



# NEWS RELEASE



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
January 15, 2015

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978.281.9175/774.392.4865

## **ASMFC & NOAA Fisheries Award Funding to Two Research Projects to Advance Understanding of River Herring Populations**

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and NOAA Fisheries announced today they are awarding approximately a quarter of a million dollars to two research projects. Information generated from these projects supports the continued development of a coastwide river herring (i.e., alewife and blueback herring) conservation plan.

“River herring are an important prey species for a variety of animals including commercial and recreational fish like cod and haddock. When they migrate from marine to freshwater, river herring also release important nutrients, which helps promote healthy aquatic ecosystems,” said John Bullard, regional administrator, NOAA Fisheries. “These awards complement the proactive conservation effort that we are undertaking with the Commission and other partners to learn more about and restore river herring populations along the East Coast.”

Selected research projects include:

1. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries and the University of California-Santa Cruz in partnership with 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 will receive \$166,659 to collect biological samples and conduct genetic analysis on river herring caught in Atlantic herring and mackerel fisheries. Researchers hope to learn more about fishery impacts and identify fish spawning areas. Researchers also will assess the number of juveniles in the upper reaches of various rivers from Maine to Connecticut and investigate environmental factors influencing spawning success. Together, at-sea and early life stage mortality will help inform researchers and managers about the multiple factors affecting the size of spawning populations.

2. Barnegat Bay Partnership and Rutgers University will receive \$78,000 to conduct surveys and collect data to help improve our understanding of historic and current distribution of alewife and blueback herring spawning habitat in Barnegat Bay and Raritan River in New Jersey. This project will also provide alewife and blueback herring samples to support ongoing genetic studies.

"We received a number of terrific proposals," said Robert Beal, executive director, ASMFC. "The selected projects will provide insights into what is happening to river herring when they are at sea and in their riverine nursery and spawning areas. They also will help us fill critical gaps in our understanding of the condition of river herring populations."

On August 12, 2013, NOAA Fisheries announced that listing river herring under the Endangered Species Act as either threatened or endangered was not warranted. However, NOAA Fisheries is collaborating with the Commission and other partners to implement a coordinated coastwide effort to proactively conserve river herring and address data gaps. These research projects advance the work of this collaborative effort.

Priority areas for research funding included the need for more information on

- life history and spawning habitats to improve the effectiveness of fish passage and restoration efforts;
- impacts of fisheries on river herring and developing ways to reduce those impacts; and
- identifying the spawning region from which fish caught in ocean fisheries originate.

Research priorities were based on NOAA Fisheries' river herring management and science needs. They were also informed by the River Herring Technical Expert Working Group, convened to help develop information for the conservation plan; the Commission's 2012 benchmark assessment; council research priorities and needs; and public comments.

"If the conservation plan is successful, another Endangered Species Act status review for river herring will be unnecessary because we'll have restored their populations," said Kimberly Damon-Randall, Protected Resources Division Chief, Greater Atlantic Region, NOAA Fisheries.