



# The Brief

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## Wolastoqiyik women stop smallmouth bass poisoning in Miramichi Lake for now

By TRACY GLYNN



**Wolastoqiyik grandmothers have maintained a presence on Miramichi Lake since August in an effort to stop the planned poisoning of the lake with rotenone.** Photo by Barbara Hildebrand.

Wolastoqiyik grandmothers and mothers keeping watch over Miramichi Lake stopped the planned poisoning of the lake’s smallmouth bass in August.

The application of the pesticide, rotenone, approved by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans earlier this year, to Miramichi Lake, Lake Brook and approximately 15 kilometres of the Southwest Miramichi River was scheduled to begin on August 17 and last for two days. A second one-day treatment was scheduled to occur in September for Lake Brook and Southwest Miramichi River. The pesticide application will not only kill the smallmouth bass but most of the other fish in the waters.

The Atlantic Salmon Federation is one of several groups behind the plan to apply rotenone to areas of the Miramichi watershed to kill the smallmouth bass.

Smallmouth bass is not a native fish of New Brunswick. Stocks of the fish are believed to have been illegally introduced to Miramichi Lake around 2008. According to the government of New Brunswick, the fish has had a presence in New Brunswick waters for more than 130 years.

The Atlantic Salmon Federation and the proponent, the North Shore Mi’kmaq District Council, argue that the fish kill is needed to restore native fish populations, namely the endangered Atlantic salmon, and trout. According to the federation, smallmouth bass is threatening salmon and trout by taking over their habitat.

Nathan Wilbur is the regional director of the Atlantic Salmon Federation. Wilbur says, “We have always been clear that the purpose of this invasive species eradication is to preserve the native ecosystem of the Miramichi, which supports species like Atlantic salmon and brook trout, and many other species. This is not simply about saving salmon, it is the future of the ecosystem at stake and if smallmouth bass are allowed to colonize the 13,500 square kilometre watershed, the entire Miramichi will be forever changed.”

The grandmothers and mothers from Tobique, St. Mary’s and Woodstock First Nations argue that their communities have not been adequately consulted. Before taking the project to their communities, the Chiefs of the Wolastoqey First Nations had asked for a series of conditions to be met. According to Charles Bryant who is representing the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers and mothers, these conditions

have not been met.

Ramona Nicholas, one of the grandmothers, says there are many reasons to put a brake on the plan.

“First, there is a lack of consultation with our communities. We want to know if there are other ways of protecting the salmon that are less harmful. Do we know the long-term effects of such poisoning? What about the other fish? What about the waterfowl? What about the entire lake ecosystem?”

According to Wilbur, consultation with Indigenous communities was done but admits not everyone was reached.

Cottage owners around Miramichi Lake and the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council, representing off-reserve and non-status Indigenous people in the province, oppose the project because of the risks associated with applying the fish pesticide.

Wilbur noted that there is public support for the project. When the project’s Environmental Impact Assessment was filed, “1,300 letters of public support were submitted, and only a handful were opposed, all from Miramichi Lake cottage owners,” said Wilbur.

A trip around the scenic Miramichi Lake reveals that the smallmouth bass is not the only potential threat to salmon. Clearcuts and plantations that would have been sprayed with glyphosate dot the landscape.

Forestry practices are known contributors of degradation of fish habitat. Clearcutting and logging roads add sediment to rivers and streams and open up cooler forested areas, making water bodies warmer and less hospitable to the cold water-loving salmon.

The Conservation Council of New Brunswick and more recently Stop Spraying New Brunswick have called for banning the herbicide glyphosate in the forest but the largest salmon conservation group in the province has not. The Atlantic Salmon Federation is a long time partner of New Brunswick’s largest forestry company J.D. Irving Ltd.

According to Wilbur, the Atlantic Salmon Federation does not receive any direct funding from J.D. Irving and has been critical of forestry practices. J. D. Irving provides funding to salmon conservation projects and controls access to some salmon-bearing rivers in the province.

## Two more nursing home contracts awarded to Shannex: Is the future of our not-for-profit nursing homes under threat?

By JOAN McFARLAND

On June 18, Bruce Fitch, Minister of Social Development, announced the award of contracts to the for-profit corporation, Shannex RLC Ltd. of Halifax, to build and manage two new nursing homes in Saint John and Moncton.

Since 2008, only Shannex has been awarded new nursing home contracts in the province, including the replacement of two not-for-profit nursing homes in Miramichi. This will be twelve contracts for Shannex since 2008.

Prior to 2008, all nursing homes in the province, 60 in all, were community-based, not-for-profit ones. This raises concern about the privatization and corporatization of nursing homes in New Brunswick.

The tender for these most recent nursing homes came out of Social Development’s 2011-2016 Nursing Home Renovation and Replacement Plan. Posted in June 2018, the tender called for 60-bed nursing homes each in Saint John, Moncton and Florenceville. At the same time, a tender was put out for a 190-bed nursing home in Shediac, a replacement for the not-for-profit Villa Providence.

In August 2018, in the first tier of the procurement process, three “qualified” bidders were identified: NB Partners in care, Rocmaura in Saint John, a not-for-profit nursing home, and Shannex, a for-profit corporation. These “qualifiers” were then invited to proceed with the second tier of the process, which requires the submission of a full proposal.

Since the fall of 2018, there has been total silence on these awards. It was becoming questionable whether there were going to be any awards at all for nursing home contracts under the Higgs government. Despite there being 705 seniors currently on the waiting list for nursing home beds, as recently as this fall, Higgs was making comments to the effect that nursing homes were too expensive, that they wouldn’t be needed once the baby boom generation had passed and that home care was a much better option anyway.

Since those comments, Higgs seems to have relented somewhat. Two tenders were issued in late 2020 and early 2021. One is a re-tender for the Shediac nursing home. The other is a new tender for a 60-bed nursing home on the Acadian Peninsula.

Finally, when the June 2021 announcement was made, the awards were for only two of the three nursing homes which had been tendered and both awards were made to just one of the three “qualifiers”: Shannex RLC Ltd.

I have suggested that the Shannex monopoly of new nursing homes is a result of the post-2008 adoption of the procurement process for the awarding of nursing home contracts.

As sociologist and health care system researcher Pat Armstrong has argued, the trend of privatizing nursing care



**On June 18, 2021, the Government of New Brunswick announced that Shannex was the successful proponent for the construction and management of a new 60-bed nursing home in Saint John. From left: Derek Green, vice-president of New Brunswick Operations for Shannex, and Social Development Minister Bruce Fitch.** Photo from the Government of New Brunswick.



# New Brunswick’s Household Income Policy is unjust for people with disabilities

By KAITLYN LAYDEN



**Kaitlyn Layden and her partner Lucas. Layden, a disability rights advocate, says she and her partner have delayed marriage and living together because of New Brunswick’s Household Income Policy.** Photo submitted.

I am a proud disability advocate in New Brunswick. With the Department of Social Development conducting a review of its social assistance policies, I appeal to New Brunswickers to join calls to abandon policies that discriminate against people with disabilities, including the Household Income Policy.

For those of you that have been following my journey, you know that I am currently engaged. My partner is able-bodied, but due to the household income policy, if I was to marry him, I would put my livelihood in jeopardy.

I have cerebral palsy and as a result of this, I am unable to work and rely on social assistance. Having never been able to work, I do not have access to the federal Disability Canada Pension Plan, and so social assistance is my only option. There are no other options for me.

I am thankful that the Department of Social Development currently provides me with income assistance, a rent subsidy, provincial health card, and home care support. It has been a true Godsend. However, if and when I marry (something I long to do), I will be considered a unit with my partner. What does this mean? It means that because I fell in love with an

able-bodied and employed man, I am at risk of losing all the social supports that I need to live.

Based on the Household Income Policy, my partner and I would make “too much” as a combined unit for me to qualify for the support I am currently receiving. To be clear, the love of my life takes home a very modest income, which is barely enough to feed two people. His income is definitely not enough to pay for my special needs as a person with a disability.

As for the “provincial health card” (famously known as “the white card”), getting to keep it would depend on whether we can show a financial need, that is if our medical expenses put us in a deficit.

In this world of equal rights for all, does this sound like a policy that should exist for people with disabilities in our province? Are you okay with me not being able to be in a relationship and have lifetime companionship due to the province potentially stripping away the services I so desperately need? Is this equal marriage rights for everyone?

*Kaitlyn Layden is a disability rights advocate in New Brunswick.*

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## Two more nursing home contracts awarded to Shannex: Is the future of our not-for-profit nursing homes under threat?

took place earlier, in Ontario, in the 1990s, under the Mike Harris Conservative government.

The privatization of nursing homes in Ontario followed the Harris government’s adoption of a procurement process for the awarding of long-term care contracts similar to the one being used in New Brunswick since 2008.

In these processes, all applicants – for-profit and not-for-profit – are eligible to bid. So far, however, for-profit corporate bidders have received almost all of the awards. The RFQ/ RFP (Request for Qualifications/Request for Proposals) procurement process which they are using inherently favours for-profit corporations because they have far greater administrative resources than not-for-profits.

There does seem to have been an attempt by Social Development to get more bidders for the nursing home tenders. An info session in April 2018 invited all potential bidders to participate. The formation of new teams for the submission of bids was encouraged. More recently, there has been a New Brunswick First provision put on the two new tenders posted for nursing homes in Shediac and the Acadian peninsula. In addition, in these tenders, some points in the evaluation criteria, 23/230, are given for having New Brunswick suppliers.

The New Brunswick First provision, written in the tender document, is that “non-New Brunswick suppliers will be rejected.” However, later in the document, it is explained that only those “who do not have a place of business in New Brunswick” are excluded from bidding.

Unfortunately, then, despite these attempts by Social Development, little may change. Such weak measures are unlikely to end Shannex’s monopoly on new nursing home contracts.

For-profit corporations like Shannex RLC Ltd say they can provide the same standard of care as not-for-profits, but the evidence from Ontario suggests the opposite. Instead, the for-profits lead to higher costs, less access, and lower quality of care, according to Armstrong and her co-authors.

Studies of those same Ontario for-profits during the pandemic showed their performance to be a lot worse than not-for-profits in terms of deaths, outbreaks and failures in care.

In Canada, we believe strongly in universal public healthcare that is free of the profit motive. Why should we allow healthcare for older Canadians in the form of nursing homes to be any different?

Is there any chance that the Shediac and Acadian Peninsula tenders could be awarded to not-for-profits and finally turn the tide? Or is it more likely that the whole procurement process for awarding nursing homes will have to be seriously reconsidered?

*Joan McFarland is a retired professor of economics at St. Thomas University.*

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## Wolastoqiyik women stop smallmouth bass poisoning in Miramichi Lake for now

In 2017, the NB Media Co-op reported that a senior employee at J.D. Irving Ltd. warned the Miramichi Headwaters Salmon Federation they would face reprisals if they went public with their opposition to glyphosate

spraying of the forest. They did so anyway, making them the first salmon conservation group to publicly oppose glyphosate spraying.

### Alternatives to “poison and plant” projects

New Brunswick is not the only place where there is opposition to eradicating invasive fish with poisons.

Mike Garrity is with the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, an organization that has drawn attention to the plans to kill fish with rotenone in waters in Wyoming and Montana. Wyoming’s Department of Game and Fish had approved a project to apply rotenone to Game Creek on August 20 to poison non-native brook trout and reintroduce the native Snake River cutthroat trout.

Garrity writing for *Counterpunch* said, “Rotenone not only kills brook trout, but anything with gills, including the aquatic insects and any amphibians unfortunate enough to be present when the stream is poisoned.” He is also worried about human health impact of rotenone reaching groundwater that feeds well systems.

According to Wilbur, “Rotenone is not a groundwater contaminant, it doesn’t penetrate more than a few centimetres into soil before it is bound. Hundreds of wells have been monitored around rotenone projects and none have shown presence of rotenone or other formulation ingredients. Human health has been extensively studied by health agencies around the world, including the US EPA and Health Canada, and that is why rotenone products are allowed for use in our country. They are safe and effective when used according to the product label.”

Garrity argues that there are the alternatives to what he calls “poison and plant” projects but they are more expensive: applying chemicals to kill fish is “cheaper

than removing non-native fish through labour-intensive electroshocking, fishing, and netting. But poisoning entire water bodies – especially flowing streams – severely alters biodiversity and causes a broad loss of taxa and species from the aquatic ecosystem.”

The state of Wyoming is listening to Garrity and the Alliance for the Wild Rockies.

On July 12, Wyoming’s fisheries biologist informed the alliance that the state was putting their plans to apply rotenone to eradicate brook trout on hold and was considering mechanical removal (electrofishing) of the trout and stocking the water with trojan males that only produce male offspring to collapse the population. The community has also rallied around the plan and have assisted in meeting catches of 16 brook trout per person per day.

Back on Miramichi Lake, Nicholas also wants the province to consider Indigenous perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge and feels that “scientific knowledge is being shoved down our throats.”

“We need to talk about the environment as a whole. It’s not just about the fish.”

On August 19, in an effort to remove the grandmothers and mothers from the site, the Atlantic Salmon Federation sought a court motion to get an injunction against the women. The motion was dismissed by the court.

With the clock running out on when rotenone can be applied to Miramichi Lake, the Atlantic Salmon Federation has decided to hit pause on the project until 2022.

*Tracy Glynn is a writer and editor with the NB Media Co-op.*

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