Canada is losing track of its wild salmon - just when we need that knowledge most

Price, M.H.H., & Moore, J.W. 2026. From Policy to Practice: Declines in Monitoring and Pacific Salmon Conservation in Canada. Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 83: 1-11.

Issue

- The amount of annual information available for Pacific salmon has steadily declined, and is now near its lowest level in decades.
- As monitoring erodes, managers lose the ability to reliably assess population health, increasing the risk of both overfishing and missed conservation warnings.
- Broad, consistent monitoring is essential to conserve salmon diversity and to distinguish healthy populations from those in decline.

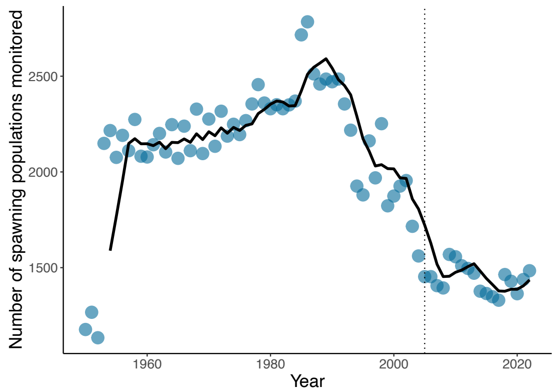

Figure 1. Annual number of Pacific salmon populations with a spawning estimate in BC and Yukon (1950-2022). Vertical dash line is 2005, the year Canada's Wild Salmon Policy was released. Black line is 5-year running average.

Background

- The central objective of Canada's Wild Salmon Policy is the conservation of wild Pacific salmon.
- Annual information on the number of salmon returning to spawn is required to assess population health and inform fisheries and land-use decisions.
- Monitoring of salmon spawning populations has declined to its lowest level in ~70 years (Figure 1).
- As a result, the health of nearly half of Canada's salmon Conservation Units cannot currently be assessed (Figure 2).
- Monitoring erosion reflects low prioritization rather than lack of funding.

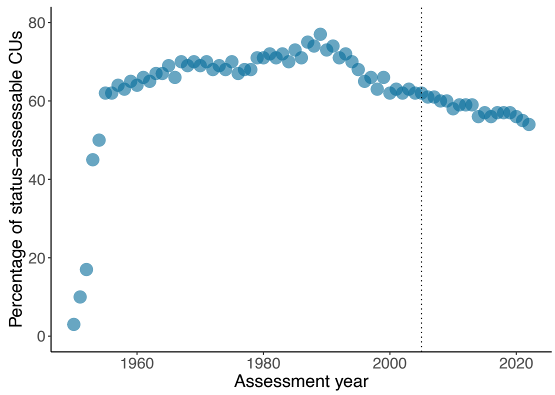

Figure 2. Percentage of Pacific salmon Conservation Units with sufficient data to assess risk status based on the recent generation abundance metric.

Considerations

- Where monitoring data exist, many Pacific salmon populations remain depleted and continue to decline.
- Climate change is leading to increasingly unpredictable salmon returns. Timely information is needed to improve annual fishery decisions and conservation action.

Solution

Prioritize salmon monitoring.

Implement a strategic and systematic monitoring program for salmon by re-allocating existing funds within DFO towards stock assessment.