

Restigouche Ecotourism and Conservation Opportunities

The Restigouche River Watershed is one of New Brunswick's wilderness tourism treasures. It is internationally renowned for wild Atlantic salmon angling, and is increasingly recognized as a world-class wild river canoeing destination.

The potential for New Brunswick to build on this outdoor tourism appeal is held back by the fact that its forests and rivers are virtually unprotected from development.

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, New Brunswick Chapter (CPAWS NB) and its community partners envision a Restigouche region where the natural assets, so crucial for regional economic development and quality of life, are protected – misty mountains, sparking wild rivers, spawning Atlantic salmon, majestic forests, and wildlife.



Any potential activities need to respect the rights and values of the First Nations in the region, and their interests in helping implement solutions that would protect their values. CPAWS is working with community partners, including the Restigouche River Watershed Management Council and the Gespe'gewaq Mi'gmaq Resource Council, to reflect local values and priorities.

Opportunity 1: Conserving the Natural Infrastructure that Supports Restigouche Communities – Wild Rivers, Wilderness Forests, Wildlife

- New Brunswick ranks 2nd to last in wilderness protection in Canada, with only 4.7% of the province in permanent parks or protected areas. On average, other provinces are protecting about 10% of their jurisdictions, with commitments to increase in almost every other province.
- Currently, only about 3% of the Restigouche watershed is protected, making it one of the least protected watersheds in the province, despite the fact that over three-quarters of the watershed is Crown land.
- Ecologists have recommended that we need to do a better job of protecting both old forests and the forests around the headwaters of our rivers, to conserve habitat for New Brunswick fish and wildlife

CPAWS' Proposed Solutions:

- 1) To move New Brunswick towards the Canadian average for protected areas, the government should commit to **protecting at least 20% of the province's Crown land by 2020**, which amounts to 10% of the province. This would allow more of the wildest parts of Restigouche to be permanently protected from development and industrial activity.
- 2) To ensure that wild Atlantic salmon can continue to thrive in the Restigouche rivers, we should increase protection on stream banks and steep slopes, and improve forest conservation to maintain shade around headwater streams.

Opportunity 2: Promoting Ecotourism, Angling and Revitalizing Northern NB Economy

In order to continue to market the Appalachian / Restigouche area as a nature-oriented destination, we need to actually protect the wildest parts of the Restigouche from industrial development, so we can provide a predictable, quality destination year after year.

- Part of the Restigouche River is a **Canadian Heritage River**, which should help attract tourists to this part of New Brunswick. This recognition does not actually add any protection for the river or lands nearby, other than an unenforced management plan that provides limited voluntary controls on forestry near the main river.
- The Restigouche supports one of the world's most thriving **wild Atlantic salmon** populations, with some of the largest salmon in Eastern Canada. A recent economic study has shown that salmon angling in the lodges of the Restigouche contributes \$15 million and over 500 jobs to the regional Restigouche and provincial economy.
- A valued **ecotourism sector** provides important jobs and wealth creation to Restigouche communities, attracting customers from across Canada, Europe and the United States. This sector could flourish even more, but it is difficult to plan and promote their wild river and wilderness tour products in the absence of permanently protected quality destinations.
- Barred owls, scarlet tanagers, Canada lynx, black bears, moose and bald eagles are found amongst the forest-covered hills and deep gorges of the Restigouche. This **wildlife** attraction is a relatively untapped source of ecotourism potential, but can only be a tourism asset if we manage the rivers and forests to ensure this wildlife can still find sufficient habitats in Restigouche.
- Thousands of **canoeists and anglers** use the Restigouche River each year for recreation, sometimes coming into conflict over their approach to using the river. There is no special status or protection that would allow enforcement officials to ensure that recreational use doesn't lower the quality of experience for tourists looking for a true wilderness experience.



CPAWS' Proposed Solutions:

- 1) CPAWS and local partners believe that adding new permanent **protected areas** on at least **10% of the public land in the Restigouche watershed** would increase the ability of ecotourism operators to have predictable destinations around which they can plan and market tours.
- 2) Improved **conservation of steep slopes, riverbank buffers and headwater streams** would ensure the water quality and temperature are suitable for conserving a wild Atlantic salmon population that can withstand both food and recreational fisheries into the future.
- 3) CPAWS and ecotourism operators in the area believe that a **wilderness waterway park or other special status designation** could help address some of the conservation and recreational use issues along the rivers. A relevant model may be the *Allagash Wilderness Waterway* in Maine, although we envision a wide protected corridor that includes the Restigouche and its major tributaries in the province. This would work especially well for tourism if the linear corridor links with permanent protected areas and parks throughout the watershed.
- 4) The Restigouche River Watershed Management Council is advancing options for addressing **recreational user issues on the boundary waters** parts of the river, between the Patapedia and Matapedia Rivers.