



# Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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## Shad & River Herring Technical Committee Meeting Summary

September 23, 2024

**Technical Committee Members:** Wes Eakin (Chair, NY), Matthew Jargowsky (Vice-Chair, MD), Michael Brown (ME), Ken Sprankle (USFWS), Patrick McGee (RI), Ruth Haas-Castro (NOAA), Patrick McGrath (VA), Conor O'Donnell (NH), Reid Hyle (FL), Kevin Job (CT), Brian Neilan (NJ), Holly White (NC), Brad Chase (MA), Jeremy McCargo (NC), Kyle Hoffman (SC),

**ASMFC Staff:** James Boyle and Katie Drew

The TC met via webinar on September 23, 2024, to review updates to the Sustainable Fishery Management Plans (SFMPs) for river herring from New Hampshire and Maine, as well as updates to the SFMPs for American shad from Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Maine and New Hampshire updates also included proposals to change and reopen their fisheries, respectively.

### 1. New Hampshire River Herring SFMP Update and Proposal to Reopen Fishery

Conor O'Donnell presented an updated New Hampshire SFMP for river herring, as well as a proposal to reopen the fishery. The new SFMP includes updated instantaneous mortality rates, standard error calculations for Visual Time Counts, and an added figure of a juvenile abundance index from the state's juvenile seine survey. The TC did make a request for New Hampshire to add some of the river specific results from the 2024 River Herring Benchmark Stock Assessment to the SFMP. **The TC recommended the updated plan for approval by consensus.**

Along with the updated SFMP, New Hampshire submitted a proposal to reopen the river herring fishery, which was closed in 2021 due to low spawning run counts in 2019 and 2020. With new passage estimates in the Exeter River, the Great Bay indicator Stock in New Hampshire has been above the fishery-independent target escapement level of 94,598 fish for the past four years. However, the [Technical Guidance on the Implementation of Amendments 2 and 3 to the Shad and River Herring Fishery Management Plan](#) contains a TC recommendation that states:

“If a state has implemented a management restriction in response to the stock falling below the sustainability target(s), the management restriction must stay in place until the sustainability target(s) have been met for at least 5 consecutive years of sufficient data collection” (pg. 8).

With the exception of the Cocheco River, the proposal requested to open the state fishery for the upcoming 2025 fishing season, which is one year earlier than the recommended five-year closure. The proposal states that the reasons for the low spawning run counts in 2019 and 2020 were primarily driven by errors in counting, rather than true declines in river herring abundance. Specifically, New Hampshire notes that there were issues with quantifying river herring in both the Cocheco and Exeter Rivers. In the Cocheco River, equipment failure and fishway modifications led to a loss of efficiency and inaccurate electronic fish counting. In the Exeter River, the majority of river herring are utilizing restored spawning habitat between the former Great Dam and Pickpocket Dam and not accessing the habitat above Pickpocket Dam fishway, where the new electronic counting station was installed after the Great Dam removal.

**The TC was unable to reach a consensus on whether to recommend for or against New Hampshire opening their fishery a year earlier than recommended. The TC is hesitant to go against previously established technical guidance, but they also acknowledge that it is unclear whether the decreases in spawning run counts in 2019 and 2020 were true reflections of abundance or due to methodology.**

## **2. Maine River Herring SFMP Update and Proposal for Additional Fisheries**

Michael Brown presented an updated Maine SFMP for river herring, which included the addition of five additional commercial fisheries: Sewall Pond, Wights Pond, Chemo Pond, Pennamaquan Lake, and Pushaw Lake. The plan includes updated fishery independent surveys; a recalculated 25th percentile metric; updated Z estimates from the 2024 River Herring Benchmark Stock Assessment; and an added age range requirement, all of which are to be used as management triggers. Of the five new commercial fisheries that were requested to be opened, Sewall and Wights Pond were provisional fisheries approved from 2019-2024, Chemo Pond and Pushaw Lake were added due to significant improvements as a result of restoration efforts, and Pennamaquan Lake previously supported a fishery prior to the moratorium in 2012. **The TC recommended the updated plan for approval by consensus.**

## **3. Massachusetts American Shad SFMP Update**

Brad Chase presented an update to the Massachusetts SFMP for American shad. There were no significant changes to the previous SFMP other than the addition of a description of stocking efforts in the Taunton River. Over 5 million shad larvae have been stocked each year from 2022-2024 in collaborative effort with USFWS. This fishery is solely a recreational fishery. **The TC recommended the updated plan for approval by consensus.**

## **4. Connecticut American Shad SFMP Update**

Kevin Job presented an update to the Connecticut SFMP for American shad. No significant changes were made from the previous SFMP. Connecticut has a recreational fishery and small commercial fishery. The fishery is managed using a stop light approach. Harvest from both

fishing sectors has declined over time, with most anglers now targeting striped bass. **The TC recommended the updated plan for approval by consensus.**

#### **5. Review of Technical Guidance on Incorporation of Stock Assessment Information into SFMPs**

The TC revisited their [previous recommendation](#) (pg. 9) not to recommend requiring jurisdictions to use the stock assessment information to develop sustainability metrics for SFMPs (e.g. benchmarks based on total adult mortality). While they did not express interest in recommending changes to state requirements to maintain flexibility for states to account for regional differences, the TC will amend the Technical Guidance document to include specific recommendations on how states should include stock assessment metrics in future SFMP updates.

#### **6. Other Business**

Matthew Jargowsky informed the TC of Maryland's plan to change their age sampling. Since 2016, Maryland has been taking a subset of both otoliths and scales for river herring, with plans to eventually transition to otoliths. The only active spawning stock survey in Maryland is the North East River spawning stock survey that started in 2012; however, Maryland is in the process of developing an additional spawning stock survey for river herring and is planning to start that survey collecting the preferred aging structure. Currently, for the North East River, Maryland has been aging up to 300 scales per species per year and collecting up to 100 otoliths per species per year (~80 and ~50 per year for alewife and blueback, respectively). Starting in 2025, for each survey, Maryland would sample up to 200 otoliths per species per year. Sampling collection would be based on length bins to facilitate the use of ALKs. Maryland will also begin aging all previously collected otoliths, so that age and mortality estimates from 2016–2024 can be compared. This will be completed by the next river herring stock assessment update.

Additionally, Maryland has been taking both fork and total length measurements for river herring, but will be switching to just taking total lengths since that was the preferred measurement in the most recent stock assessment. Maryland will continue to only collect/age scales for American shad due to sampling constraints.