

Atlantic Salmon . . . and the Endangered Species Act (ESA)

The ESA protects wild Atlantic salmon in Maine rivers and streams from the lower Kennebec River north to the U.S./Canada border. This includes the Dennys, East Machias, Machias, Pleasant, Narraguagus, Ducktrap and Sheepscot rivers, and Cove Brook.

Why Salmon Need Protection

In 2000, only 75 to 110 adult salmon returned to these rivers to spawn. Biologists estimate this is less than ten percent of the spawners needed for long-term survival of wild salmon in Maine rivers.

What ESA Listing Means

No Takes

It is a violation of federal law to “take” endangered salmon. “Take” means “to harass, harm, pursue, trap, capture or collect.”

Consultations

Federal projects and actions that might cause a “take” must be reviewed by the federal agencies responsible for protecting salmon (NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). A review is also required for any activity that involves federal funding or federal permits. These reviews are often referred to as “consultations” or “Section 7 consultations.”

Recovery Plan

NOAA Fisheries and the USFWS must develop a recovery plan to rebuild the wild Atlantic salmon population to a level that no longer requires ESA protection. The recovery plan must address potential threats such as disease, escaped aquaculture salmon (which can interbreed with wild salmon and compete for food or habitat), predation, and destruction or modification of salmon habitat.



Recovery Activities

Federal and state agencies such as the Atlantic Salmon Commission and other organizations are conducting an ambitious research program to better understand the threats to salmon survival. These programs study salmon in all phases of their lives, in freshwater and saltwater habitats. The agencies and other partners including the aquaculture industry are also conducting “river-specific” stocking programs in which endangered salmon are raised in hatcheries or off shore pens and then stocked back into their natal rivers.

Conservation of Atlantic salmon is not solely a job for the government. Successful conservation depends to a large extent on the work of local groups and private citizens. Groups of dedicated individuals, such as the Sheepscot Watershed Council, provide a crucial link between federal and state

management agencies and local communities. Watershed Councils perform essential tasks such as providing site specific information about land use practices, stream conditions, and habitat threats and restoration needs. The councils also provide vital education and outreach services that help build greater public awareness and support for recovery activities.

For More Information

Information about Atlantic salmon and the ESA is available online:
www.nero.nmfs.gov/atsalmon/

If you would like to help conserve Atlantic salmon, contact:
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