

Narraguagus River Cormorant Control Project

*Sponsored by
Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission,
NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, and the USDA – Wildlife Services*

Question: What is the Cormorant Control Project?

Answer: This is a project designed to protect endangered Atlantic salmon by using non-lethal methods to encourage foraging Double-crested Cormorants to leave the lower Narraguagus River and estuary. The goal is to see if displacement alone can have a measurable effect on the survival rate of juvenile Atlantic salmon migrating to the ocean. The project is a collaborative effort of the Maine Atlantic Salmon Commission, NOAA Fisheries Service, and USDA – Wildlife Services.

Question: Why remove Cormorants from the area?

Answer: The Narraguagus River is one of only eight U.S. rivers known to still support a population of naturally reproducing Atlantic salmon. These fish are endangered and must be protected under U.S. law. As they migrate down river and into the estuary, Atlantic salmon smolts swim close to the surface, making them vulnerable to predators, particularly cormorants. The project is an effort to reduce the number of cormorants feeding on the endangered salmon during the smolt run.

Question: What does *non-lethal* mean? What are the non-lethal methods? And why are the wildlife experts using non-lethal methods?

Answer: *Non-lethal* methods are methods that encourage the cormorants to leave the area but do not result in the death of cormorants. The non-lethal methods used in this project are pyrotechnics (firecracker shells and 'screamers'), lights, and boat activity. US Fish and Wildlife Service regulations require wildlife experts to use non-lethal methods whenever possible. If non-lethal methods fail, the Service does have authority to issue a lethal 'take' permit, in some instances.

Question: How will the biologists know whether the displacement project is successful?

Answer: The biologists will surgically implant ultrasonic tags called "pingers" in migrating Atlantic salmon smolts. The pingers can be detected by tracking units the biologists will place strategically in the river and bay. This will allow the scientists to count and monitor the number of smolts that successfully migrate out to sea. Smolt counts in the areas where the cormorant are being displaced will be compared with past year's mortality rates from those same areas to see what effect, if any, the cormorant displacement has on smolt mortality.

Question: Where can I get answers to other questions about the project?

Answer: For more information, contact Rory Saunders at (207) 866-4049 or Rory.Saunders@noaa.gov, or by writing: ATTN: Rory Saunders, NOAA Fisheries Service - 17 Godfrey Drive, suite 1, Orono, ME 04473.