

HICKORY SHAD

Alosa mediocris



Life History and Habitat Needs

Geographic Range:

Hickory shad are distributed along the Atlantic coast from the Bay of Fundy to the Tomoka River, Florida. The greatest abundance of hickory shad occurs from New York southward.

Movement/Migration:

Hickory shad spend most of their adult lives at sea but ascend coastal rivers during spring migration. It is assumed that adults move gradually downstream and return to the ocean by mid-summer. Most young juveniles move downstream in summer and migrate to estuarine nursery areas. Other juveniles move directly into saltwater. Almost nothing is known about sub-adult and adult distribution and movements once they return to the ocean.

Spawning:

Most spawning occurs in freshwater reaches of coastal rivers, flooded swamps, and channels of tributary creeks from Maryland south. Hickory shad are repeat spawners. Spawning activity has been reported from water temperatures ranging from 8-22°C. Adults are noted to prefer deep and dark-water tributaries for spawning in the Neuse River, North Carolina.

Habitat Use:

Little is known about its life history and specific habitat requirements; however, coastal migrations and habitat requirements are thought to be similar to that of other alosines, especially American shad. Adult hickory shad have been reported in Maryland waters where structures such as ledges and fallen trees are present. Bottom composition for spawning in these waters tends to be mud, sand, and gravel.

Threats to Habitat

- Dams and other physical obstructions
- Water withdrawal facilities
- Thermal and toxic discharges
- Channelization and dredging
- Land use (farming, logging and urbanization)
- Aluminum and other metals
- Changes in pH levels

ASMFC Habitat Areas of Particular Concern

Habitat Areas of Particular Concern include spawning sites; nursery areas; inlets that provide access to coastal bays, estuaries, and riverine habitat upstream to spawning grounds; and sub-adult and adult nearshore ocean habitat.

Recommendations to Improve Habitat Quality

- Remove obstructions or improve passage to upstream migration. Evaluate effectiveness of passage at existing bypass facilities. Mitigate hydrological changes from dams. Determine if passing migrating adults upstream earlier in the year in some rivers would increase production and larval survival and opening downstream bypass facilities sooner would reduce mortality of early emigrants.
- Take into account water flow needs for alosine migration, spawning, and nursery use when deciding river flow allocation. Alter water withdrawal rates or water intake velocities to reduce alosine mortality. Locate water withdrawal facilities along the river where impingement will be low.
- Improve water quality. Upgrade wastewater treatment plants. Reduce thermal effluent into rivers and discharge earlier in the year to reduce impacts to migrating fish. Determine the effects of dredging on alosine habitat. Implement erosion control measures and best management practices.
- Identify, quantify, and evaluate potential alosine spawning and nursery habitat. Coordinate with other agencies responsible for habitat restoration plans and promote cooperative interstate research, monitoring and law enforcement. Evaluate water quality standards and criteria to ensure they meet special needs of alosines. Review proposed projects for alosine spawning and nursery areas. Limit development projects.
- Determine biotic effects of alosine passage into previously restricted habitats and on other native species.

Habitat Research Needs

- Determine habitat requirements and optimal tolerances for variables such as temperature or depth for all life stages
- Use a multiple scale approach for restoring alosine habitat and identify and assess indicators of suitable habitat, including potential spawning habitat
- Document the impact of power plants and other water intakes on early life stage mortality in spawning areas
- Focus research on within-species variation in genetic, reproductive, morphological, reproductive, and ecological characteristics
- Review studies dealing with effects of acid deposition on anadromous alosines
- Determine how abundance and distribution of potential prey affect growth and mortality of early life stages
- Conduct additional studies on the effects of land use on riverine stages
- Determine if pH and aluminum levels lead to reduced reproductive success and if chlorinated sewage effluent slows recovery of depressed stocks

Additional Information

Hickory shad are managed under Amendment 1 (1999), Technical Addendum I (2000) and Addendum I (2002) to the Fishery Management Plan for Shad and River Herring. Additional information is contained in the ASMFC's Diadromous Fish Habitat document. These documents can be found on the ASMFC website at www.asmfc.org or by contacting the ASMFC Habitat Program Coordinator at 703.842.0740.