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# The Gaspé **SPEC**

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## Salmon are finally spawning

Geneviève Gélinas

GASPÉ: - Around July 10 salmon finally started to spawn on Gaspé rivers. 2014 will probably remain a poor year for spawning.

In June and at the beginning of July, river managers were reporting that this year the salmon were slow to spawn. Interviewed by SPEC on July 14, Jean Roy, director general of the Gaspé Rivers Managing Society (*Société de gestion des rivières de Gaspé*), said that “for a few days, it has been a little better. A lot of grilse [young salmon] are entering our rivers. But when grilse spawn, it usually means that most of the large salmon spawning is over.”

In Gaspé, catches of large salmon are twice as low as in 2012. But the 70% increase of grilse catches suggests that 2015 could be a better year. But fishermen didn't stop trying their luck: for the first part of the season, their number was 5% higher than in 2013, and only 8% lower than in 2012, which was a record year.

On July 23, 24 and 25 the Society will count the number of salmon in its three rivers. “We'll see if we will allow fishermen to keep their salmon on the St. John and Dartmouth Rivers and if we continue to allow them to keep their salmon on the York River,” said Mr. Roy.

When SPEC reached its deadline, the catch and release measure was in force on the St. John and Dartmouth Rivers, but not on the York.



Photo: Jean-Guy Béliveau

*In Gaspé, the catches of large salmon are two times lower than in 2012. But the increase of grilse catches (+70%) suggests that 2015 could be a good year.*

The catch and release measure is being increasingly accepted by anglers, pointed out Mr. Roy. “Of course, a few fishermen are disappointed, but in general, fishermen have a greater concern for salmon in the rivers than for salmon in their fridges.”

Meanwhile, there is good news for the York River: the illness which was affecting the salmon in 2011, 2012 and 2013 seems to be gone in 2014. “We didn't collect any dead salmon and we got only a few reports of salmon with white spots [caused by the *Saprolegnia* fungus, which

affects already ill salmon].” Jean Roy said.

Darlene Sexton, Director General of the Cascapedia Society stated that fishing “started slowly” at the beginning of June. But from June 10 or 11, it got better, she added. Fishermen caught and released 485 salmon in June and Mrs. Sexton is expecting an average season.

On the Bonaventure River, spawning has been better since Hurricane Arther passed through on July 5. “The river level has risen and we had a full moon over the next weekend,” pointed out Ronald

Cormier, director of the ZEC. “There has been an increase in catches since Arthur and it looks as if salmon are spawning.”

Only 76 salmon were caught on the Bonaventure by the end of June. The 2002-2013 average for that period was 275. But such a low year isn't abnormal, Mr. Cormier said. The ZEC also experienced low years in 2002 and 2007.

As for the fishermen, they had “thrown in the towel” at the beginning of July, but “it's still possible to catch up,” Mr. Cormier states.

Several reasons were mentioned to explain the low spawning: more intense fishing in Greenland where our salmon spends a part of its life, late spring and thick ice around Newfoundland, a migration path for our salmon.

According to Jean Roy, “once we've assessed that large salmon are less numerous this year, and not only late, we can search for the reasons.”

He pointed out that in 2013, there was a 55% decrease in grilse numbers on Quebec rivers, which is consistent with the 2014 decrease in large salmon.