



WOLASTOQEY NATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

Matawaskiye • Neqotkuk • Wotstak • Bilijk • Sitansisk • Welamukotok

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Federal Budget Cuts Will Cause Wolastoq Salmon Extinction Polamuwok Back | Save Wolastoq Salmon

WOLASTOQEY HOMELAND - The Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick (WNNB) is demanding that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) keep the Mactaquac Biodiversity Facility (MBF) operational. A recently announced federal budget decision will close the facility without alternative conservation measures to restore Wolastoq salmon (Polamuwok).

“This facility keeps salmon in the Wolastoq alive,” said Chief Justice Gruben of Bilijk (Kingsclear).

This year, hundreds of salmon are expected to be released into the Wolastoq from this facility to help restore the population on the river. If this facility closes before alternative measures are in place, they will likely die before they can spawn, and crucial salmon conservation programs will cease. Fisheries scientists and conservation groups have spoken out about the impacts of this closure. It will be immediate and lasting: irreplaceable salmon genetics will be lost, upstream populations risk extinction, fish passage outcomes will weaken, and New Brunswick will lose Wolastoq salmon recovery efforts.

“DFO’s unilateral decision sends the message that they have given up on restoring salmon in the Wolastoq. We cannot let this happen,” Gruben continued. “While the Mactaquac dam’s life is being extended, the mitigation efforts to protect this vital species are being eliminated. This is shortsighted and in direct breach of the government’s obligations.”

The federal government’s decision to close the Mactaquac Biodiversity Facility threatens the Wolastoq’s entire ecosystem. The Minister made this decision without consultation with the First Nations who are critical in stewarding the recovery of salmon in the Wolastoq and without consideration for future mitigation efforts. The Wolastoqey Nation has requested to discuss this decision with the Minister and has received no response.

“Officials in Ottawa are pitting river systems against each other by investing in salmon conservation in other watersheds while eliminating mitigation efforts in the Wolastoq.” Gruben said.

The Wolastoqey Nation is launching a public campaign and petition to demand that DFO reaffirm its commitment to Wolastoq salmon by keeping the Mactaquac Biodiversity facility operational, at minimum until adequate mitigation measures are in place.

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Background:

The Mactaquac Biodiversity Facility was established in 1968 as a conservation mitigation to offset the impacts of the Mactaquac dam on Atlantic Salmon. Originally built to compensate for the losses to Atlantic salmon because of the dam, studies determined that it would be impossible to maintain the historical salmon population in the Wolastoq (Saint John River) without a hatchery.

A formal legal agreement was made between DFO and the New Brunswick Electric Power Commission (NB Power) to build a hatchery to produce 500,000 young salmon per year and create systems to collect, sort, and move fish past the dam to support the river's salmon population. DFO committed to operating the facility "during the life of the Mactaquac Project". Through the Mactaquac Life Achievement Project (MLAP), the dam is set to undergo major repairs that will extend its lifespan to 2068, even as the key mitigation measure created to reduce its effects is being dismantled.

Every year, the Mactaquac Biodiversity Facility collects and raises young Atlantic Salmon (smolts) from the Tobique River. Once mature, the adult fish are released back to the Tobique River to spawn. This helps to ensure population numbers do not fall to a critical level. The facility also helps maintain the genetic diversity of salmon upriver from the Mactaquac Dam and provides valuable resources to support salmon research and population assessment. The work of the Mactaquac Biodiversity Facility has kept the species' genetics alive. More needs to be done to fully restore the population.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) confirmed early in 2026 that it will close the Mactaquac facility and its conservation programs along with a sister facility in Coldbrook, Nova Scotia. The closures are part of broader cuts announced in the federal budget.

WNNB, along with Atlantic salmon scientists and conservationists, have strongly criticized the decision. The facility's closure is expected to further devastate Atlantic salmon populations in the Wolastoq, which have already dropped from an estimated population more than 100,000 before industrialization to just a couple of hundred returning fish per year.

For more information, visit our campaign and petition page: www.wolastoqsalmon.ca



Scientist and Conservation Partners:

Dr. Tommi Linnansaari, Professor, University of New Brunswick - Fredericton, Department of

Biology/Faculty of Forestry and Environmental Management; Fellow, Canadian Rivers Institute
Dr. Linnansaari is a fish ecologist, and his research lab focuses on Atlantic salmon ecology, the effects of anthropogenic impacts on rivers related to climate change, hydropower and other manipulations of flow.

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Dr. David Roth, Regional Program Manager for New Brunswick, Atlantic Salmon Federation

David Roth is the New Brunswick Program Director for the Atlantic Salmon Federation. With a strong scientific background, he has contributed to a wide range of Atlantic salmon research programs across Canada, Europe, and Greenland, including supplementation initiatives. In his current role, he leads and supports projects throughout New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada, working in close collaboration with a broad network of partners and stakeholders involved in Atlantic salmon conservation.

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