



Eco-Emotions and Declining Wild Atlantic Salmon on the Main Southwest Miramichi River

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Overview

In the Main Southwest (MSW) Miramichi River in New Brunswick (Canada), wild Atlantic salmon are in decline. This species, integral to the local ecosystem and culture, serve as a lens through which to understand how people feel about ecological change. To understand the emotional impacts of this decline, I move beyond ecological and biological perspectives to explore human, salmon, river relationship with a focus on emotions. I hope to contribute to current environmental discourses, to emphasize the need to engage with emotional dimensions when thinking about the environment. The use of narratives link humans, salmon, and the river, with eco-emotions to provide insight into human-nature relationships and eco-emotions during times of ecological change. I shape a path forward to understand how species loss reshapes cultural traditions, personal identity, and emotional well-being throughout ecological change.

Research Question

How has the decline in wild Atlantic salmon in the MSW Miramichi River altered the emotional landscape of those living along the river, and has the decline led to a reconfiguration of people's identities and values?

Why Does it Matter?

The emotional and cultural dimensions of biodiversity loss is often neglected. The integration of human emotions and cultural narratives in environmental discourse humanizes ecological science to make issues more relatable and urges the inclusion of these aspects in policy. This approach not only helps in the preservation of cultural heritage connected to the salmon but also enriches conservation strategies to ensure that they are culturally sensitive and emotionally informed. I emphasize the interconnectedness of humans and nature which has global relevance and could inspire holistic environmental policies and conservation efforts worldwide.

Context

In the heart of central New Brunswick, the MSW Miramichi River carves the landscape, & its species define the ecosystem. Here lies a story of change where nature & culture unfold in a way that is beautiful & precarious. Once abundant, now dwindle, salmon are signaling shifts in the waters they navigate & in the lives entangled with their existence. The river has long been a nexus for human culture & natural ecosystems. The salmon face decline due to overfishing, habitat destruction, invasive species, & broader impacts of climate change, mirroring global ecological challenges.

However, the narrative of the MSW Miramichi River & its salmon is not solely one of ecological loss. It is rooted in human experience & the eco-emotions evoked by witnessing the fading of cultural traditions, & identity forge alongside these "Kings of Fish." They play an important role in the aquatic ecosystems they grace & to the communities for whom they are a symbol of heritage & a source of life.

I highlight the intersections of ecological change & human emotion, exploring how this decline impacts the cultural traditions, identities, & sense of place. It is about understanding the emotional & sensory experiences of ecological loss. To explore the life of wild Atlantic salmon & the cultural significance, I uncover narratives of loss & change, a microcosm of global challenges as the world confronts environmental degradation & climate change.

Through this lens, I bridge the gap between ecological science & human experience, to understand the tangible, cultural & emotional impacts of environmental change. Species decline reveals a complex relationship between ecology, culture, & emotions. I encourage a look beyond ecological & economic impacts to hear the stories of those at the frontline of this change. I hope this will unfold an understanding of the implications & efforts to counteract environmental change.

Methodology

Autoethnography: Blending personal experienced with cultural analysis.

Participant Observation: Participating in community activities centered around salmon.

Open-Ended Semi-Structured Interviews: Talking asking questions, having conversations.

Narratives: Gathering insights into the cultural heritage, environmental changes, and emotions through films, books, songs, pictures, carving, paintings, and other materials about river and its salmon.

Theoretical Framework

Environmental Anthropology & Precarious Entanglements: The inseparability & entangled fates of the human & the more-than-human.

The Precarity of Human-Nature Assemblages: Viewing the vulnerabilities and resilience of human-nature relationships.

Semiotics & Shared Meaning: Understanding communication and representation beyond the human.

Eco-Emotions: Understanding & finding language for emotional responses to environmental change.

Narratives & Environmental Storytelling: Importance of stories in shaping understanding & responses to environmental change.

Broader Implications

Enhanced Understanding of Human-Nature Relationships: Challenge traditional views that view humans and nature as separate, view the interconnected and entangled relationships between people, salmon, and their shared environment, foster appreciation for these relationships, encouraging a holistic approach to environmental management and conservation.

Cultural & Emotional Recognition: The emotional dimensions of environmental change, the importance of acknowledgment and treatment of the psychological impacts of ecological decline, empathetic conservation strategies that consider the human cost of environmental degradation & the loss of cultural heritage.

Policy Implications: Inform policy, particularly in the areas of biodiversity conservation, sustainable fishing practices, & habitat restoration, demonstrate the multifaceted impacts of salmon decline, support ecologically sound, culturally sensitive & emotionally aware policies

Contribution to Environmental Anthropology: Contribute to academic discussions that pave the way for further interdisciplinary research that explore human-nature relationships, enhance knowledge of meanings & narratives that influence environmental attitudes and actions.

Public Engagement & Environmental Stewardship: Narratives & storytelling shape human-nature relationships and set new pathways for engagement & environmental education. Capture the emotional & cultural dimensions of ecological issues through stories, a powerful tool for raising awareness, fostering a sense of stewardship, & action among a broader audience.

Global Relevance: While focused on the Main Southwest Miramichi River, this research has global relevance. The methodologies & insights can be applied to other contexts where communities face challenges of environmental degradation & cultural loss. This research contributes to a better understanding of global environmental issues & the search for sustainable solutions.

Resilience & Adaptation: Explore the vulnerabilities and resilience within human-nature assemblages, crucial in eras of rapid environmental change, informs strategies to build resilience & adaptation to environmental change in ways that are both ecologically sustainable & culturally meaningful.