



# PLAMU FIRST.

PLAMU FIRST 2024 | FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN (2025-2030)  
April 2025

Prepared by:



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Land Acknowledgement .....	4
<b>3. DEFINITIONS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. OVERVIEW.....</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	6
4.2 Background of Plamu First.....	6
4.3 State of Plamu .....	7
4.4 Indigenous Rights.....	8
4.5 Fiduciary Obligation and the Honour of the Crown.....	8
<b>5. FOUNDATIONS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
5.1 Knowledge Holders' Stories.....	9
5.2 Language.....	10
5.3 Etuaptmumk .....	10
5.4 The First Nations Principles of OCAP® .....	10
5.5 Integrated Watershed Management Plan Framework.....	11
<b>6. PLAN .....</b>	<b>12</b>
6.1 Objective.....	12
6.2 Goals.....	12
6.3 Timeline of Activities .....	13
6.4 Considerations.....	14
<b>7. EXPECTED OUTCOMES .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>8. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>9. REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>10. APPENDIX A: Conference Overview Report .....</b>	<b>20</b>

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plamu First 2024 was an Indigenous-led conference focused on the critical decline of Plamu (Atlantic salmon) in the Miramichi River watershed. Funded in part by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), it brought together rightsholders, stakeholders, and knowledge holders to advance conservation efforts. Hosted by the North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council (NSMTC), the conference included participation from First Nations, government, academia, and conservation organizations.

Plamu are in crisis. Excessive predation and climate change have pushed populations to the brink, threatening both cultural heritage and ecological stability. The conference reaffirmed the urgent need for a unified approach to restoration, building on the initial plan developed at Plamu First 2021 (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council, 2021). Participants emphasized the need for an inclusive governance structure, improved data-sharing practices, and sustainable funding for research and conservation in the Miramichi River. Key recommendations included establishing an Indigenous-led coalition, developing a data governance framework, and prioritizing annual projects that integrate Indigenous knowledge and Western science.

**This strategic plan fully aligns with the four strategic outcomes of *Canada's national strategy to ensure the future of Atlantic salmon 2024-2036* and offers a place-based, First Nations–led model ready for immediate implementation (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2025).** It captures the recommendations from Plamu First 2024 and is grounded in Indigenous rights, the honour of the Crown, traditional knowledge, language, data sovereignty, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Integrated Watershed Management Plan Framework. It also reflects growing national recognition of the need for parity in watershed governance and funding – drawing on lessons from Indigenous-led models on the Pacific coast.

The success of this strategy depends on long-term, dedicated federal support. That support must uphold constitutional and international commitments, affirm the fiduciary responsibility of the Crown, and enable Indigenous Nations to lead restoration planning and decision-making in their watersheds.

## 2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan is the result of a collaborative effort involving Mi'kmaq knowledge holders, conservationists, academia, and government, who participated in Plamu First 2024. Their dedication has shaped the vision and actions outlined in this document. Participants represented a wide variety of different organizations keen to preserve the Miramichi Plamu, a list of which can be found in the Plamu First 2024 Conference Overview Report, which is appended to this document. This conference could not have been created without the help of the Plamu First Planning Committee, which met frequently, many months prior to the conference. A full list of planning committee members can be found in Appendix A. The planning committee and conference was overseen by Plamu First Conference Coordinator Joseph Augustine.

The success of this conference also reflects the tireless work of Plamu First Facilitator Tom Mann of Thomas Mann Consulting LTD. Tom's ability to organize, steer and facilitate presentations and round table discussions was outstanding. In the wake of the conference, Tom worked unremittingly, not only majorly contributing to the Conference Overview Report, but also speaking with many participant organizations, which spearheaded the concept of the First Nations-Led Collaborative Leadership Council.

### 2.1 Land Acknowledgement

The Miramichi River watershed lies within the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Mi'kmaq Nation. We honour the Treaties of Peace and Friendship (1725–1760), which recognizes the sovereignty and rights of the Mi'kmaq Nation, and other Indigenous Nations, and established principles of mutual respect and cooperation. This plan is rooted in the responsibility to protect the lands and waters of Mi'gma'gi for current and future generations. By centering Indigenous leadership and values, we strive to uphold our responsibilities as stewards of this vital ecosystem.

### 3 DEFINITIONS

**Plamu:** The Mi'kmaq word for Atlantic salmon. (*Pronounced BLAH-moo*)

**Milamitji:** A Mi'kmaq phrase from Elder George Paul of Metepenagiag that means “I eat of great variety”, theorized to be the origin of the name Miramichi. (*Pronounced MILL-ah-MID-jee*)

**Mawlugutineg Ogtjit Plamu:** A Mi'kmaq phrase meaning “working together for salmon”. (*Pronounced MOW-lah-GOO-dah-nej OOK-jid BLAH-moo*)

**Etuptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing):** An approach integrating Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. (*Pronounced EHD-doo-AWP-da-muhmkh*)

**The First Nations Principles of OCAP®:** Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession principles ensuring Indigenous authority over data. Asserting and respecting the First Nations Principles of OCAP® is the foundation to data sovereignty.

**Collaborative Leadership Council:** A governance model that fosters shared decision-making and mutual accountability among diverse stakeholders.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** A formal, non-binding agreement that outlines roles, responsibilities, and commitments between collaborating parties.

**Integrated Watershed Management Plan (IWMP) Framework:** A collaborative approach conceptualized by Fisheries and Oceans Canada for managing watershed health, integrating ecological, cultural, and socio-economic priorities.

**United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP):** An international framework affirming the rights of Indigenous peoples, including self-determination, participation in decision-making, and the conservation of traditional lands and waters.

**Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*:** A section of Canadian law recognizing and affirming the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of Indigenous peoples, providing a legal foundation for Indigenous leadership and governance in conservation efforts.

## 4 OVERVIEW

### 4.1 Introduction

Every year, smolts leave the Miramichi estuary and migrate to the ocean where they grow and mature to adulthood before returning home to their native river to spawn. In recent decades, the Plamu has come under constant threat from predation, as well as the effects of climate change and rising water temperatures. As stewards for future generations, we owe it to the Plamu to do everything we can to protect them and their home.

Indigenous-led Plamu governance models on the Pacific coast have demonstrated the effectiveness of community-driven restoration and management. These examples set important precedents – underscoring the need for parity in the Atlantic, where Mi'kmaq Nations seek similar leadership roles in conservation efforts and equitable access to long-term conservation funding.

This Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030) proposes a formal governance structure and an effective Integrated Watershed Management Plan as central solutions, providing a coordinated framework for long-term conservation in the Miramichi. To achieve success, there must be a commitment by government to support these initiatives through long-term dedicated funding. This commitment must be grounded in the honour of the Crown and Canada's fiduciary obligation to Indigenous peoples, and must also respect and enable Indigenous autonomy in conservation governance.

### 4.2 Background of Plamu First

Plamu First 2021 was a virtual conference held during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid these trying times, key players on the Miramichi, including non-government, Indigenous and governmental organizations, came together with a shared goal – safeguarding the future of the precious Plamu. Threats to the species' survival were explained through a series of presentations from knowledgeable individuals. A sense of urgency echoed through the speakers and headphones of interested parties.

The first conference introduced a framework for Mi'kmaq-led conservation, emphasizing collaboration and Indigenous leadership. Strategic imperatives based on principles of returning Plamu to sustainable levels were forged. This further bolstered the idea of collaborative projects on the Miramichi such as the Miramichi Lake Eradication and Cold-Water Brook Enhancement. In the three years that followed, collaborative momentum slowed, threats mounted, data gaps remained, and the ever-present need for stable funding for the Miramichi Plamu persisted. In response to these pressing issues, Plamu First partners expressed a shared interest in reconvening and, thus, Plamu First 2024 was developed (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council, 2021).

### 4.3 State of the Plamu

The Plamu has been an important species to the Mi'kmaq people of the Miramichi for over 3,000 years. They hold cultural and ceremonial significance and are also a high-quality food item, low in mercury compared to other fish and highly nutritious. For generations, they have helped sustain the Mi'kmaq people, as well as the settlers who landed on the shores of the Miramichi hundreds of years ago.

Unfortunately, in the past 50 years, they have gone from returning every year to the Northwest branch of the Miramichi River in the hundreds of thousands and being a plentiful resource which could support entire communities, to being reduced to perhaps a couple thousand in the Northwest Miramichi. According to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the highest number of returning adult Atlantic salmon returns to the Miramichi River in recent history occurred in 1992, with 185,000. This number has since dropped to an estimated 5,315 adult returns in 2024 (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 1992; Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2024). The average human generation is 27 years, meaning that in just two generations, the Plamu has been all but wiped out of the Miramichi. Rather than being able to teach their grandchildren how to fish Plamu, Mi'kmaq elders instead can only tell stories of what it was like when they were abundant. The days of Plamu running in numbers so great that the splashing would wake you if you lived by the water are gone, replaced by quiet nights and empty pools.

The depletion of Plamu poses a serious risk to the whole ecosystem of the Miramichi River. As a keystone species, losing Plamu could set off a chain reaction, throwing the food web out of balance and impacting other species that depend on them. This could lead to broader ecological collapse, ultimately affecting the health of the watershed and the communities that rely on it.

There are several things which brought the Plamu to this point, many of them anthropogenic in origin. At-sea survival has been historically impacted by commercial overexploitation, much in the same way Peju (Atlantic cod) was. The loss of habitat and poaching in their natal freshwater streams are other factors which contributed to their decline. Climate change has also been slowly but steadily warming the cold waters in which Plamu used to thrive, contributing both to at-sea and in-stream survival of all life stages of Plamu.

More recently, a problem unique to the Miramichi has been observed: the survival of migrating smolt (the life stage in which Plamu transform and adapt to life at sea) has seen a dramatic decline to the point where less than ~10% of all smolt in the Northwest Miramichi migrating out to sea make it beyond the estuary (Atlantic Salmon Federation, 2023). Predators, notably the rebounding population of the once endangered Jigaw (Striped Bass) have greatly reduced the amount of smolt that make it to sea to become Plamu, due to their spawning migration coinciding with the smolt migration. With smolt numbers already dwindling and at-sea predation also being high, having so few smolt make it to sea means that almost no Plamu will survive long enough to make it back home to our river.

To further complicate matters, a new predator has also made its way into Miramichi waters – the invasive smallmouth bass was found in Miramichi Lake. After an eradication project lead by the North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council was only partially completed, these bass escaped the confines of the lake they were illegally introduced to and have made their way throughout both branches of the Miramichi River. These sinister invaders inhabit similar habitats to Plamu, can tolerate warmer temperatures, and can outcompete Plamu fry from the moment they hatch. As they grow, their diet then shifts to one of piscivory (fish-eating) and they can then prey on the young Plamu with voracity.

After witnessing the drastic decline of our Plamu and the numerous threats that they face, we could not sit idly by and watch such an important species be driven to extirpation. Indeed, the Plamu is in peril, and we must act before it is too late. This is why Plamu First was created.

#### 4.4 Indigenous Rights

The Mi'kmaq of the Atlantic have existing Aboriginal and treaty rights that have been recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada and are protected under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* (United Nations General Assembly, 2007), which affirms the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Such Aboriginal and treaty rights include the Aboriginal right to Plamu for food, which takes priority over all other aspects of Plamu harvesting. It is these Aboriginal and treaty rights that provide the legal foundation for the necessity of Mi'kmaq leadership in Plamu governance and conservation. As well, the inherent right of self-determination provides Indigenous governments, including the Mi'kmaq, with the ability to develop and determine their own path forward on issues regarding their culture and language, education, land management, economic opportunities, and the exercise of Aboriginal and treaty rights.

Aboriginal and treaty rights, including the inherent right to self-determination, is also recognized under international law through the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, (“UNDRIP”). UNDRIP recognizes and affirms the inherent rights of Indigenous peoples, which includes the right to self-determination, free, prior and informed consent in decision-making, and ownership and stewardship of their lands and resources. Through Canada's 2021 *United Nations Declaration Act* (Government of Canada, 2021), (“UNDRIP Act”), these principles are recognized and are now being integrated into the Canadian legal framework. Through established Aboriginal and treaty rights, UNDRIP, and the UNDRIP Act, these legal frameworks ensure that Aboriginal and treaty rights and Indigenous leadership, values, and priorities are essential in addressing the conservation of Plamu and the health of the Miramichi River watershed.

#### 4.5 Fiduciary Obligation and the Honour of the Crown

With respect to its relationship with Indigenous peoples, Canada is bound to conduct itself consistent with specific legal principles; that being the honour of the Crown and the fiduciary obligation owed to Indigenous peoples with respect to their rights and their Aboriginal interests. The honour of the Crown requires the Crown to act honourably in its dealings with Indigenous peoples. Arising from this principle, where the



Mi'kmaq have a beneficial interest, the fiduciary obligation requires the Crown to protect the interests of the Mi'kmaq. These principles specifically come into play with respect to Plamu, as the resource is an Aboriginal right and a substantial Aboriginal interest of the Mi'kmaq, evoking the duty of the Crown to address it consistent with the honour of the Crown and the fulfillment of their fiduciary duty. As such, in collaboration with this Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030), it is expected that such principles and legal obligations will be upheld by the Government of Canada.

## 5 FOUNDATIONS

The success of this strategy relies on foundations which ensure that conservation efforts respect Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous Aboriginal and Treaty rights, and shared values. By keeping these foundations front-of-mind, this plan ensures that the conservation of Plamu reflects both ecological and cultural priorities.

### 5.1 Knowledge Holders' Stories

As a part of the Plamu First initiative, knowledge holders from Mi'kmaq communities on the Miramichi River were engaged to help support this foundational element of the Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030). Knowledge holders include lifelong, commercial, and professional fishers, along with community members in leadership roles, between the ages of 40-65. They were gracious in their time and contributions; the following highlights are but a glimpse of their vast knowledge of Plamu on the Miramichi.

*“My grandfather used to tell me stories from back in the 1920s/30s about how during the salmon run, the salmon were so loud going up the river, that it would keep you awake at night. Almost like how striped bass are now. Grandfather used to be able to go out fishing for one or two days and he would have enough fish to feed the family (including aunties and uncles) for almost a full year.”*

*“I caught a small striper in 2006 in community's box trap net (a time when regulations disallowed anyone to keep them) and was going to keep the fish as it would be wasteful and bad luck not to keep it for food. When I cleaned it, I found three tagged smolt in its mouth and three partially digested tagged smolt in its stomach. I sent the picture to government and their feedback was that it was “a staged photo”. I then gave the picture to a local non-Indigenous small business owner who sold fishing gear, and he sent it into the same department two years later and they accepted it as an authentic picture. I was disheartened that the Indigenous knowledge didn't carry the same weight.”*

*“The salmon numbers now, in the last three years, are the worst I’ve ever seen in my life. Numbers are dwindling because of commercial fishing, poaching and water temperature. The number of bass is through the roof and they’re moving through the system. For example, when I was younger, you’d never catch a bass at Big Hole Tract. It was rare to catch them years ago, now the past three years, catch them all the time now. I compare bass to a goat in the water, they’ll eat anything.”*

*“I’m 61 and have been fishing all my life. My father had me on the river at such a young age, that I was wet on the outside and on the inside, in my diaper...then at age eight I learned how to sew a fishing net. I’m one of the few people today that still possess these skills. I’ve seen the threats to Plamu firsthand, such as overpopulation of seals in the Bay. Plus, the balance of the river is so off now due to the number of striped bass in the river.”*

## 5.2 Language

The Mi’kmaq word for Atlantic salmon, *Plamu*, represents more than just the species; it carries the weight of cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance and reflects our relationship as people to the land and water.

*“I always stress the importance of our language because all of our history, teachings and cultural identity is held there.”* (Norman Sylliboy, Grand Chief of Mi’kmaq Nation, 2022)

## 5.3 Etuaptmumk

*“Two-Eyed Seeing refers to learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing and to using both of these eyes together.”* (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012)

Plamu First 2024 included Indigenous knowledge holders, academics, governmental organizations, and conservationists with diverse perspectives. By respecting Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, this strategy ensures that conservation efforts are holistic and balanced, reflecting the full value of collective wisdom.

## 5.4 The First Nations Principles of OCAP®

The First Nations Principles of OCAP® (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2020) are vital to discussions about research and data governance. These principles ensure that Mi’kmaq communities maintain authority over their information, fostering ethical practices in data collection, sharing, and

application. The First Nations Principles of OCAP® strengthen trust among collaborators, ensures transparency, and upholds the self-determination of Mi'kmaq communities.

## 5.5 Integrated Watershed Management Plan Framework

The IWMP Framework, developed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, provides a structured and collaborative approach to restoring and protecting watershed health. DFO's mandate is to protect, conserve, and restore all fish and fish habitats, and there is no relationship more important to DFO than the one with Indigenous peoples. The IWMP directly supports DFO's conservation mandate while reinforcing its commitment to working alongside Indigenous communities to protect species of cultural and ecological significance, such as Plamu.

Figure 1: *Elements within an IWMP*

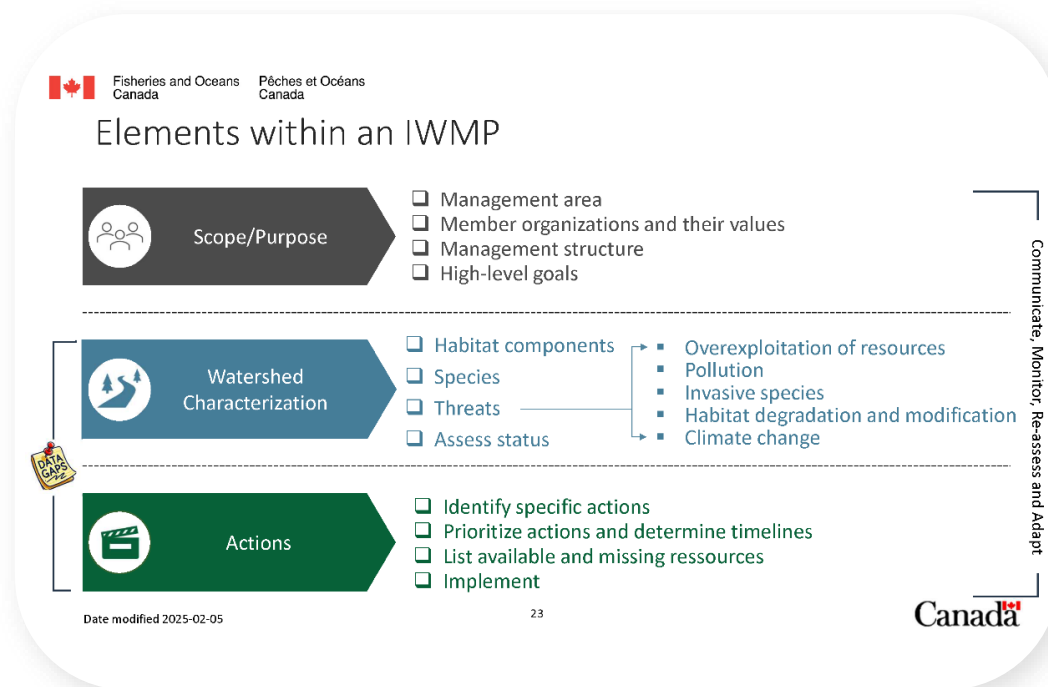


Figure 1: *Elements within an IWMP – The core elements to be included in an Integrated Watershed Management Plan – Scope, Characterization, and Actions – with an emphasis on data gaps and direction to communicate, monitor, re-assess, and adapt. (Goguen, 2025).*

By adopting an IWMP framework, DFO positions itself not only to fulfill its legal and conservation obligations but also to strengthen its relationship with Indigenous communities. Investing in Plamu First through an IWMP aligns with DFO's mandate and advances shared conservation and reconciliation goals.

A key strength of the IWMP is its ability to connect long-term conservation goals with short-term priority actions. Through structured annual work plans, an IWMP identifies which partners have the capacity and resources to carry out specific conservation and restoration activities. This approach ensures that efforts are maximized, resources are used efficiently, and progress is measurable. The IWMP also supports transparency and accountability by encouraging regular updates and engagement among partners.

## 6 PLAN

### 6.1 Objective

The objective of this Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030) is to restore ecosystem balance in the Miramichi watershed. Through a unified, Indigenous-led approach that values culture and incorporates Etuaptmunk and the First Nations Principles of OCAP®, this plan aims to reinvigorate Plamu populations, address key threats to Plamu like habitat loss and predation, and integrate Indigenous-led governance into every aspect. It emphasizes shared decision-making, knowledge, and resources, ensuring that First Nations take the lead. It includes securing support from Fisheries and Oceans Canada for long-term, sustainable funding and autonomy to make decisions for the health of the watershed.

### 6.2 Goals

1. **Restore Ecosystem Balance:** Support the health of the Miramichi Watershed by addressing the root causes of ecosystem imbalance.
2. **Reinvigorate Plamu Populations:** Prioritize the revitalization of Plamu in the Miramichi Watershed, addressing key threats, including predation and habitat loss, through focused conservation and restoration efforts.
3. **Implement Strategic Imperatives:** Build on the goals established in 2021 by enhancing collaboration, addressing threats, and integrating Indigenous-led governance.
4. **Establish a First Nations-Led Collaborative Leadership Council:** Develop a three-tier structure with an Executive Committee, Steering Committee, and a Technical Committee to ensure coordination and accountability.
5. **Capacity Building and Sustainable Funding:** Secure funding for full-time coordination roles, operational needs, public outreach, and a dedicated project fund.
6. **Codify Agreements:** Establish Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that define the roles and responsibilities of participating organizations and government, ensuring decision-making power and autonomy for the First Nations-Led Collaborative Leadership Council in watershed management and restoration efforts.

7. **Enhance Data Sharing and Coordination:** Create a centralized system to close research gaps, improve planning, increase transparency and access for all stakeholders and rightsholders.
8. **Develop an Integrated Watershed Management Plan:** Prioritize habitat restoration, predation management, and invasive species control.
9. **Coordinate and Launch Projects:** Develop and implement conservation, research, and advocacy projects that support the strategic imperatives.

### 6.3 Timeline of Activities

Figure 2: *Timeline of Activities*

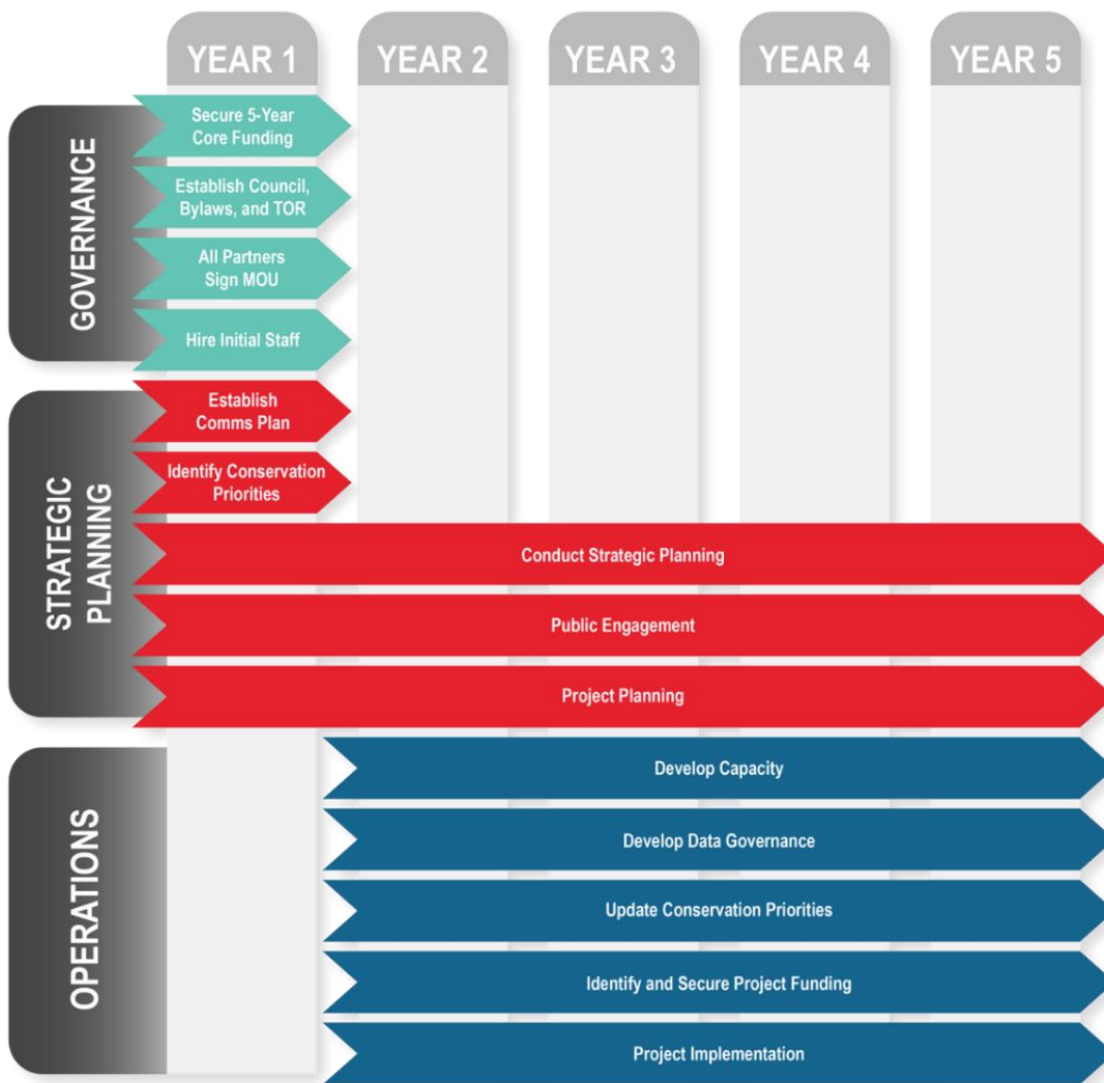


Figure 2: *Timeline of Activities* – Depiction of the breakdown of planned activities into governance, strategic planning, and operations, over a five-year term.

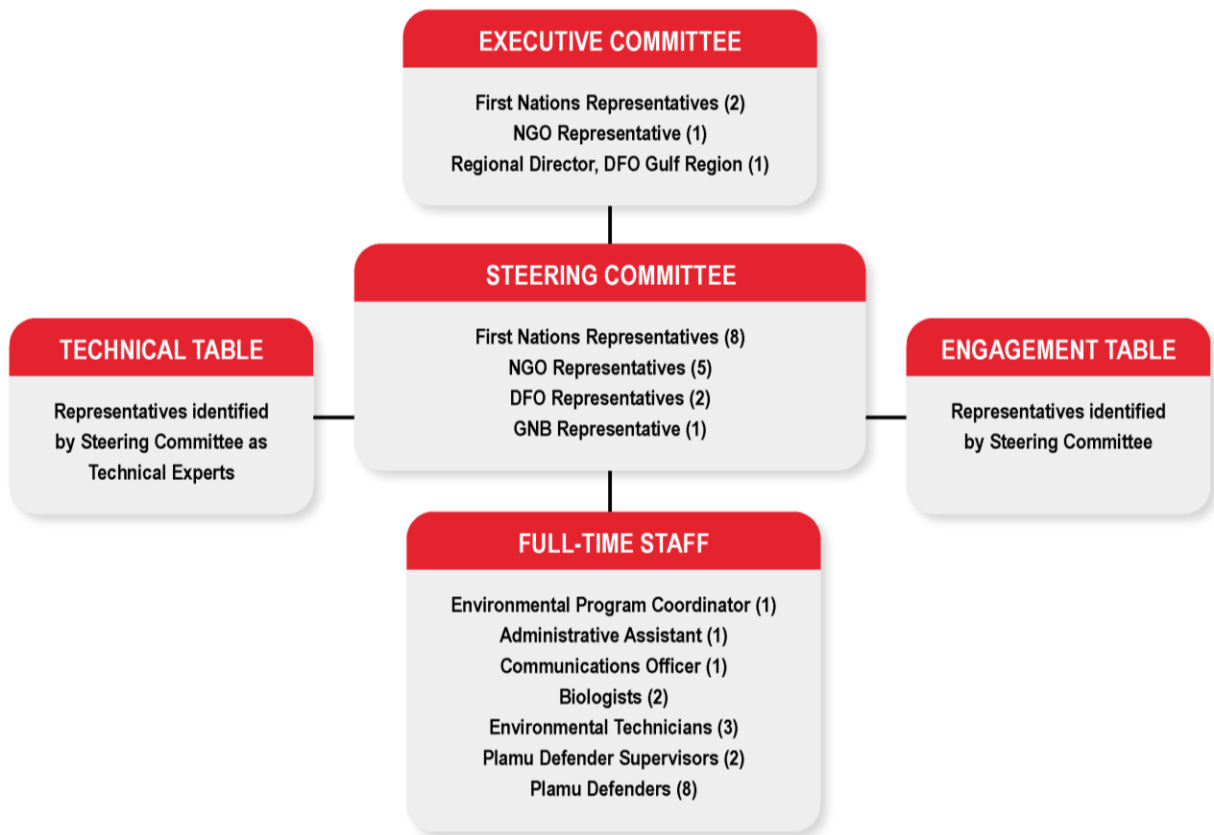
- **Year 1-2 (2025/2026; 2026/2027): Establish Governance and Initiate Strategic Planning**
  - Secure five-year operational/core funding
  - Establish a First Nations-led Miramichi Watershed Collaborative Leadership Council
  - Establish by-laws, Terms of Reference (TOR), and MOUs signed by all partners
  - Hire initial, core staff
  - Conduct strategic planning (SWOT/mission/vision/resources)
  - Develop communications plan
  - Establish conservation priorities
  
- **Year 2-5 (2026/2027; 2027/2028; 2028/2029; 2029/2030): Operations and Continued Strategic Planning**
  - Strategic & project planning
  - Public engagement
  - Capacity development
  - Data governance
  - Update conservation priorities
  - Identify and secure project funding for the Miramichi Plamu
  - Project implementation

## 6.4 Considerations

To support the implementation of the presented Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030), we request that the proposed First Nations-Led Leadership Council consider the following:

1. For the name of the First Nations-led Miramichi Watershed Collaborative Leadership Council to be rooted in the Mi'kmaq language, using the name **Mawlugutineg Ogtjit Plamu** (“working together for salmon”; pronounced *MOW-lah-GOO-dah-nej OOK-jid BLAH-moo*).
  
2. For the First Nations-led Miramichi Watershed Collaborative Leadership Council to be structured accordingly:
  - **Executive Committee:** Provides leadership, decision-making, and strategic direction.
  - **Steering Committee:** Guides project goals, priorities, and progress to ensure alignment.
  - **Technical Table:** Offers expert input, data analysis, and technical/scientific recommendations.
  - **Engagement Table:** Facilitates collaboration, communication, and stakeholder/rightsholder involvement.
  - **Full-Time Staff:** Provide operational support, implement decisions, and facilitate projects.

**Figure 3: Proposed Mawlugutineg Ogtjit Plamu Organizational Chart**



*Figure 3: Proposed Mawlugutineg Ogtjit Plamu Organizational Chart – A proposed organizational chart that balances representation from First Nations, government, and non-government organizations, and lays out expectations for full-time staff.*

3. For the First Nations-led Miramichi Watershed Collaborative Leadership Council to coordinate and implement the following projects, many of which already have essential groundwork laid and only require sustainable funding and resources to succeed:

- **Conservation Projects**

- **Bank Erosion Mitigation Efforts:** Implementing measures to reduce bank erosion and sediment runoff at critical locations—such as the Oxbow on the Northwest branch of the Miramichi River—to protect water quality and habitat integrity.
- **Smallmouth Bass Mitigation Efforts:** Targeting the invasive smallmouth bass in the Miramichi system through mitigation approaches such as angling, seine netting, electrofishing, and nest-spearing to control their spread.
- **Striped Bass Population Management:** Develop strategies to manage the striped bass population, informed by population estimates and predation data.



- **Gaspereau Trap Net Implementation:** Engaging commercial Gaspereau fishermen to deploy innovative trap nets designed to reduce bycatch.
- **Cold Water Habitat Enhancement:** Enhancing cold water pools that are essential for thermoregulation by Plamu and other native fish species, with ongoing monitoring to evaluate the performance of previously improved habitats.
- **Riparian Protection Efforts:** Align forestry practices and land use planning with Plamu habitat protection goals, including measures within Protected Natural Areas (PNAs) to safeguard riparian zones and spawning grounds.
- **Plamu Stocking Initiatives:** Use juvenile Plamu density data to guide responsible stocking in priority areas of the Miramichi Watershed.
- **Hatchery Infrastructure Assessment & Enhancement:** Evaluating the current Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre hatchery to determine its viability for supporting novel conservation and research initiatives, and completing necessary improvements to carry out those initiatives.

- **Research Projects**

- **Expand Plamu Smolt Tagging Research Capacity:** Increasing the deployment of advanced telemetry technologies to support Plamu smolt tracking efforts and more precisely evaluate their escapement from the Miramichi estuary.
- **Smallmouth Bass Population Estimate:** Conducting comprehensive surveys and data analyses to quantify the distribution and abundance of smallmouth bass within the watershed.
- **Striped Bass Population Estimate:** Work with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to expand the current striped bass spawner estimate into a total population estimate, including striped bass recruitment to monitor long-term trends.
- **Expand Striped Bass Bypass Capacity:** Increasing the capacity for transporting Plamu smolt past high-predation zones in the Miramichi River system to determine long-term program viability.
- **Plamu Gene Banking:** Collecting and preserving genetic material from wild Plamu populations in the Miramichi River to support future conservation, restoration, and research efforts.
- **Piscivorous Bird Predation Study:** Analyzing predation rates by piscivorous birds in the Miramichi estuary on Plamu and native fish species to evaluate ecological impacts and develop effective mitigation measures.
- **Seal Predation Study:** Investigating the impact of seal predation on Plamu and other native fish populations to understand ecosystem dynamics and guide management strategies.
- **Plamu Research:** Examining Plamu behavior, including site fidelity, and assessing egg durability to inform stocking and conservation programs.



- **Data Collection and Coding:** Compiling the wealth of existing ecological data on the Miramichi River, assessing trends within that data, and establishing a streamlined system for collecting new information to better inform watershed management decisions.
- **Striped Bass Recreational Permitting System:** Developing a permitting process for striped bass fishing that supports long-term multi-species management for the Miramichi River and provides valuable recreational angling data.
- **Advocacy Projects**
  - **Employ Plamu Defenders:** Developing a team of boots-on-the-ground staff who continuously monitor the Miramichi watershed, record anecdotal catch data, engage with recreational and commercial fishers, and advocate for conservation.
  - **Annual Plamu First Conference:** Organizing a yearly conference that brings together experts, policymakers, and community members to share research findings and discuss strategies for Plamu conservation.
  - **Plamu Conservation Advocacy and Education:** Developing outreach programs and resources, targeted at youth, elders, rightsholders, stakeholders, and the general public, to raise awareness of Plamu conservation issues and advocate for sustainable watershed management practices.

## 7 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The presented Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030) seeks to bolster Plamu populations by strengthening the combined efforts of all Plamu First collaborators. These expected outcomes will be reached by carrying out projects that respect Etuaptmumk and through shared management of the Miramichi watershed:

- **Establishment of a First Nations-led Collaborative Leadership Council** with secure, dedicated funding to ensure involvement in conservation management and engagement efforts.
- **Enhanced decision-making** through consistent communication and collaboration among First Nations, government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders, ensuring all voices are included in the management of the Miramichi River.
- **Improved collaboration** in identifying conservation priorities and developing ongoing strategies for the health of the Miramichi watershed.
- **Increased data sharing and on-the-ground capacity** for collaboration with the DFO Gulf Region to support effective project implementation.

- **Strengthened public awareness and education** on the issues of the Miramichi Watershed, and how the public can contribute to improving the conservation of Plamu and all species through a holistic approach.

## 8 CONCLUSION

For thousands of years, long before European contact, the Mi'kmaq who inhabited the Miramichi River Watershed shared a close relationship with the river and its adjacent lands. They relied on it for food, shelter and clothing. The resources were plentiful; they were provided with everything they needed, and they took no more than they needed.

Today, the world is a very different place for Indigenous peoples and for the resources they once relied upon. Many species of fish and wildlife are at great risk – they are diminishing, dying, disappearing. And among them is the Plamu.

The survival of the Plamu in the Miramichi River has reached a critical stage from which it may not recover unless immediate action is taken. The success of this Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030) will depend on all the partners around the table taking full ownership of this Plan and pooling their resources and working together for a common shared goal.

## 9 REFERENCES

- Anqotum Resource Management, North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council. (2021).** *Plamu First Conference Report*. <https://www.plamufirst.ca/s/Plamu-First-2021-Conference-Report.pdf>
- Atlantic Salmon Federation. (2023).** *Rivernotes – June 2, 2023*. <https://www.asf.ca/rivernotes-june-2-2023/>
- Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012).** Two-eyed seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4), 331–340.
- Coffin, M. (2024).** *2024 Eastern New Brunswick Coastal and Inland Recreational Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting* [Meeting notes]. Fisheries and Oceans Canada.
- First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2011).** *The First Nations Principles of OCAP® training*. First Nations Information Governance Centre. <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada. (1992).** *Status of Atlantic salmon stocks in 1992*. [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2015/mpo-dfo/Fs76-1-1993-4-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/mpo-dfo/Fs76-1-1993-4-eng.pdf)
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada. (2024).** *Cumulative counts*. <https://inter-j02.dfo-po.gc.ca/asir/report/count>
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada. (2025).** *Canada's national strategy to ensure the future of Atlantic salmon 2024-2036*. <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especies/publications/salmon-saumon/national-strategy-strategie-nationale/atlantic-atlantique-eng.html>
- Goguen, J. (2025).** *Integrated Watershed Management Planning* [PowerPoint slides]. Fisheries and Oceans Canada.
- Government of Canada. (2021).** *United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples act*. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/U-2.2/>
- Premier's Office, Government of Nova Scotia. (2022 July 17).** *Mi'kmaw Language Legislation Proclaimed* [Press release]. <https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2022/07/17/mikmaw-language-legislation-proclaimed>
- United Nations General Assembly. (2007).** *United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples (Resolution 61/295)*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenous-peoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>



# PLAMU FIRST.

PLAMU FIRST 2024 | CONFERENCE OVERVIEW REPORT  
April 2025

Prepared by:



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>3. OVERVIEW</b> .....	<b>5</b>
3.1 Purpose.....	5
3.2 Objective.....	5
3.3 Format.....	6
3.4 Participating Organizations .....	7
3.5 Plamu First Planning Committee .....	7
<b>4. OPENING REMARKS</b> .....	<b>8</b>
4.1 Chief George Ginnish.....	8
4.2 Bud Bird .....	9
<b>5. PLAMU FIRST 2021</b> .....	<b>11</b>
5.1 Overview .....	11
5.2 Assessment.....	12
5.3 Moving Forward.....	13
<b>6. SETTING THE STAGE</b> .....	<b>13</b>
6.1 Collaborative Leadership .....	14
6.2 Trust Building.....	14
6.3 Etuaptmumk .....	14
6.3 The Power of Language.....	15
6.4 Base Camping.....	16
<b>7. PANEL 1: THE SHARED VALUE OF PLAMU IN 2024</b> .....	<b>17</b>
7.1 Panel 1 Speakers .....	17
7.2 Panel 1 Roundtable Questions.....	17
7.3 Panel 1 Takeaways .....	17
<b>8. PANEL 2: WHAT BARRIERS DO WE FACE?</b> .....	<b>18</b>
8.1 Panel 2 Speakers .....	18
8.2 Panel 2 Roundtable Questions.....	19

8.3 Panel 2 Takeaways ..... 19

**9. PANEL 3: LET’S TALK CO-MANAGEMENT ..... 20**

9.1 Panel 3 Speakers ..... 20

9.2 Panel 3 Roundtable Questions ..... 20

9.3 Panel 3 Takeaways ..... 21

**10. CONCLUSION ..... 22**

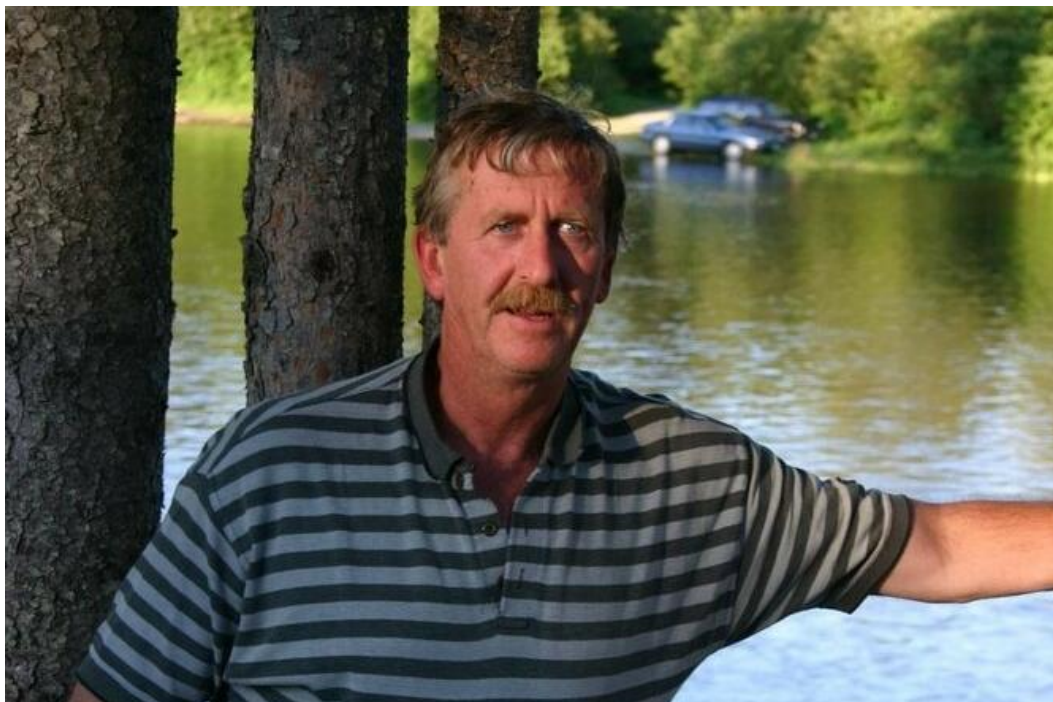
10.1 Next Steps ..... 22

# 1 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This conference would not have been possible without the dedication and collaboration of numerous individuals and organizations. We extend our gratitude to all participating organizations and planning committee members, listed below, whose efforts were instrumental in bringing this event to life. A special thanks also goes to the roundtable facilitators and note-takers, composed of planning committee members and Anqotum Resource Management staff, for their invaluable contributions.

A tremendous amount of thanks goes to Plamu First Facilitator, Tom Mann of Thomas Mann Consulting LTD. Tom's ability to organize, steer and facilitate presentations and round table discussions was outstanding. In the wake of the conference, Tom worked tirelessly on lens/concepts for the conference overview and strategic plan.

This conference was dedicated to the memory of Peter Joseph Cronin (1952-2023), former president of the New Brunswick Salmon Council and true champion for Plamu conservation. His contributions to Plamu First 2021 echoed throughout Plamu First 2024 in its entirety.



In memory of Peter Joseph Cronin (1952-2023)

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Plamu First 2024, held from April 22–24 at the Rodd Miramichi in Miramichi, New Brunswick, brought together members of the wild Plamu community to advance a collective action plan focused on salmon conservation.

The conference aimed to refine the goals of the Plamu First Five-Year Strategic Plan developed in 2021 and reinforced the importance of collaborative leadership for sustainable resource management. Through guided discussions, participants identified shared objectives, addressed key challenges, and outlined actionable steps for the future. This report offers an overview of the conference, highlights key takeaways, and outlines next steps for conserving the Miramichi River ecosystem.

## 3 OVERVIEW

### 3.1 Purpose

Plamu First 2024 served as a follow-up to Plamu First 2021. The conference reconvened partners and collaborators to share updates, reaffirm shared values, and refine their objectives. Building on the work started in 2021, participants assessed and adjusted the five-year plan for protecting and enhancing Plamu populations through ecosystem-based management in the Miramichi watershed. Discussions focused on reviewing progress, identifying necessary modifications, and strengthening conservation strategies.

### 3.2 Objective

Plamu First 2024 was designed to build on the foundation of Plamu First 2021, incorporating its key elements to develop a realistic, time-sensitive, and accountable strategic plan. The Plamu First 2024 | Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030) aims to:

- Use the strategic imperatives established in 2021 as a baseline to address urgent challenges in the Miramichi River watershed.
- Establish an Indigenous-led watershed leadership structure with clear timelines.
- Collaborate to protect, conserve, and restore Plamu populations in the Miramichi River watershed.

Plamu First 2021 established a set of recommendations, but further structure and alignment were needed to support implementation. Plamu First 2024 built on this foundation, focusing on developing a more actionable and results-driven strategy.



With a sense of urgency, participants engaged with speakers, presentations, and panel discussions to ensure their efforts were not starting from scratch but rather addressing key themes:

- **Shared Values:** How can we prioritize and tackle the most pressing issues?
- **Barriers and Challenges:** What obstacles must be overcome?
- **Leadership of the Miramichi River Watershed:** What governance structure is needed to ensure long-term success?

### 3.3 Format

Plamu First 2024 was structured into three sections, each addressing a key conference theme: shared values and goals, known barriers and challenges, and the development of a cooperative management framework. Each section featured a speaker panel followed by roundtable discussions, providing 48 participants the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue, practice active listening, and collaborate on solutions. Roundtable discussions were prompted by providing each roundtable with a set of four questions.

**Figure 1: Speaker Panel**



*Figure 1: Speaker Panel – As part of Panel 1: The Shared Value of Plamu in 2024, Charlie Bjorndal (Mi'gma'we'l Tplu'taqnn Incorporated) presents findings from an Indigenous Knowledge Study conducted on the Miramichi watershed.*

A collective check-in allowed attendees to channel their shared passion for Plamu conservation into constructive, widely endorsed action items. A crucial element of these discussions was the inclusion of Etuaptmunk in the development of a new collaborative management system. For conservation efforts to succeed, the mandates of the Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Government of New Brunswick (GNB) must integrate Indigenous knowledge as an equally valued and legitimate scientific and data-driven approach alongside non-government organization (NGO) perspectives.

To foster dynamic and results-driven discussions, participants were reassigned to different groups for each roundtable session. Each group had a facilitator and a notetaker to capture key insights, commitments, and proposed timelines. Attendees were encouraged to be open, forthright, and respectful in sharing their perspectives, ensuring productive and inclusive dialogue.

### 3.4 Participating Organizations

Plamu First 2024 brought together First Nations organizations, government agencies, academia, and NGOs, all focused on Plamu conservation in the Miramichi watershed. The following organizations were represented:



### 3.5 Plamu First Planning Committee

Plamu First 2024 would not have been possible without the dedication and support of the following individuals:

- Butch Dalton (Miramichi Salmon Association)
- Dan Cain (Miramichi Salmon Association)
- David Roth (Canadian Rivers Institute)

- Debbie Norton (Miramichi Watershed Management Committee)
- Ethan Augustine (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council)
- Jim Ward (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council)
- Jodi MacIntosh (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council)
- Joseph Augustine (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council)
- Joe Palmer (Miramichi Salmon Association)
- Kevin Davidson (New Brunswick Salmon Council)
- Nathan Wilbur (Atlantic Salmon Federation)
- Neville Crabbe (Atlantic Salmon Federation)
- Pam Ryan (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council)
- Richard McGuigan (Miramichi Salmon Association)
- Serge Collin (Atlantic Salmon Federation)
- Siobhan Curry (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council)
- Tom Mann (Thomas Mann Consulting LTD)
- Tommi Linnansaari (University of New Brunswick)
- Vanessa McLaughlin (North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council)

## 4 OPENING REMARKS

### 4.1 Chief George Ginnish

#### **Natoaganeg First Nation Chief | North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council Chair**

Chief George Ginnish has served as an elected leader for 40 years, joining the Natoaganeg First Nation Council in 1984 and becoming Chief in 1986. He has also held key leadership roles, including board chair of the North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council and co-chair of Mi'gmawel' Tplu'taqnn Incorporated. Chief Ginnish is a strong advocate for truth and reconciliation, as well as rights recognition for all Mi'kmaq in New Brunswick. He is an expert at fostering understanding, community dialogues, and promoting healing and resolution.

*“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.*

*For over 300 years the right for Mi'gmaq communities to fish commercially has been secured under the Covenant of Peace and Friendship Treaties of 1725 (ratified in 1726),*

*1749 and 1760. 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.*

*The Marshall decision in 1999 recognized the continued authority of our 18<sup>th</sup> century Peace and Friendship Treaties between the British government and Mi'gmaq and Wolastoqey Peoples. The Supreme Court of Canada required the federal government to respect First Nation Treaty rights within the East Coast fisheries.*

*The United Nations Declaration Law (2021) could be a remedy that expressly and directly sets out the responsibility of governments in relation to Indigenous rights. This would include their obligation to take active steps to implement the United Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples including to consult and cooperate in good faith in order to obtain free, prior, and informed consent for the approval of any project affecting their lands, territories or other resources. However, we have in this session, the opportunity to work together to establish a model, a collaborative model, to take concrete steps to what I believe is a common goal, restore the Plamu to its historic relativity to the river, and to all of us.*

*Plamu First 2024 presents the opportunity for the gathering to discuss, as collaborators, how to best serve our king of fish in their uphill climb.”*

## **4.2 J.W. Bud Bird, PC, OC, ONB**

### **Champion of the Plamu**

Bud has been a lifelong advocate for Miramichi salmon conservation, having served as past president and Chair Emeritus of the Miramichi Salmon Association, as well as a director of the Atlantic Salmon Federation. He recognizes the importance of building strong, direct relationships between the business and government sectors and First Nations in the province. Over the past 20 years, Bud has led numerous initiatives aimed at improving these relationships and fostering greater engagement.

*“As we all know – but always worth repeating – the wild Atlantic salmon, Plamu has been a treasured resource in the Miramichi River watershed from the time mankind began to emerge on these lands. It was a mysterious creature among nature’s many blessings; emerging from such small eggs laid in gravel bars each fall, less than two years later disappearing from the river as very small smolts, then returning in the spring, two, three, or four years after that again as much larger mature fish. With that inexplicable cycle*



*repeating itself century after century to the present day. Truly a magical process beyond human imagination.*

*There are many challenges that confront our mutual wonderment and attachment to the Plamu, the growth of the commercial fishing industry converging on the Greenland fishery, the advent of the growth of the striped bass species, other bass species, have left us after 15 years still searching for the resolve to complete the leadership and management action that we all know is needed.*

*All this adds up to the proposition that, from the northwest Miramichi, less than 5% of its smolts are surviving to reach saltwater. Can we imagine how few of these smolts will ever return as adult spawning salmon to this wonderful river?*

*I am grateful for the guidance of our First Nation partners, who will bring collective knowledge and experiences in the areas of meaningful engagement and their history of the watershed. Now is the time. If not us and the organizations that we belong to, gathered here in this room, then who?"*

**Figure 2: Chief George Ginnish and J.W. Bud Bird, PC, OC, ONB**



*Figure 2: Chief George Ginnish and J.W. Bud Bird, PC, OC, ONB – Leaders in Plamu conservation offer opening remarks at Plamu First 2024.*

## 5 PLAMU FIRST 2021

### 5.1 Overview

The inaugural Plamu First 2021 was held from March 16-18, 2021, with 48 attendees participating in the three-day virtual event. This was a First Nations-led event designed to foster collaboration and partnership with all major stakeholders invested in addressing the current crisis facing the Plamu population.

The goal of Plamu First 2021 was to develop a five-year plan focused on protecting and enhancing the wild Plamu population through ecosystem-based management in the Miramichi watershed. In collaboration with local First Nations, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Government of New Brunswick, the Miramichi Salmon Association, the Miramichi Watershed Management Committee, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the New Brunswick Salmon Council, and academia, a plan with strategic imperatives was developed.

**Figure 3: Plamu First 2021 Opening Prayer**



*Figure 3: Plamu First 2021 Opening Prayer – Metepenagiag Elder, Betty Jane Ward gives an opening prayer via Zoom at the Plamu First 2021 conference.*

The 2021 Plamu First Report can be found at:

<https://www.plamufirst.ca/s/Plamu-First-2021-Conference-Report.pdf>

## 5.2 Assessment

Kevin Davidson, representing the New Brunswick Salmon Council, played a key role in the planning of Plamu First 2021. At Plamu First 2024, he presented the 2021 Plamu Report, evaluating the progress on the strategic imperatives outlined in the 2021 five-year plan. These Imperatives focused on local leadership to restore the wild Plamu population and protect the Miramichi watershed through an adaptive conservation plan that balances social, cultural, and economic benefits.

The goal was to exhaust all possible measures to increase the Plamu population and achieve meaningful co-management of Plamu by 2023. To support this, strategic action elements were established. The collaborators identified the need for sustainable funding to ensure all parties have the resources to support ongoing programs and increase research capacity for engaging rightsholders and stakeholders.

Kevin assessed the progress on each of the six strategic imperatives, providing star ratings (★):

1. **Improve Collaboration and Coordination:** Enhance coordination and communications to more effectively harness skills and knowledge.

★★★★☆

2. **Address Known Priority Threats:** Mitigate and alleviate the threats that are currently known to negatively affect the salmon population in the Miramichi watershed, by 2024.

★★

3. **Widen Awareness of the Crisis:** Ensure greater awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of Atlantic salmon and the escalating threats to the survival of the species.

★★★★★

4. **Address Data Gaps:** Identify and close the key data gaps mitigating the development of effective and efficient solutions to enhance watershed management and salmon recovery.

★★

5. **Enhance Habitat Conservation, Restoration and Protection:** Ensure the Miramichi watershed maintains a healthy and sustainable ecosystem with enough carrying capacity for all terrestrial and aquatic species.

★★★

6. **Conduct a Priority Threat Assessment:** Ensure greater awareness of the cultural, social and economic value of Atlantic salmon and the escalating threats to the survival of the species.

★★★☆☆



**Figure 4: Improved Collaboration and Coordination**



*Figure 4: Improved Collaboration and Coordination – Miramichi River conservation groups come together to carry out the Miramichi Smallmouth Bass Eradication project, a priority identified at Plamu First 2021.*

### **5.3 Moving Forward**

The consensus at Plamu First 2021 was that, to address the strategic imperatives, alignment and accountability among collaborators are essential. At Plamu First 2024, it was reaffirmed that developing leadership via a co-governance model is crucial for directing action on the strategic imperatives and ensuring long-term success.

## **6 SETTING THE STAGE**

Facilitator Tom Mann guided the discussions at Plamu First 2024 with a briefing that set the framework for addressing the challenges facing the Miramichi watershed and wild Plamu. He highlighted the importance of key foundations for productive collaboration. These included collaborative leadership, trust building, the significance of language, and the concept of base camping – elements framed as essential touchstones for working together.



## 6.1 Collaborative Leadership

The practice of collaborative leadership has proven successful in helping First Nations, governments, and non-government organizations build respectful and productive relationships. Through this initiative, leaders work together to dispel myths, build trust, and open new pathways for tackling tough issues. This approach forms the foundation for the proposed First Nations-led Collaborative Leadership Council, which aims to develop new approaches to decision-making, governance, and planning, ensuring ongoing and long-term collaborative action. Sustainability is embedded in this model to create permanent change in governance processes, operating systems, and decision-making structures.

Moving forward, the objective for all collaborators should be to strengthen partnerships and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information. This will enable them to make collaborative decisions, aligned with shared values, and addressing the challenges facing the Miramichi watershed. Reconciliation will further strengthen the governance model for the watershed.

## 6.2 Trust Building

Mutual trust is a critical requirement for governance, values, and effective collaboration. For trust to be established, it must be earned through trustworthy practices and engagement. Building trust should be a priority, with the collaborators taking responsibility for creating an environment of transparency and openness. Effective communication, using mutually agreed-upon channels, is essential for fostering understanding and trust, while also respecting different cultures, traditions, and perspectives.

Trust allows for the removal of barriers to communication, including managing dissenting views, and addressing concerns as they arise. With trust, effective collaboration becomes possible, ultimately leading to public trust that supports proactive actions recommended by the collaborative leadership model. The sharing of information and transparency will help mitigate mistrust, creating a stronger foundation for decision-making and collective action.

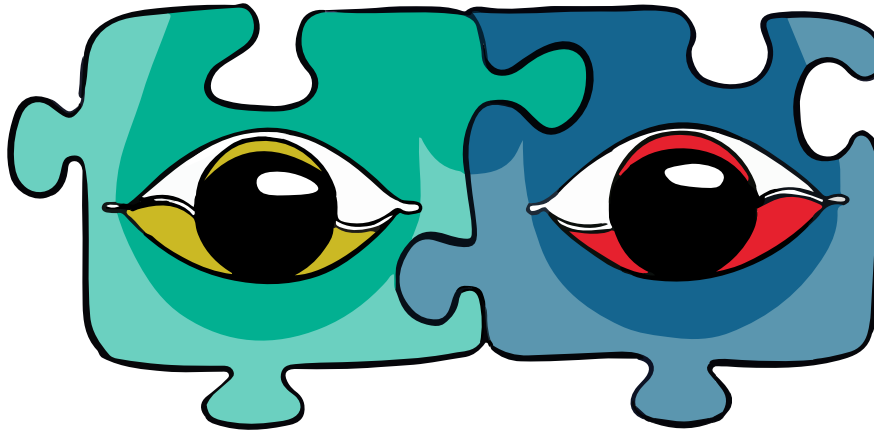
## 6.3 Etuaptmumk

Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) is a Mi'kmaq principle that emphasizes the value of integrating both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. As Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall explains, Etuaptmumk involves learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and from the other with the strengths of Western knowledge – and using both eyes together for the benefit of all.

In the context of the conference, this approach was presented as a guiding principle for integrating Indigenous laws, knowledge systems, and scientific data into collaborative decision-making, especially in the conservation of the Miramichi River ecosystem. Embracing Etuaptmumk ensures that diverse

perspectives are respected and that solutions are grounded in a holistic understanding of both traditional wisdom and modern science.

**Figure 5: "Two-Eyed Seeing" (Etuaptmumk in Mi'kmaw)**



*Figure 1: "Two-Eyed Seeing" (Etuaptmumk in Mi'kmaw) – Illustrated by N. M. Burton, in A. J. Reid et al., Two-Eyed Seeing: An Indigenous Framework to Transform Fisheries Research and Management (Fish and Fisheries), 2021.*

## 6.4 The Power of Language

To move forward, individual and organizational ethics must be reconsidered within the landscape of cultural difference, recognizing that the language we use varies between partners. Common values were expressed during both Plamu 2021 and 2024, but what constitutes common sense can differ greatly from person to person, shaped by different frames of reference.

Language plays a significant role in these differences, with three distinct language constructs existing within the conversation:

1. **First Nations:** Traditional knowledge, the First Nations Principles of OCAP®, Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* the 1999 Marshall decision, the United Nations Declaration Act, and science.
2. **Government:** Federal, provincial, and municipal legislation, regulations, departmental policies, strategies, and science.
3. **Non-Government Organizations:** Conservation language, often tied to external funding sources, including memorandums of understanding, mission statements, and the language of protection and restoration.

Understanding these language differences is critical to fostering dialogue. Rather than focusing on what we do not agree on, the aim should be to celebrate the common values that unite us and work from those to find solutions. Engaging in this way can help move discussions forward productively.

**Figure 6: Meaningful Discussion as a Three-Legged Stool**



*Figure 6: Meaningful Discussion as a Three-Legged Stool – A depiction of how First Nations, government, and NGOs can overcome language differences and come together for meaningful discussions.*

## 6.5 Base Camping

In addressing complex challenges like the conservation of the wild Plamu, it is crucial to approach the work step by step. Just as climbers ascend mountains by acclimatizing at base camps along the way, collaborators must move forward thoughtfully and steadily, building trust and understanding as they go.

The process of base camping emphasizes the need to take time to adjust to new perspectives, build relationships, and align on shared goals. It is about creating a solid foundation for collaboration by respecting the diverse experiences, values, and expertise each participant brings to the table. Just as each base camp serves as a preparation point for the next phase of the journey, each stage of collaboration requires reflection and readiness to move forward together.

This approach ensures that as challenges are tackled and decisions are made, there is mutual respect and understanding at each stage of the process. It also reinforces the idea that meaningful, long-term change takes time and requires patience as participants continue to engage and work toward a common goal.

## 7 PANEL 1: THE SHARED VALUE OF PLAMU IN 2024

### 7.1 Panel 1 Speakers

- **Charlie Bjorndal, Director of Indigenous Knowledge Research**  
**Mi'gmawe'l Tplu'taqnn Incorporated**  
*The Miramichi Watershed: Importance of Salmon (Plamu) – Findings from an Indigenous Knowledge Study to determine the status of Miramichi River fisheries from the Mi'kmaq perspective*
- **Charlie Marshall, Fisheries Policy Analyst**  
**Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs Secretariat**  
*Wild Atlantic Salmon & NASCO – An overview of APC's work on the Wild Atlantic Salmon Conservation Policy and Strategy*
- **Lyndsay Jay-Keating, Biologist**  
**Miramichi Salmon Association**  
*Miramichi River Branch Smolt Estimates in the context of the current state of Atlantic salmon – An assessment of salmon population trends on the Northwest and Dungarvon branches of the Miramichi River*
- **Mark Hambrook, Vice-President**  
**Miramichi Watershed Management Committee**  
*Overview of Atlantic Salmon Stocking on the Miramichi – The history, current capacity, and potential of the Miramichi Salmon Conservation Centre's annual fry-stocking program*

### 7.2 Panel 1 Roundtable Questions

- Why is Atlantic salmon important to you?
- What do we (and our organizations) share in common regarding Atlantic salmon preservation?
- What else do you (or your organization) need to advance Atlantic salmon preservation?
- What further capacity can your organization contribute to these shared objectives?

### 7.3 Panel 1 Takeaways

- *The salmon has always brought people together and continues to bring us together in this crisis.*
- *We need to rally around the species.*
- *We need to be committed together to capacity-building for the next seven generations.*

- *The watershed needs us to break out of our silos. We must understand the sense of urgency.*
- *We all share responsibility in our role, and we share the crisis. We want a solution.*
- *Plamu are a species that is natural to our river, and we do not want it destroyed. It is part of our Atlantic identity.*
- *We need capacity to address the challenges that must go beyond interest only.*
- *Stewardship and sustainability are keys to the future of salmon.*
- *Rights holders and stakeholders are not the same. We have different roles.*
- *Habitat restoration.*
- *Looking forward to future generations.*
- *Striped bass is one of the threats.*
- *A value we all share is conservation.*

## 8 PANEL 2: WHAT BARRIERS DO WE FACE?

### 8.1 Panel 2 Speakers

- **Karl Phillips, Postdoctoral Fellow**  
**University of New Brunswick and Canadian Rivers Institute**  
*To what degree is the striped bass success story compounding other barriers to Atlantic salmon recovery? – An overview of smolt-tracking research and how the results relate to striped bass predation in the Miramichi River*
- **David Roth, Postdoctoral Fellow**  
**University of New Brunswick and Canadian Rivers Institute**  
*“Truck & Transport” Smolt in the Miramichi River: Estimating the Effects of Smolt Transportation from Different Vantage Points and Management Perspectives – An outline of an upcoming project to transport Plamu smolts to the Miramichi River estuary as a means to increase survival and returns*
- **John Bagnall, Fisheries Committee Chair and Past President**  
**New Brunswick Salmon Council**  
*Plamu II Presentation – An assessment of current scientific data relating to Miramichi Plamu, striped bass populations, and stocking capacity, with an emphasis on data gaps*

- **Ethan Augustine, Anqotum Resource Management Senior Biologist  
North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council**

*Invasive Smallmouth Bass in the Miramichi* – An overview of smallmouth bass as a threat to the Miramichi River ecosystem, efforts to contain them, and next steps

## 8.2 Panel 2 Roundtable Questions

- What other barriers to Plamu preservation do you see? How do you prioritize them? Address them?
- How do we leverage a process to build trust, strengthen trust, strengthen relationships, advance ongoing efforts, and develop new initiatives?
- Is your commitment to a pathway forward one that includes clearly defining our common interests, identifying obstacles to progress, and dispelling myths with fact-based dialogue of mutual respect?
- What data deficiencies do we face relating to all species and why cannot the data be brought to the table to benefit all shareholders?

## 8.3 Panel 2 Takeaways

- *There is lots of data. One issue is access to the data – it is not housed in one location.*
- *Of all we have seen today, the UNB/CRI studies were interesting, as predation by striped bass does not line up with DFO's science. There is a big gap to inform fishery management decisions.*
- *How do we leverage a process to build trust?*
- *Just because it was done a certain way in the past does not mean it has to be done that way now.*
- *Meaningfully listening to each other's perspective is a good place to start.*
- *One data gap appears to be that we have no idea what is coming into the river on a yearly basis.*
- *Can we not eliminate redundancies in data and establish a centralized database?*
- *We are cheating ourselves out of the value of sharing data and resources.*
- *We have lost touch with the environment. No one wants to give anything.*
- *Modern consumer culture – no one wants to sacrifice to solve the issue.*
- *It is a pity that rivers are so often boundaries between jurisdictions.*
- *We need our people monitoring the river, as eyes and ears on the water, providing continuous knowledge and advocating for Plamu.*
- *We need a better understanding of DFO's processes, including the funding management process.*
- *If our wants are divided, then no one will get what they want.*
- *Coordination is a big challenge. Coordinating would give us a louder voice.*

## 9 PANEL 3: LET'S TALK CO-MANAGEMENT

### 9.1 Panel 3 Speakers

- **Joseph Augustine, Anqotum Resource Management Field Technician  
North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council**  
*Gaspereau Trap Escapement Toolkit* – A look at efforts to develop a Gaspereau trap that allows the escapement of other fish species, a project that was conceptualized at Plamu First 2021
- **Nathan Wilbur, Vice President of Regional Programs  
Atlantic Salmon Federation**  
*Coldwater enhancement put into practice: Considerations, challenges, lessons learned* – Insights into cold water Plamu habitat, research-action gaps, and collaborative enhancement efforts
- **Butch Dalton, President  
Miramichi Salmon Association**  
*Let's Talk Co-Management* – A review of best practices for co-management and the potential of the already established Miramichi Watershed Management Committee
- **Josiane Goguen, Fish & Fish Habitat Protection and Ecosystem Management Biologist  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Gulf Region**  
*Integrated Watershed Management Planning (IWMP): A roadmap to building a comprehensive and collaborative IWMP* – An explanation of IWMPs and how they can lead to successful watershed co-management

### 9.2 Panel 3 Roundtable Questions

- What does co-management of the Miramichi River watershed mean to you?
- Is the status quo enough, or is there a better way to work together? How can you (and your organization) contribute to a better way?
- What are the next steps to tailor a process to ensure ongoing and long-term collaborative action, achieving co-management of Plamu advancing accountable responsibilities, timeframe, and approaches to meaningful co-development, codesign, and co-delivery within a year?
- In the next five years, what do we need to maximize solutions to our common issues? What should we have seen change in the Miramichi River watershed by 2029?

### 9.3 Panel 3 Takeaways

- *A balanced watershed is made up of conservation groups, industry, First Nations, and all levels of government.*
- *The governance model requires more First Nation involvement overall.*
- *The governance model must be designed to secure long-term funding dedicated to the protection of the watershed governance model and to strengthen its lobbying role.*
- *Why does the Pacific Coast get funding for salmon, and we do not? Compared to the Pacific salmon initiative, we seem to be a poor cousin.*
- *DFO wants to align their Gulf programming.*
- *There are a number of threats, including bycatch issues, gaspereau trap, salmon mortality, and coldwater habitat. There are a lot of other things that can make a difference.*
- *There is a lot of apathy from the general public related to the value of the watershed.*
- *Talking is good, but we get in our own way. We need more action.*
- *A barrier to action is cohesiveness – a stream of funding.*
- *Establishing a five-year strategy or plan will, hopefully, secure long-term resources.*
- *An ecosystem approach might be better than the species approach as it would give the opportunities to be able to spread resources out, and into focus as well.*
- *Capacity is built when organizations partner—we must optimize our resources and the assets we have such as the hatchery.*
- *The Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk is an example of a two-year project that can have a tie into other projects, for eligibility for other types of grants to secure needed resources.*
- *Leveraging programs with collaboration from in-kind support from partners – by doing that, we build trust and create success stories.*
- *All parties must be at the table and find different ways to do things through improved understanding and collaboration.*
- *Our goals must be driven by an accountable leadership model with funding streaming towards the right pockets of programs among the funding partners.*
- *Regular touchpoints in developing relationships, so funders are always aware of the needs of the local groups.*
- *We need good relationships and better alignment.*
- *Co-management should encompass all species, valuing the total ecosystem.*
- *A two-eyed seeing approach is a must.*
- *We need an Indigenous champion.*



## 10 CONCLUSION

Throughout the Plamu First 2024 Conference and post-conference debriefings, the concepts of co-management and self-governance were central to the discussions. It was emphasized that the Peace and Friendship Treaties envisioned a co-governance model, where two peoples from different cultures could share resources in a manner culturally appropriate to each community.

The integration of Indigenous laws and customs, particularly Etuaptmunk, emerged as crucial to sustainable resource use. By incorporating Indigenous principles and knowledge into the decision-making processes alongside scientific data, we can strengthen the current First Nations-Led Collaborative Leadership Council structure. This approach aligns with conservation principles already in use by the Fisheries and Oceans Canada and offers an opportunity for deeper collaboration.

Despite the optimism surrounding new initiatives, history shows that many projects begin with high expectations but face unforeseen challenges that hinder progress. However, after the Plamu First 2024 conference, there is renewed hope and commitment to a shared path forward.

### 10.1 Next Steps

A new platform is needed to enable effective collaboration between government, First Nations, and non-government organizations, facilitating informed decisions and establishing true co-management for the Miramichi watershed. The foundation for the First Nations-Led Collaborative Leadership Council is laid out in the Plamu First 2024 | Five-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030). The shared goal among all groups is clear; what remains is the establishment of a structure to effectively implement this vision.