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Statement from the Working Group on Smallmouth Bass Eradication in the Miramichi May 14, 2021

On Tuesday, May 11th, representatives of our Working Group received a letter signed by New Brunswick Minister of Environment and Local Government, Gary Crossman, releasing the Miramichi smallmouth bass eradication project from further environmental assessment.

The North Shore Micmac District Council officially registered the project for an environmental impact assessment (EIA) determination review on October 8th, 2020. The plan was prepared according to international standard operating procedures for the use of rotenone in fisheries management with help from experts in the field.

As part of the EIA process, a committee with representatives from multiple provincial and federal agencies conducted a technical review of the project description. As a result, our Working Group, made up of Indigenous organizations and NGOs, addressed 104 questions and comments. We also responded to 57 questions and comments from a group of camp owners with properties on Miramichi Lake. During the EIA open comment period, our project garnered 1,290 letters of support from the public.

Recognizing that the project can be conducted safely with limited short-term consequences to non-target species, and that it has a reasonable chance of eradicating smallmouth bass from the Miramichi watershed, Minister Crossman determined we may proceed subject to 24 conditions.

This is the first major regulatory achievement since illegally introduced smallmouth bass were discovered in Miramichi Lake in 2008. However, other processes are still pending, including a decision from Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) on whether to authorize the use of a Health Canada approved rotenone product in Miramichi Lake, Lake Brook, and an approximately 15-kilometre section of the Southwest Miramichi River.

Our plan is to conduct a first treatment of the lake, brook, and river in August and a second of the brook and river in September. Our final proposal has been under review by DFO since April 2020. In addition to a detailed technical analysis, DFO has led consultation with all New Brunswick First Nations. Given the time sensitive nature of the project, we expect a decision from DFO in the coming weeks.

Our Working Group has begun operational planning in order to be prepared if all permits are issued. We have contracted experts from around North America to lead the operation and have begun recruiting approximately 70-volunteers to take part.

Invasive fish species like smallmouth bass are a permanent biological pollutant. They prey on native fish, consume their food, and compete for habitat. The widespread colonization of smallmouth bass in the Miramichi watershed would negatively alter the ecosystem, harming the fisheries and cultures it supports.

This is an urgent conservation project to benefit the environment. Our action is necessary and the tools and techniques we intend to use have been proven safe and effective. The alternative is to allow one of the world's great wild salmon rivers to be forever negatively altered.

For more information contact Neville Crabbe
(506) 467-6804
ncrabbe@asf.ca