

CBC

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Wild salmon numbers in decline along Atlantic coast

The number of wild Atlantic salmon is in steep decline in parts of Nova Scotia. (CBC)

The number of wild Atlantic salmon in rivers along the Atlantic coast is in sharp decline, and may be deemed an endangered species in the region.

The Sackville River is one of 63 in the region known as the Southern Uplands. Those rivers are between Yarmouth and Canso and flow into the Atlantic ocean.

"Some of the rivers have extinct runs now. There's no salmon left," Walter Regan, of the Sackville Rivers Association, said Thursday.

Regan said a big problem continues to be urban development, but perhaps the biggest problem of all is acid rain.

He said the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has failed in trying to keep salmon populations in good shape.

"To me it's a national disgrace. Where is DFO? Why has DFO cut back the Atlantic salmon budget by over 80 per cent since 1994?" Regan said.

"We need DFO, we need the federal government to come back to the table, come back to the rivers, to help the wild Atlantic salmon."



Walter Regan, of the Sackville Rivers Association, says DFO has to do more to protect the wild Atlantic salmon stock. (CBC)

Regan said the government should be looking at more technology like a lime dozer used on the West River near Sheet Harbour. Limestone is put into the river to fight against acid rain and help preserve the proper pH level.

Raymond Plourde, of the Ecology Action Centre in Halifax, said the salmon fishing industry is a valuable asset that needs protection.

"The value of the recreational Atlantic salmon fishery in northern Nova Scotia is worth around the neighbourhood of \$62 million a year to the province," he said.

"If we invested some money into taking care of the Atlantic Coast which is suffering from acid rain, then that money could easily be doubled. So there is a return on investment."

Rivers in other parts of the province aren't suffering from the same problems.

There's less acid rain in northern Nova Scotia and in the Margaree area of Cape Breton. In some areas, salmon are thriving and their numbers are up by 500 per cent.

Scientists from DFO will host a meeting next month in Dartmouth with many of the stakeholders from the Southern Uplands Rivers.

Unless the numbers turn around, it's possible wild Atlantic salmon could be declared endangered in the region.