



Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

NEWS RELEASE

Working towards healthy, self-sustaining populations of all Atlantic coast fish species, or successful restoration well in progress by the year 2015

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ASMFC River Herring Benchmark Assessment Indicates Stock is Depleted

Alexandria, VA – An independent panel of scientists endorsed the findings of the 2012 Benchmark Stock Assessment for River Herring, concluding the overall coastwide population of river herring (alewife and blueback herring) stocks on the US Atlantic coast is depleted to near historic lows. The “depleted” determination was used instead of “overfished” and “overfishing” because many factors, not just directed and incidental fishing, are contributing to the declining abundance of river herring. In addition to reducing harvest, recovery of river herring will need to address issues such as fish passage, predation, water quality, and climate change.

River herring are an anadromous species, spending the majority of their life at sea and returning to their natal streams to spawn. While at sea, mixing is believed to occur among multiple river-specific stocks and the incidental catch of river herring in non-targeted ocean fisheries is known to include both immature and mature fish.

Ideally, river herring should be assessed and managed by individual river systems. However, with over 200 river-specific stocks, population estimates were difficult to develop for the majority of these due to insufficient data. For the 52 river-specific stocks of alewife and blueback herring for which data were available, 23 were depleted relative to historic levels, one stock was increasing, and the status of 28 stocks could not be determined because of the data’s limited time-series (see accompanying Table).

State	River	Status Relative to Historic Levels/Recent Trends
ME	Damariscotta Union	Depleted ^A , Stable ^A Increasing ^A , Stable ^A
NH	Cocheco	Unknown ^{A,B} , Stable ^{A,B}
	Exeter	Depleted ^A , Increasing ^A
	Lamprey	Depleted ^A , Unknown ^A
	Oyster	Depleted ^B , Stable ^B
	Taylor	Depleted ^B , Decreasing ^B
MA	Winnicut	Depleted ^{A,B} , Unknown ^{A,B}
	Mattapoissett	Depleted ^A , Unknown ^A
	Monument	Depleted ^A , Unknown ^A
	Parker	Depleted ^A , Unknown ^A
RI	Stony Brook	Depleted ^A , Unknown ^A
	Buckeye	Depleted ^A , Unknown ^A
	Gilbert	Depleted ^A , Decreasing ^A
CT	Nonquit	Depleted ^A , Decreasing ^A
	Connecticut	Depleted ^B , Decreasing ^B
NY	Hudson	Depleted ^{A,B} , Stable ^{A,B}
MD, DE	Nanticoke	Depleted ^{A,B} , Decreasing ^{A,B}
VA, MD, DC	Potomac	Depleted ^{A,B} , Unknown ^{A,B}
NC	Chowan	Depleted ^{A,B} , Stable ^{A,B}
SC	Santee-Cooper	Depleted ^B , Increasing ^B

Table 1. Status of select alewife and blueback herring stocks along the Atlantic coast. Status relative to historic levels is pre-1970. Recent trends reflect last ten years of data. A = Alewife only; B= Blueback herring only; A,B = Alewife and blueback herring by species

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission was formed by the 15 Atlantic coastal states in 1942 for the promotion and protection of coastal fishery resources. The Commission serves as a deliberative body of the Atlantic coastal states, coordinating the conservation and management of nearshore fishery resources, including marine, shell and diadromous species.

In 2008, in response to perceived declines, the Management Board initiated the development of Amendment 2 to the Shad and River Herring FMP. Under Amendment 2, states and jurisdictions without an approved sustainable fisheries management plan were required to close their river herring fisheries by January 1, 2012. States with approved plans are Maine, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina and South Carolina. Prohibitions on harvest currently occur in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, District of Columbia, Potomac River Fisheries Commission, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida. The Commission will continue to coordinate with the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils in monitoring and reducing river herring bycatch in at-sea fisheries.

A more detailed overview of the River Herring Stock Assessment is available on the Commission website (www.asmfc.org) under *Breaking News*. It was developed with the intent of aiding media and interested stakeholders in better understanding the Commission's stock assessment results and process. Copies of the River Herring Stock Assessment Report and Assessment Peer Review Report will be available on the Commission website under *Breaking News* on May 7. For more information, please contact Kate Taylor, Fishery Management Coordinator, at ktaylor@asmfc.org or 703.842.0740.

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