# Salmon stocks in Scotland face alarming decline as rivers classify 'poor'



Salmon stocks in Scotland are facing an alarming decline, with a recent report revealing that a record number of rivers are classified as ‘poor’ for salmon conservation. According to an annual audit by the Scottish Government, 153 rivers—representing a staggering 72 per cent of surveyed waterways—now fall under a mandatory catch-and-release policy, meaning anglers are forbidden from keeping any salmon they catch.

The extensive report highlights significant concerns for the future of wild salmon, as conservationists warn that populations may be on the brink of extinction. Factors contributing to the decline include climate change, pollution, blocked waterways, and diseases linked to fish farming. The newly published data indicates that nearly three-quarters of rivers in Scotland are unable to meet their conservation limits, which defines the minimal fish population necessary to ensure sustainability.

Prominent rivers such as the Clyde, Ayr, and Don have been rated poor, classified as grade 3 status, denoting less than a 60 per cent probability of meeting conservation limits over a five-year period. In contrast, just 31 rivers, or approximately 15 per cent, have achieved a ‘good’ status (grade 1), allowing compliance with conservation requirements and permitting the legal retention of a limited number of fish.

Commenting on the situation, Tim Eagle, Scottish Conservative rural affairs spokesman, described the report as “devastating news,” stating, “This comes following years of inaction from SNP ministers to fully protect our rivers.” He expressed concern over the potential economic ramifications for communities reliant on angling.

Despite the grim overall findings, there is some optimism for the angling sector, which is estimated to contribute £100 million to Scotland's economy annually. The ‘Big Four’—the Tay, Spey, Tweed, and Dee—are designated as Special Areas of Conservation and have been rated as ‘good’, providing a positive aspect for anglers seeking trophy catches and edible fish.

Andrew Graham-Stewart, Interim Director of the conservation charity WildFish, has raised particular alarm regarding the proliferation of salmon farms along the west coast of Scotland. He pointed out that juvenile salmon migrating from several grade 3 rivers face the risk of infestation by sea lice from these farms, which can prove fatal if levels exceed a certain threshold.

Graham-Stewart remarked, “Despite being aware of the issue for many years, the Scottish Government has failed dismally to introduce effective regulation to limit sea lice numbers on salmon farms.”

The Scottish Government, however, has outlined measures aimed at protecting salmon populations, including the promotion of planting trees along riverbanks to mitigate rising water temperatures and the removal of obsolete weirs and dams to restore natural river flows. They also indicated that new risk assessment frameworks have been implemented to better manage the impacts of fish farming on wild salmon.

In a broader context, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has reclassified wild salmon as an ‘endangered’ species for the first time in their 2023 assessment, alongside other species also facing extinction threats.

Concerns over the status of wild salmon in Scotland are indicative of larger ecological challenges, with the Scottish Government asserting the necessity for significant collective action to ensure both the survival of this iconic species and the health of Scotland’s waterways.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/status-of-salmon-in-scotland/pages/decline-in-adult-salmon-numbers/> - Corroborates the decline of salmon stocks in Scotland due to factors like climate change and poor conservation status.
* <https://wildfish.org/latest-news/2023-assessment-of-atlantic-salmon-lowest-on-record/> - Supports the concerns over the endangered status of wild salmon and highlights the ecological challenges, such as pollution and fish farming impacts.
* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-salmon-sea-trout-fishery-statistics-2023/> - Provides data on Scottish salmon catches and conservation efforts, including catch-and-release policies.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - Original source article discussing the decline of salmon stocks and conservation challenges in Scotland.
* <https://www.iucn.org/theme/species/our-work/species-specialist-groups/red-list> - Relates to the IUCN Red List assessment of wild salmon as an endangered species.