organizations, salmon outfitters and Sépaq, represent a formidable example of land governance and successful integrated sustainable development based on science and local knowledge.

Program and project funding are essential. It is important to decentralize decision-making and to include the involvement of local partners in the development and management of programs as well as in establishing local or provincial priorities.

While the implementation of such projects, programs and strategic plans present management, collaborative and communication challenges, the FQSA, with its expertise and status, is a partner of choice for action in the province of Quebec on the conservation of Atlantic salmon.

## **9. Summary of Recommendations**

**Establish a system where information flows, data is available at no cost, and all stakeholders can contribute;**

**Adopt a long-term vision of 100 years and a short-term approach of 20 years;**

**Adopt a “river by river” approach to salmon conservation and restoration in partnership with stakeholders and to assure accessibility for all potential beneficiaries;**

**Establish or identify government resources specific to Atlantic salmon;**

**Include all Canadian government programs that can be leveraged to achieve the objectives in the strategic plan;**

**Allocate \$50 million to Atlantic salmon conservation over 20 years for Quebec.**