

Planning an International Year of the Salmon

By Mark Saunders

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The NPAFC and its counterpart in the Atlantic, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO), completed their annual meetings in May and June, respectively. It was a time for both organizations to review progress and consider plans for activities for the upcoming year. The agendas for both organizations saw emphasis on the International Year of the Salmon (IYS), an initiative that brings the two organizations together as core partners in a bold initiative to establish the conditions required for the resilience for salmon and people in a rapidly changing world. I was fortunate enough to be able to attend both meetings along with NPAFC colleagues George Iwama and Jim Irvine. It was both rewarding and inspiring to engage with similarly dedicated people literally a world apart.

Re-affirming the Relevance of the IYS

The IYS was born out of concerns related to our ability to understand and respond to the extremes and uncertainty in both ecological and social contexts. It was not surprising to see that the news in both basins continues to support a heightened need for the IYS. In the Pacific, the “Blob” of warm water persisted from 2013–2016, representing the most intense recent warm water



Mark Saunders currently works for the NPAFC Secretariat as the Director for the North Pacific Region of the International Year of the Salmon initiative. He recently retired from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, where he headed up a Salmon, Aquaculture and Freshwater Ecology Division at the Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo, BC with staff working on salmon stock assessment, freshwater habitat, molecular genetics, fish health, and marine ecology. The first half of Mark’s career focused on stock assessment of marine fish including Pacific hake, pollock, sablefish, and spiny dogfish as well as research related to hydroacoustic surveys and fisheries oceanography of the California current system. From 2003–2009 Mark worked with the Departments Policy Branch assisting with the development and implementation of Canada’s Wild Salmon Policy. Mark has been active at NPAFC since 2009, serving as CSRS Chairperson from 2011–2014, and he is currently the Chairperson of the International Year of the Salmon Working Group. Mark and his wife live in the small town of Chemainus on Vancouver Island. In his spare time, Mark enjoys sailing, kayaking, cycling, skiing, and sport fishing.



The First IYS North Pacific Steering Committee Meeting—Richmond, BC, Canada February 28–March 1, 2017. Photo credit: NPAFC Secretariat



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event in the North Pacific. The impact of these conditions is just starting to be felt now. Additionally, concern grows over declining abundances of chum salmon in the northwest Pacific Ocean. In the Atlantic, the generally poor abundance and productivity status of Atlantic salmon persists. The Report of the ICES Advisory Committee to the Council was striking in the consistency in timing of declines of many Pacific and Atlantic stocks that started in the 1990's. It is unlikely that this is simply a coincidence and the IYS provides an opportunity to combine our observations and expertise to understand how large-scale climate drivers are affecting salmon.

NASCO held two special sessions during their annual meeting this year that were informative and thought provoking with presentations relevant to both ocean basins. The IYS Special Session included talks on lessons learned from other international initiatives such as the International Year of the Coral Reef and World Fish Migration Day. Talks were encouraging in that our approach to the IYS to date is consistent with their recommendations, and good ideas were presented that we can draw from. A presentation from Dr. Steve Sutton of the Atlantic Salmon Federation outlined the NGO perspective on the IYS, particularly the need for strong objectives that will see direct benefits for salmon in the end. Finally, a presentation from Dr. Robert Arlinghaus on the Human Dimension outlined a quantitative approach to understanding human thought and action regarding fish, fishing, and fisheries. This was particularly relevant to our development of a results-based approach to outreach and research in general.

A second special session on hatcheries and stocking was insightful and I encourage you to have a look at the papers posted on the NASCO website, in particular the paper by Karl Young from the University of Zurich that is thought-provoking. <http://www.nasco.int/2017councildocs.html>



Russian Research Vessel "Professor Kaganovsky". Photo credit: TINRO-Center, Vladivostok, Russia

Getting started ...

Last year the IYS became a reality with both organizations endorsing a joint proposal. The focus over the past year has been the implementation of the governance structure and the initiation of serious planning for the IYS. The governance structure reflects the collaborative nature of the IYS with steering committees of partners in the both basins providing input to a Coordinating Committee. A Symposium Steering Committee, again with representation from both basins is charged with planning the opening event/symposium and is considering a number of options. The basin steering committees held their inaugural meetings this past year in November in London, England and in March in Richmond, BC, Canada. Based on input from the meeting, the North Pacific Steering Committee will be pared down to 12–15 members. NASCO supported the proposed results-based planning and the concept of Signature Projects. High seas expeditions in the Pacific proposed by Russia (Dr. Melnikov) and Canada (Dr. Beamish) have generated a lot of excitement as defining Signature Projects in the North Pacific. In March 2018, Japan will host the local IYS

Symposium on *Sustainable Management of Chum Salmon in Changing Environments*. Similarly, Norway is proposing a symposium title “Managing the Atlantic salmon in a rapidly changing environment—management challenges and possible responses” to be held in conjunction with their annual meeting in June of 2019. The NPAFC has agreed to hold IYS workshops in association with each of its annual meetings over the next five years with the first to be titled “Pacific Salmon Production in a Changing Climate” and being held in Khabarovsk, Russia on May 26–27, 2018.

The Coordinating Committee has been active holding regular conference calls to refine the governance model and develop a logo and website. The logo, completed in the spring after much spirited deliberation, is a globe containing a stylistic salmon supported by an upturned hand. The image reflects the IYS theme of salmon and people in a changing world and I am excited to be using this logo and a soon to be completed branding package that will allow us to increase the exposure of the IYS. A contract has been awarded for the development of the IYS website that we anticipate launching early in the fall.



Mark Saunders with NASCO President Mr. Jóannes Hansen

The Upcoming Year

This summer, NPAFC President Carmel Lowe will meet with NASCO's new President Jóannes Hansen to discuss the IYS and future collaboration between the two organizations. Following that, the Coordinating Committee and the Symposium Steering Committee will work in consultation with their respective basin steering committees to plan the opening event and develop communication materials.

Over the next year George, Madeline and I along with our NPAFC Secretariat colleagues are looking forward working with all of you to continue implementing the IYS. Much of our effort this fall and winter will focus on planning the IYS opening event, developing communications materials and the development of plans for high impact projects that will make a difference in achieving our IYS outcomes.

Building a hemispheric partnership is both bold and daunting. While we face challenges of distance and limited budgets, we have a tremendous opportunity to leverage capacity through collaboration to realize our vision for the IYS. On my last day in Sweden I toured

several local watersheds. Given the topics of discussion with local fisheries staff and volunteers I could have been in almost any watershed across the salmosphere. One group of presenters were working on a Watershed Council to protect salmon and fish values as part of a European Union pilot initiative involving four countries. Approaches to watershed governance is an area of interest in the Pacific and I am making arrangements to connect this group with a similar initiative in Western Canada. I am also considering how to incorporate this approach into our IYS Human Dimension theme and engage all interested IYS partners. It was one of dozens of connections in terms of people and issues of shared interest that I was able to take away in my short time in Sweden. It left me convinced that the IYS is the right initiative for this difficult time. The IYS can build bridges between institutions and communities across the hemisphere that are challenged by the distances and the isolated nature of our academic and management communities. Leveraging our investments, and learning from one another and working together is a positive environment to take on the challenges in front of us. It has left me inspired and excited to get on with our work to plan and implement the International Year of the Salmon.



Mark Saunders with Swedish team engaged in the development of a Himleån River water council.