



Connecticut Department of
**ENERGY &
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

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P R E S S R E L E A S E

Prohibition on the Taking of Alewife and Blueback Herring from Connecticut Waters Extended for another Year

Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) today announced that the prohibition on the taking of alewives and blueback herring from most inland and marine waters in Connecticut has been extended for another year. This action was initially taken in April of 2002, and has been extended each successive year because there has been no improvement in populations of these species during the past year. The current action by DEEP Commissioner Robert Klee extends the prohibition through March 31, 2017.

"Despite the conservation efforts taken by this agency and others over the past decade, the runs of river herring in Connecticut are still diminished," said DEEP Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen. "The best available data from this past year indicates that the closure of these fisheries must therefore remain in place."

River herring is a term used collectively to refer to alewife and blueback herring. Both species are anadromous, which means they hatch in freshwater, migrate to the ocean to grow, then return to freshwater to spawn. Historically, millions of river herring returned to Connecticut's rivers and streams each year. More than 630,000 blueback herring were passed over the Holyoke Dam (Massachusetts) on the Connecticut River in 1985. By 2006, only 21 passed the Holyoke Dam, the lowest number in the history of the Holyoke Fishlift. Numbers have fluctuated since that time but have never surpassed 1,000. In 2015 the number of fish passed was only 87. While river herring are not typically consumed by humans, they are important food to many species of freshwater and marine gamefish, as well as osprey, bald eagle, harbor seals, porpoise, egrets, kingfishers and river otter.

"All of us were a bit encouraged in 2014 when there were more blueback herring in the Connecticut River than we had seen in many years," said William Hyatt, Chief of DEEP's Bureau of Natural Resources. "But the numbers in 2015 were back down to the very low levels

of previous years. In fact, our data suggest that last year's run of river herring, statewide, was the worst on record."

"We need to demonstrate real, significant, and sustainable recovery before we once again allow harvest in our state," Hyatt said. "Opening up the fishery too early could set back our conservation efforts and put both river herring species at risk."

In 2013, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) ruled that the two species of river herring did not require protection under the federal Endangered Species Act, although the agency acknowledged that the species are suffering declines and are in need of conservation measures. In 2014, NMFS convened a working group for river herring to investigate what more can be done. Biologists from DEEP's Inland Fisheries Division have been serving on that group, and also working with their counterparts from the other northeastern states for the last several years to learn more about the biology and harvest of river herring and seek enhanced interstate cooperation to promote conservation.

Non-migratory alewife populations are established in several lakes and ponds in Connecticut. The DEEP prohibition does not include landlocked alewives from Amos Lake, Ball Pond, Beach Pond, Candlewood Lake, Crystal Lake, Highland Lake, Mount Tom Pond, Lake Quassapaug, Lake Quonnipaug, Squantz Pond, Uncas Pond, and Lake Waramaug. Alewives in these lakes may still be taken by angling and scoop net as established in state statute and regulation.

The DEEP continues its other efforts to enhance river herring stocks by transplanting adult herring from streams with healthy runs into streams where runs have been eliminated or greatly depleted, removing obsolete dams and building fishways that allow fish to migrate past remaining dams. In 2015, 20 miles of habitat were reconnected with removals of dams in Stonington, Preston, Lyme, and New Haven.

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