



## River Herring: An Imperiled Piece of Atlantic Ocean Ecosystems

**The Fish:** Alewife and blueback herring are two species of fish that belong to the river herring family. Both species are anadromous, meaning they spawn in rivers in the spring, but spend most of their lives at sea. River herring are important forage fish (prey) for ospreys, bald eagles, striped bass, sharks, tunas, seabirds, and marine mammals, including whales, porpoise, and dolphins, just to name some of the predators that count on river herring for their diet. Following decades of population declines from dams, habitat degradation, and fishing mortality, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) listed alewife and blueback herring as a species of concern in 2006.

**The Problem:** River herring fish counts have declined more than 95 percent from historical highs in many areas of the Mid-Atlantic and New England. To put this into perspective, consider that in 1959 over 70 million pounds of river herring were caught by commercial fishermen. In 1985, landings fell to 13.7 million pounds and have declined ever since. In 2005, less than 700,000 pounds of river herring were caught by commercial fishermen. The population has fallen so drastically that four states – Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and North Carolina – have banned commercial and recreational river herring fishing to help conservation efforts.

From the commercial fishermen to the striped bass angler to the shop owner that sells river herring bait — all are feeling the pinch of river herring’s decline. Predators also feel the impact as federal and state regulators have yet to consider the ecological role that river herring serve as forage fish.



Although river herring spawn inshore (under state jurisdictions), most fishing mortality occurs at sea, in federal waters, where they are often caught as bycatch (the accidental capturing and killing of non-targeted fish and ocean wildlife) by trawlers targeting Atlantic sea herring and mackerel. In some years, river herring bycatch reaches 2 million pounds. However, this figure may underestimate the true amount of bycatch since fisheries observer coverage on herring and mackerel fishing vessels is very low. The amount of river herring bycatch is significant as fewer river herring are returning to spawn in the rivers and streams along the Atlantic coast.

### The Solution:

- Monitor and evaluate bycatch of river herring (and other depleted forage fish such as American shad and butterfish) in mid-water and bottom trawls targeting Atlantic mackerel, Atlantic sea herring and squid by increasing at-sea and dockside sampling.
- Identify and close bycatch “hotspots” to mid-water and bottom trawls.
- Manage river herring (and other forage fish) throughout their range by implementing complementary bycatch reduction regulations through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, New England and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, and NMFS.

**Make Your Voice Heard:** The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), representatives from 15 states along the Atlantic seaboard, is currently holding public hearings on Amendment 2 to the River Herring Fishery Management Plan. To comment at the hearing or to submit your comments in writing, you do not need to be an expert on river herring, but ASMFC does need to hear your thoughts and concerns about these important forage fish. ASMFC will issue a final amendment in 2009. **The comment deadline is January 1, 2009.**

**Public Hearing Schedule on Draft River Herring Amendment**

<p><b>SC—Moncks Corner</b>          October 14, 2008, 6 PM          Santee-Cooper Auditorium          1 Riverwood Drive          Bill Post: 843- 953-9821</p>	<p><b>MD— Stevensville</b>          October 27, 2008, 6 PM          Matapeake Nat. Res. Police Training Academy; Conf. Room          Bob Sadzinski: 410-643-6776, 2121</p>	<p><b>NH—Portsmouth</b>          November 5, 2008, 7 PM          Urban Forestry Center          45 Elwyn Center          Doug Grout: 603-868-1095</p>
<p><b>CT- Old Lyme</b>          November 6, 2008, 7 PM          Marine Headquarters          333 Ferry Road          David Simpson: 860-434-6043</p>	<p><b>NJ- Galloway</b>          November 6, 2008, 7 PM          Galloway Township Public Lib.          Tom McCloy: 609-292-7794</p>	<p><b>VA-Charles City</b>          November 17, 2008, 6 PM          Charles City Gov't Admin. Bldg.          10900 Courthouse Road          Jack Travelstead: 757-247-2247</p>
<p><b>RI-Narragansett</b>          November 18, 2008, 6 PM          URI Narragansett Bay Campus          Corless Auditorium          215 South Ferry Road          Phillip Edwards: 410-789-0281</p>	<p><b>NC-Elizabeth City</b>          November 18, 2008, 6:30 PM          College of Albemarle          1208 N. Rd. Street; Rm. FC121B/C          Sara Winslow: 252-264-3911</p>	<p><b>MA-Plymouth</b>          December 1, 2008, 6 PM          Plymouth Radisson          180 Water Street          Melanie Griffin: 617-626-1528*</p> <p><b>MA-Gloucester</b>          December 2, 2008, 6 PM          Annisquam River Marine Fisheries Station          30 Emerson Avenue          * contact info. for both hearings</p>
<p><b>ME-Wiscasset</b>          December 2, 2008, 6 PM          Wiscasset High School          272 Gardinner Road          Terry Stockwell: 207-624-6533</p>	<p><b>NY-East Setauket</b>          December 2, 2008, 7PM          Bureau of Marine Res. HQ          205 N. Belle Mead Rd., Suite 1          Steve Heins: 631-444-0433</p> <p><b>NY-Staatsburg</b>          December 8, 2008, 7 PM          Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve          256 Norris Point Way          Andy Kahnle: 845-256-3072</p>	<p><b>ME—Ellsworth</b>          December 8, 2008, 6 PM          Ellsworth High School          299 State Street          Terry Stockwell:207-624-6533*</p> <p><b>ME- Machias</b>          December 11, 2008, 6 PM          University of Maine Machias Science Center          9 O'Brien Avenue          * contact info. for both hearings</p>



**Information:** Please contact the ASMFC at (202) 289-6400 or [www.asmfc.org](http://www.asmfc.org), and encourage the commission to enact strong measures to restore river herring populations that are vital to the ecology of the Atlantic coast. To download a copy of Amendment 2, please visit [www.foragefish.org](http://www.foragefish.org) and go to “Take Action.”

