

Atlantic Salmon Fishery Management Plan

Species Managed Under Fishery Management Plan (FMP)

Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) have a complex life history, going through several distinct phases marked by changes in physiology and behavior. Spawning and juvenile development of Atlantic salmon occur in fresh water streams, with adults undergoing a highly migratory life on the open ocean and returning to fresh water to reproduce. Atlantic salmon in the Gulf of Maine are either migratory stocks, undergoing long ocean migrations, or resident stocks, with more limited ocean migrations. Northern Canadian stocks are residential, while New England stocks tend to be migratory, traveling vast distances across open ocean to return to spawning grounds.

Management Plan Overview

The FMP for Atlantic Salmon was implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service on March 17, 1988, establishing explicit U.S. management authority over all Atlantic salmon of U.S. origin. The plan was intended to complement state salmon management programs in coastal and inland waters and federal management authority over salmon on the high seas which had been conferred to the U.S. as a signatory nation to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO).

The FMP prohibits possession of Atlantic salmon and any directed or incidental (bycatch) commercial fishery for Atlantic salmon in federal waters. The Council's salmon plan strengthens the efforts of local groups, such as the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission, that are working towards the restoration of salmon stocks in New England river systems. There are no existing amendments or framework adjustments to this FMP.

History of the Fishery

The Atlantic salmon fishery expanded during the late 1800s from a reported 183 weirs and nets capturing 7,320 salmon in 1867 to 230 weirs and 36 gillnets capturing over 10,016 salmon in 1880. The catch peaked in 1889 with over 17,000 salmon and began a steady decline during the 20th century, with landings falling to as low as 40 salmon in 1947 (Bigelow & Schroeder, 2002). Because no reporting requirements were established for the fishery, landings data are incomplete. In 1989, all state and federal commercial salmon fisheries in New England were closed by law. Recreational salmon fishing continues in the Gulf of Maine area under strict regulation.

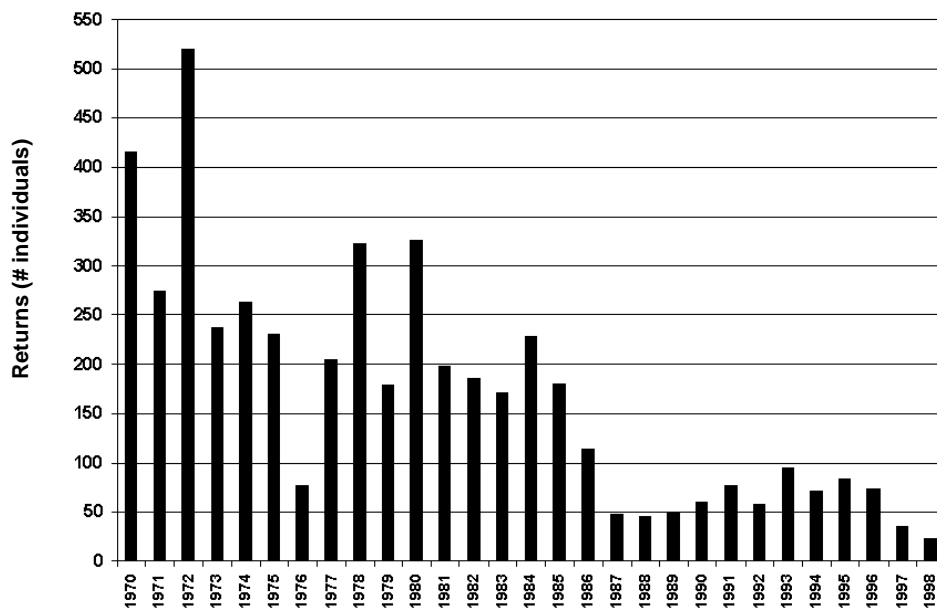
With the decline of wild salmon populations, fish farming efforts (aquaculture and mariculture) have sustained an important Atlantic salmon fishery resource in New England. Salmon mariculture is especially important in Maine, where revenues for farmed Atlantic salmon reached \$58.2 million in 2001.

Fishery Status

Unlike New England's other managed stocks, Atlantic salmon is not subject to a periodic stock assessment and plan review by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee (USASAC) produces an annual report that includes an index of minimum documented returns to U.S. rivers. USASAC data provide the best available composite index of recent adult population trends. Supplementary information is collected through independent tagging studies done by state agencies and academic institutions. Salmon stocks began a steady decline in the early 1900s and remain at low levels today. Restoration projects developed throughout the latter half of the 20th century have focused on revitalizing salmon stocks throughout New England and successfully utilized hatchery production as a tool for enhancing salmon runs. Atlantic salmon within a distinct population segment (DPS), or subset of the

total Atlantic salmon population, that returned to rivers in Maine were documented through angler catch and trap data from 1970 to 1998 (USASAC 1999). A dramatic decline in spawner returns occurred in the mid-1980s and populations have remained at low levels since that point.

Total Documented Natural (Wild & Fry Stocked) Spawner Returns



Source: USASAC (1999)