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One might have expected jubilant celebration among environmentalists, anglers and others working to restore wild Atlantic salmon populations to their former abundance in Maine's major rivers.

But the response to Monday's announcement that Atlantic salmon populations are to be listed as "endangered" in the Penobscot, Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers and their tributaries has been muted ... and, in some cases, openly critical. When some of the salmon's strongest allies bemoan the additional protections that will be implemented in mid-July by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, it begs the question, "What gives?"

Common sense would seem to dictate that expanding the "endangered" listing of Atlantic salmon can only help, since it will make it illegal to take salmon from the rivers and could force dam owners to build additional fish passages to help salmon reach their historic upriver spawning grounds.

And scientific data certainly supports the "endangered" designation: The Brunswick-based Atlantic Salmon Federation's Web site, for example, cites in a May 27 report an 82 percent decline over the past 38 years in the numbers of large salmon that contribute the majority of eggs needed to rebuild wild populations in Canadian and American rivers.

Obviously, a continued trend in that direction for the wild Atlantic salmon's breeding stock is likely to spell "extinction."

But as the Bangor Daily News reported in a Page 1 story Wednesday, Maine anglers aren't happy about the "endangered" designation for salmon. Citing their long-time conservation efforts and their vested interest in reviving the salmon fishery, the anglers had hoped for the less restrictive "threatened" designation that would have allowed them to continue catch-and-release fishing seasons for salmon. Now denied the chance to do even that, some expressed frustration, betrayal and an inclination to stop pushing for salmon conservation.

That would be a shame. For, as noted by Andrew Goode, vice president of the Atlantic Salmon Federation's U.S. programs, "for much of the past 40 years, salmon anglers have been the sole voice for restoring Atlantic salmon."

Gov. John Baldacci expressed concern that the federal action "ignores Maine's strong track record in species management and our need for a flexible approach which will enable us to use all our tools to work with stakeholders to manage Atlantic salmon. He suggested in a statement issued Monday that the state might take "legal actions" to counter the expanded "endangered" listing for Atlantic salmon on Maine's three major rivers.

"The numbers don't lie," cautions Ed Friedman, chairman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, which filed a lawsuit in 2008 to force the listing decision. "Every non-salmon fisherman I've spoken with understands these fish need more protection than they are getting."

Even with the "endangered" listing, Friedman remains concerned that "economic factors" can be considered in determining the "critical habitats" salmon need to spawn in numbers sufficient to ensure their survival.

"The end result, unfortunately, can be that we list a species close to extinction and then deny that species access to the very historical habitat they need to survive," he said. "If we protect salmon but don't allow them access to that habitat, we are fooling ourselves."

All parties do agree on one thing: Every salmon counts. Building on that common ground understanding is critical if the Atlantic salmon is to survive.

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