



NEWS RELEASE



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NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Release River Herring Conservation Plan to Aid in Restoration Efforts

NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) announce the release of the River Herring Conservation Plan. The goals of the plan are to increase public awareness about river herring (alewife (*Alosa pseudoharengus*) and blueback herring (*A. aestivalis*)), and to foster cooperative research and conservation efforts to restore river herring along the Atlantic coast. The plan, which is available online and will be refined over time with public input, builds upon past and current river herring conservation projects and coordinates ongoing activities. The Plan was developed with input and information provided by the River Herring Technical Expert Working Group (TEWG), a group of scientists, industry representatives, conservation groups, tribal leaders, and government officials with expertise related to river herring. The Plan seeks to achieve the following goals:

- Increase coordination of river herring data collection, research and conservation
- Identify and undertake key research projects related to assessment and conservation
- Identify any further conservation actions to address threats
- Cultivate and engage research groups to address key topics in protecting or restoring herring populations
- Identify funding sources and secure funds for river herring research and conservation
- Improve information to be used in conservation efforts and incorporated into the next assessment
- Increase public outreach about river herring and the need for addressing impacts to these resources

“By focusing on areas where there is the greatest need, the plan is an ideal tool for anyone interested in restoring river herring populations coastwide,” said Kimberly Damon-Randall, Assistant Regional Administrator for Protected Resources, Greater Atlantic Region, NOAA Fisheries. “It provides extensive background on each species’ life history, stock condition, and current management measures, and identifies areas where research and conservation efforts should be concentrated. Importantly, the plan and what it seeks to achieve represent the collective input and efforts of a broad constituency of individuals and agencies dedicated to the restoration of

these important species. It is our hope that by following the roadmap we have laid out in the plan, restoration can be achieved.”

On August 12, 2013, NOAA Fisheries announced that listing river herring under the Endangered Species Act as either threatened or endangered was not warranted based on the analysis of available information. As part of that decision, NOAA Fisheries committed to working collaboratively with the Commission, which manages U.S. East Coast river herring stocks, and other partners to implement a coordinated coastwide effort to proactively conserve river herring and help to fill data gaps. The Conservation Plan and the TEWG are products of that commitment and collaborative effort. Since initiation of these efforts, important progress has been made towards each of the plan’s goals, including:

- Increased coordination among partners by establishing the TEWG and developing the Conservation Plan.
- Provided funding to:
 - A collaborative project involving the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the University of California-Santa Cruz, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, The Nature Conservancy, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and the U.S. Geological Survey’s Massachusetts Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit to advance our understanding of alewife and blueback herring bycatch in commercial Atlantic herring and mackerel fisheries and impacts of this fishing activity on river herring populations. The project will also gather information from six nursery systems between Maine and Connecticut to provide insights into what factors influence freshwater productivity of juvenile river herring. These efforts will then be combined to examine the importance of different life stages to river herring populations.
 - The Barnegat Bay Partnership and Rutgers University to conduct surveys and collect data to improve our understanding of historic and current distribution of alewife and blueback herring spawning habitats in Barnegat Bay and the Raritan River in New Jersey.
 - NMFS Northeast Fisheries Science Center to develop a river herring/ Atlantic herring oceanic habitat overlap forecast tool for use by the commercial Atlantic herring fishery to minimize incidental river herring catches.
 - The Atlantic Salmon Federation to continue river herring counts at the Milltown Dam fishway in the St. Croix watershed.
- Conducted a coastwide social science survey to document fishermen’s observations of river herring in commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries.
- Identified the Penobscot River in Maine and the Choptank River in Maryland as Habitat Focus Areas under NOAA’s Habitat Blueprint, targeting financial resources and technical assistance to support habitat conservation and restoration efforts in these high-priority watersheds.
- Incorporated information provided by the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Pleasant Point, on the cultural importance of river herring to the Tribe into this conservation plan.

NOAA Fisheries and the Commission are committed to strengthening river herring conservation. An important first step is to improve upon and ensure data collection consistency throughout the Atlantic coast, including the Canadian Provinces. The Commission’s Shad and River Herring Technical Committee in conjunction with federal partners will convene later this year to develop recommendations to standardize

data collection methods for future survey programs, as well as how best to standardize current survey data collected across the species range. NOAA Fisheries and the Commission will be providing support for this meeting.

While this conservation planning initiative is a committed long-term effort, your input is welcome on the River Herring Conservation Plan during its evolving early phase. Please send your comments on the structure and contents of the plan to nmfs.gar.riverherringplan@noaa.gov by June 1, 2015. The Conservation Plan is available at <http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/protected/riverherring/conserv/index.html>.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries serves as a deliberative body of the 15 Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and to conserve and manage our coastal and marine resources.