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NSMTC Says Federal Atlantic Salmon Funding Falls Far Short of What Recovery Requires

Miramichi, NB – The North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council (NSMTC) says a recent federal funding announcement for Atlantic salmon recovery falls far short of what is required to address the crisis facing the species in the Miramichi watershed.

On March 13, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) announced \$1.2 million in funding for four projects related to Atlantic salmon recovery. NSMTC says the announcement highlights the major disparity between federal investment in Atlantic salmon and Pacific salmon recovery.

Plamu in Crisis

Plamu, the Mi'kmaq word for Atlantic salmon, are a constitutionally protected food source and a keystone species central to the ecological and cultural health of the Miramichi watershed.

Adult salmon returns have dropped from more than 185,000 fish in the early 1990s to just over 5,000 in 2024. Fewer than 10 per cent of migrating smolts now survive beyond the estuary.

A Plan for Miramichi Salmon

An Indigenous-led, multi-partner strategy to restore Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi was presented to DFO in April 2025. The *Plamu First Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025–2030)* outlines the governance, staffing, research, habitat restoration, and predation management work needed to rebuild salmon populations. The plan also includes a budget that reflects the level of coordination, staffing, and restoration work required to carry out the strategy across the watershed.

The strategy was developed by the NSMTC in partnership with the Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF), the Miramichi Salmon Association (MSA), the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee (MWMC), the New Brunswick Salmon Council (NBSC), and the University of New Brunswick's Canadian Rivers Institute (UNB/CRI).

In October, Fisheries Minister Joanne Thompson acknowledged receipt of the plan and said officials were still reviewing it. However, no timelines, funding, or next steps were provided. Instead, DFO

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directed partners to continue discussions through the MWMC, an unfunded table. In 2025, the MWMC provided a formal letter endorsing the Plamu First Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025–2030).

A Significant Federal Funding Gap

The Plamu First plan calls for approximately \$38 million in funding over five years to establish governance, staffing, and conservation initiatives needed to stabilize salmon populations in the Miramichi.

However, the funding announcement made by Fisheries and Oceans Canada on March 13 totals only \$1.2 million for four Atlantic salmon projects.

By comparison, the federal government has committed hundreds of millions of dollars to Pacific salmon recovery, including the \$647 million Pacific Salmon Strategy Initiative in British Columbia.

The scale of the federal response does not match the urgency of the crisis facing Atlantic salmon.

“Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi watershed are in crisis. Responding to that crisis will require meaningful federal investment. The funding announced earlier this month is only a small fraction of what is needed to restore Atlantic salmon populations.”

– Jim Ward, NSMTC General Manager

Mi’kmaq Rights

For Mi’kmaq Nations, the loss of Plamu is more than an environmental issue. It affects treaty rights, food security, and cultural practices.

“Plamu is essential to our culture. As traditional stewards of the land and rivers and as rights holders-the preservation of the Plamu is a key priority for our people. From our presence in this territory from time immemorial, it was a marvelous and abundant source of food and survival for our people. Our people hold Aboriginal and Treaty rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act, (1982) to fish for food, social, ceremonial and commercial purposes within Mi’gmaq Territory. The courts have also held that the Mi’gmaq have Aboriginal rights to fish, which are inherent rights and independent of the Treaties.”

– Chief George Ginnish, Natoaganeg First Nation and NSMTC Chair

“The Crown has both a moral responsibility and legal obligation to support Indigenous leadership in protecting our lands and waters. Communities have put forward a practical, collaborative plan. What’s needed now is the political will and the funding to make it happen.”

– Regional Chief Joanna Bernard, New Brunswick Assembly of First Nations

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About Plamu First

Plamu First is an Indigenous-led initiative focused on protecting and restoring Atlantic salmon in the Miramichi watershed.

First launched through a multi-partner conference in 2021, the initiative brings together First Nations, conservation organizations, academia, and government to coordinate science, stewardship, and long-term recovery efforts. The Plamu First Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025–2030) provides a collaborative, place-based framework for rebuilding salmon populations and strengthening watershed governance.

About the North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council

The NSMTC is a not-for-profit organization committed to advancing the health, sustainability, and economic prosperity of its Member Nations. The NSMTC primarily serves the Ugpi'ganjig (Eel River Bar), Oinpegitjoig (Pabineau), Natoaganeg (Eel Ground), Metepenagiag (Red Bank), L'nui Menikuk (Indian Island), Tjipōgtōtjg (Buctouche), and Amlamgog (Fort Folly) while extending support to 25 additional First Nations across Atlantic Canada. The council provides service delivery, technical support, and capacity-building in water and waste management, housing and infrastructure, post-secondary education funding, training and employment, community development, clean energy opportunities, environmental stewardship, and health service coordination.

Read the Full Five-Year Strategic Plan

To read the *Plamu First 2024 | Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030)*, visit:
<https://nsmtc.ca/plamu-first-2024-five-year-strategic-plan-2025-2030/>

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