

Eastern Shore salmon farm proposal morally indefensible

By [JIM GOURLAY](#)



West River Sheet Harbour is backdropped by a newly constructed lime doser that helps normalize the river's acid levels. (TIM KROCHAK / Staff)

That fresh water systems in much of Nova Scotia have suffered devastating damage from acid rain is well known: We just don't talk about it much anymore. Innumerable lakes have been ruined and 14 Atlantic Coast rivers have completely lost their Atlantic salmon, while 20 more have seen salmon runs reduced by up to 90 per cent.

Sweden and Norway have been similarly impacted. Norway spends somewhere north of \$20 million a year successfully treating its priceless rivers, and has pioneered watershed liming. Sweden has done likewise.

Canada has done absolutely nothing to mitigate this environmental disaster.

Frustrated, angry and disillusioned, the 100 per cent volunteer Nova Scotia Salmon Association, with support from the Atlantic Salmon Federation and Northern Pulp, took on a

huge fundraising effort to install Norwegian technology on an acidified Nova Scotia river as a demonstration project.

After seven years of liming, \$600,000 in raised funds, and 18,000 hours of volunteer labour, the pH of West River Sheet Harbour has been normalized, and juvenile Atlantic salmon populations boosted by 300 per cent — so far. Trout are also on the rebound. All good ...

Except the governments of Nova Scotia and Canada now propose to license a marine salmon farm near the Sheet Harbour estuary. It's pretty much a foregone conclusion that the presence of marine cages would utterly sabotage the dedicated work of the NGOs and their volunteers. Why?

- Unnaturally high infestations of sea lice:

In Norway, the salmon runs in 35 rivers were devastated when marine salmon farms were located in adjoining fiords. Blooms of parasitic sea lice traced to the farms decimated wild salmon smolts as they migrated to sea.

In western Scotland, following the expansion of salmon aquaculture in the sea lochs, wild salmon stocks have been in freefall. Salmon farms have been deliberately kept away from the east coast (where wild stocks are improving).

In Ireland, west coast rivers have been similarly impacted and sea lice from salmon farms have been independently verified as the major factor.

In Newfoundland, the only seriously ailing salmon stream on the whole island has a salmon farm near its estuary.

In the inner Bay of Fundy, we have completely lost the salmon runs to 33 rivers coincident with the growth of salmon aquaculture in the outer bay.

In British Columbia, a clear connection has been made between salmon farms, sea lice, and declining runs of pink and coho salmon in those rivers where farms have been sited.

Is anybody seeing a pattern here yet?

Sea lice are becoming resistant to available insecticides and the industry is panicked. Even as its PR machine makes outlandish claims of environmental sustainability, serious charges have been laid in connection with extensive shellfish poisoning in New Brunswick and Maine, allegedly as the result of illegal insecticide use on farmed fish. (Nothing has been proved.)

An industry spokesperson has been quoted as saying Nova Scotia is seeing rapid expansion of salmon aquaculture because the industry is only lightly regulated here. The company proposing to expand on the Eastern Shore is headquartered in Scotland. But Scottish Environment Minister Stewart Stevenson is now speaking openly about banning salmon farms close to salmon rivers.

In Norway, the head of the Directorate for Nature Management has publicly suggested the sea lice situation has become so severe that marine-based salmon aquaculture should be cut in half to protect wild fish.

•Disease:

Salmon farms worldwide have been implicated in the spread of fatal diseases such as furunculosis and infectious salmon anemia (ISA) among wild salmon.

•Escapes:

Global losses of (vastly inferior) genetically manipulated salmon from marine pens now outnumber wild fish populations many times over. Interbreeding results in mass spawning failure and contributes to the decline in wild fish. Some European rivers (and at least one in New Brunswick) host more aquaculture escapes than wild fish.

So why are we repeating others' mistakes? Are we really prepared to sacrifice a major natural resource for 20 low-paying jobs and profits for a foreign company?

That Canadian governments should insipidly ignore an environmental disaster of global proportions is shameful. That those same governments should propose to risk wrecking the efforts of volunteers — to do the job they should have done — is morally indefensible.

The public meeting on the proposed salmon aquaculture sites is scheduled for Monday, Feb. 6, at 6 p.m. at the Sheet Harbour legion.

Jim Gourlay is a past-president of the Nova Scotia Salmon Association and a recipient of the Nova Scotia Lieutenant-Governor's Conservation Award for his work on behalf of wild Atlantic salmon.