



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION  
79 Elm Street  
Hartford, CT 06106-5127

Further Information Contact:  
Dwayne Gardner, (860) 424-4100  
Steve Gephard, (860) 447-4316

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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**

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today announced that the prohibition on the taking of alewives and blueback herring from most inland and marine waters of the State of Connecticut has been extended for another year. This action was initially taken in April of 2002, and then extended each successive year. The current action by DEP Deputy Commissioner Susan Frechette extends the prohibition through March 31, 2012.

“Since 2002, states along the East Coast have all experienced dramatic declines in river herring populations. To combat this decline, the closure of these fisheries must remain in place,” said Deputy Commissioner Frechette.

River herring is a term used to collectively refer to alewife and the 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 rivers and streams each year. In 1985, over 630,000 blueback herring were passed over the Holyoke Dam, on the Connecticut River. By 2006, only 21 passed the Holyoke Dam (Massachusetts), the lowest number in the history of the Holyoke Fishlift. Last year that number had risen only to 76. While the reasons for these historically low levels are not fully understood, DEP biologists believe predation by increasingly abundant striped bass and undocumented catch in the ocean may be important factors.

“River herring comprise a large portion of the diet of many species of freshwater and marine gamefish, as well as osprey, bald eagle, harbor seals, porpoise, egrets, kingfishers and river otter,” said William Hyatt, Chief of DEP’s Bureau of Natural Resources, “and it is important to protect river herring runs as a means of conserving all of these other species.” DEP

wildlife biologists have noted that strong runs of river herring enhance the survival rate of osprey chicks.

Non-migratory alewife populations are also established in several lakes and ponds in Connecticut. The DEP prohibition does not include landlocked alewives from Amos Lake, Ball Pond, Beach Pond, Candlewood Lake, Crystal Lake, Highland Lake, Lake Quassapaug, Lake Quonnipaug, Rogers Lake, 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.

Hyatt indicated that the prohibition is expected to stay in place until monitoring by the DEP indicates that the population has recovered to the point where it could safely support some level of harvest. “Protecting populations of wild fish is one of our top priorities,” Hyatt said, “and monitoring conducted during 2010 indicated that the river herring stocks remain very low with no signs of an imminent recovery. The fishery closure will provide critical protection to small spawning runs until such time as the regional trend is reversed,” noted Hyatt.

The DEP 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. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is assisting the DEP with the transplantation effort.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has adopted an amendment to its Fishery Management Plan for river herring that requires all coastal states to improve their monitoring of river herring runs and take positive conservation actions. The New England Fishery Management Council is also considering changes to the Atlantic herring fishery in federal waters to reduce the accidental harvest of river herring in the ocean.

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