

SALMON AND TROUT ASSOCIATION HIGHLIGHTS IMPLICATIONS OF BEAVER IMPACTS ON SALMON POPULATIONS- AS DETAILED IN MAJOR NEW REPORT

The Salmon and Trout Association (S&TA), Britain's leading gamefish conservation body, is warning that a recently published comprehensive survey of Atlantic salmon rivers in one province of eastern Canada has concluded that beavers can have a major adverse impact on fish populations. The warning comes on the eve of the release of beavers into the wild in Knapdale, Argyll.

The report entitled "A Conservation Strategy for Atlantic Salmon in Prince Edward Island", which was commissioned by the Atlantic Salmon Federation (North America's main salmon conservation organisation), states that salmon habitat on the island has been "seriously compromised by two primary limiting factors" – one of which is beavers. Their dams "prevent salmon from reaching preferred spawning and nursery sites and sometimes prevent young salmon from going to sea". The report concludes that, unless beavers are removed or culled on an ongoing basis, the result will be "the demise of salmon runs" in at least three of the island's rivers and will put salmon runs "in jeopardy" in a further seven.

Paul Knight, Executive Director of S&TA, said: "This report is unequivocal in its conclusions and it should be required reading for those who have granted the Knapdale beaver licence. While the American beaver is a different species to its European cousin, both species share a propensity for dam building whenever the available habitat is not to their liking. Beaver dams are of course the problem and on either side of the Atlantic they can amount to insurmountable obstacles to migrating salmon, sea trout and brown trout, particularly when, as is normally the case, there is little depth of water below the dam".

Mr Knight added: "Apart from the ten rivers whose salmon populations are currently under threat, the Prince Edward report identifies 11 rivers on the island which have actually lost their salmon populations since 2002. It concludes that 'beaver blockages appear to be the main reason'. It is worth noting that beavers were re-introduced to Prince Edward Island in 1949 but six decades on it is clear that their impact on salmon numbers has been little short of catastrophic. Surely this must cause alarm bells to ring within Scottish Government. It is vital that proper scientific research is now commissioned into the likely impact of burgeoning beaver numbers on migratory fish populations in Scotland and indeed the rest of Britain. Furthermore there needs to be absolute clarity on what will happen to the Knapdale beavers once the trial period is concluded".

Nick Yonge, Director of the Tweed Foundation, which has campaigned against the Knapdale release, added: "The Prince Edward Island report underlines how stupid it would be to introduce beavers to Britain. Introducing

animals that make major changes to our countryside is only acceptable where those changes can be contained effectively to specific areas. The evidence from countries where beavers have been introduced is that they cannot be contained and that they would cause harm to our native fish stocks by building dams. I believe that the Government and their advisors now understand this and I expect it to be reflected in their future plans for species introductions”.

The full Prince Edward Island report may be viewed at <http://atlanticsalmonfederation.org/pei/2009peireport.html>

A photograph of a massive beaver dam near Alyth in Perthshire can be emailed on request.

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Notes for editors

- 1) Formed in 1903, the Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) is a company limited by guarantee which was granted charitable status in March 2008. It has a UK-wide membership of game anglers, fishery owners/managers, trades and members of the public with an interest in conserving the aquatic environment and its dependent species. Although its members are mainly drawn from those with an interest in game fisheries, its wide-ranging environmental remit is ultimately for the public benefit. Further information is available at www.salmon-trout.org
- 2) The Atlantic Salmon Federation, based in Canada, is an international non-profit organization that promotes the conservation and wise management of wild Atlantic salmon and their environment. Further information is available at www.asf.ca
- 3) Beavers are commercially trapped on Prince Edward Island. However the number of beaver trappers has declined in recent years, partly due to low prices for beaver pelts.
- 4) The Prince Edward Island report also calls into question the assertion that beaver dams improve water quality. On the contrary the report maintains that beaver dams “can negatively impact water quality” because “the more impounded water on a river, the poorer the water quality (in particular, depressed oxygen and elevated water temperature) in summer”.

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