



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Shad and River Herring Management Board
FROM: Caitlin Starks, FMP Coordinator
DATE: September 27, 2017
SUBJECT: Summary of Shad and River Herring Advisory Panel Conference Call

This memorandum summarizes the topics and discussions during the Shad and River Herring Advisory Panel (AP) call on Wednesday, September 27th 2017 at 9:00 am. The meeting took place via conference call and webinar and provided the AP to review and discuss several items including the recent 2017 stock assessment update for river herring, NOAA's status review for river herring to consider ESA listing, continued state efforts in alosine monitoring and restoration, and updated sustainable fishery management plans (SFMPs) that will be reviewed by the Board at the annual meeting.

AP Members in attendance: Pam Lyons Gromen (Chair), Byron Young, Allison Bowden, Jeff Kaelin

ASMFC Staff: Caitlin Starks, Kirby Rootes-Murdy

Public: Erika Fuller (Earthjustice), Ansley Samson (NRDC), Shaun Gehan

1) Review the 2017 River Herring Assessment Update

An overview of the 2017 River Herring Assessment Update was presented by Jeff Kipp. The presentation included background information, updated trends, and concluding thoughts. The following key points that were highlighted:

- The update used a trend analysis approach incorporating data through 2015
- 26% of 57 total rivers systems had sufficient data to use in the analysis
- There was high variability in trends across the Atlantic coast
- River specific abundance showed 16 increasing trends, 2 decreasing, 8 with no significant trend and 18 without sufficient data
- The increasing trends seem to be more prevalent in the Northeast, with more variability in the mid and south Atlantic.

Questions were raised regarding the absence of known Hudson River data sets from the assessment update, the method by which abundance trends were determined, the reason behind changes in the sex composition of repeat spawners, and whether the long-term coast wide trends in length composition and length at age are cause for concern. Given that many of the data sets come from runs in the Northeast, does this potentially mask problems in Mid and South Atlantic runs when reporting trends on a coast wide basis? Climate change studies regarding changes in fish distribution have concluded that the center of biomass for many east coast fish stocks is shifting north. How or does this affect river herring abundance trends?

The AP members commented on the data limitations of the update, and while recognizing that the update was constrained to using data sets included in the benchmark assessment, see the potential to incorporate new data in future assessments and the upcoming NOAA status review for river herring. The group also discussed the challenge of gathering more information given that moratoria resulted in the loss of much fishery dependent data.

2) Update on NOAA's status review of river herring

ASMFC Staff provided a brief overview of the process and timeline of the NOAA status review to consider ESA listing for river herring, including the following points:

- NOAA announced the status review for alewife and blueback herring in a federal register notice on August 15, 2017
- At that time, NOAA opened a 60-day public comment period to solicit information to support our status review. The information solicitation period ends on October 16, 2017.
- NOAA plans to use the recent ASMFC Alewife and Blueback Herring Stock Assessment Update from August 2017 as part of the status review.
- Timeline:
 - Status Review- present to early 2018
 - Extinction Risk Assessment- Spring 2018
 - Peer Review of Status Review and Extinction Risk Assessment- Summer 2018
 - Listing Determination- published by January 31, 2019

The AP was in agreement that the usefulness of the stock assessment update for the status review was limited since a number of research studies and data sets were excluded from the update because they did not fit within the original framework of the last benchmark assessment. The group mentioned a number of initiatives they hoped would be part of the status review, including portside and electronic monitoring of at-sea catch, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center Climate Vulnerability Assessment and research stemming from the Technical Expert Working Group and the River Herring Conservation Plan. –

The AP members asked if the River Herring Technical Expert Working Group (TEWG) will be submitting information for the review. Allison Bowden, who is a TEWG member, commented that much of the research that has been done by the TEWG has been directed at this status review, and is submitted to NOAA. Independent research will also be submitted by various other members.

Pam Lyons Gromen commented that it seems there is still a lot of uncertainty about at-sea catch of river herring and how this impacts the stocks given very low levels of observer coverage in federal mid-water trawl fisheries for herring and mackerel in recent years; this should be considered in the review as well. Jeff Kaelin and Alison added that data from portside and electronic monitoring studies are currently not considered in incidental catch analyses reported to managers and that these studies should not be overlooked for the status review.

The AP agrees it would be good for ASMFC to encourage TC members to submit data pertaining to shad and river herring to NOAA for the status review. The ASMFC should keep an inventory of information that TC members contribute.

3) Discussion on recent observations and experiences with state river herring & shad runs and restoration efforts

Byron Young updated the AP on the voluntary program in Long Island, coordinated and supported by the Seatuck Environmental Association in Islip, which looks for remnant river herring runs in small coastal streams. This has been an ongoing program for almost a decade. The program has identified 26 streams around Long Island and New York City that support some alewife runs, and these runs could be improved through dam removal or implementing fish passages. 17 fish passage efforts have been completed so far. Where larger runs are occurring, spawning fish are moved upstream.

Brad Schondelmeier was on the agenda to give a presentation on the Portside Sampling Program in Massachusetts, but was unable to attend the call. His presentation will be shared with the AP.

4) Discuss Shad SFMPs up for approval

ASMFC Staff gave a short overview of the Sustainable Fishery Management plans for American Shad that the board will review for approval in October 2017. Connecticut, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia have all submitted updated SFMPs for approval. Virginia has submitted a proposal for a limited bycatch allowance.

The TC has reviewed all of these plans except for South Carolina and Georgia, which they will review in an upcoming call. There is a concern that a few plans include several rivers for which there is no monitoring but recreational fisheries are permitted to occur. The recreational fisheries are believed to be insignificant, but there are no data to support this claim in the SFMPs. The AP agrees that all rivers with any directed fishery for shad or river herring should have required monitoring to verify that significant harvest is not occurring or that harvest meets the IFMP criteria for sustainability. More information on the type of recreational fishing that is occurring on these rivers (e.g. type of gear or size of tackle) could be beneficial to understand whether shad and river herring would be caught in the fishery.

5) Future meeting schedule and goals

The AP discussed a timeline for meeting, and agreed that the group would benefit from meeting at least once per year. September or October is a good time to meet because the AP will be able to receive new information through compliance reports and the FMP review and provide any comments to the Board for the annual meeting. The AP would like to be brought into any discussions on important changes in the fishery, and notified of upcoming Board meetings. The AP noted the low turnout and response to the webinar invitation and is hopeful that more regular communication will reinvigorate AP membership.