

River Herring Network Meeting 10/19/2011
2-5:15PM Bourne Veterans Memorial Community Center

Meeting Minutes

Jeff Hughes, Introduction:

Goal is to get wardens and other managers/enthusiasts together to discuss run management, share knowledge, and create a community. Wardens can learn a lot from each other and help each other to record operations and create best practices documents. The website will help everyone to communicate and pass experience from warden to warden, and town to town.

Matt McKenzie, University of Connecticut, Avery Point Campus

Title: History of river herring management

- NOAA fisheries management debate context
- Falmouth herring war of 1804- conflict over fish management and significance of herring in Cape Cod communities in the last three centuries
- 17th c – herring integral to subsistence, managed by towns, women and children guaranteed a share in some towns at a time when they had few rights or little standing
- 18th c – pressure for commercial herring run development, but still towns generally provided general equality in access to herring
- 19th c – rise of commercial fisheries, population boom; fisheries now as source of cash rather than energy and nutrients. Failure by towns to regulate fisheries, manage ladders/runs.
- 20th c – neglect and then resurgence of interest in management

Questions and Answer Discussion:

- NOAA person: State vs. federal documentation and protection of fisheries history
- Lobstermen used to maintain runs because they used herring as bait. Relationship between commercial and preservation interests.

Brad Chase, MA Division of Marine Fisheries

Title: Anadromous Fisheries Program

DMF responsibilities

- Manage fish population and harvest
- Maintain fish passage
- Protect and restore habitat

History of management

- 1750s to 1900s – dam construction and operation for milling and hydroelectric lead to neglect of fish passage
- 1934 – DMF fishway crew
- 1941 MGL ch. 130 – state control with town collaboration

- 1950s and 60s – huge take of herring by foreign fleets
- 2006 – prohibition of all harvest

Mass Ch. 130, Sec. 19

- Can seize and remove illegal obstructions
- Direct maintenance and operation of every fishway

Sec. 93-95

- Local control for towns to regulate herring runs
- Most towns have a management agreement in place
- MA Fishway permits
- Operation and maintenance plans for every fish ladder

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission

- Description of MA participation
- Sustainable Fishery Plans
- Towns will eventually need to submit harvest plans to DMF and have them approved
- How to work together going forward to continue management?

Habitat and population restoration – examples of projects in last two years

Questions and Answer Discussion:

- Has process for ASMFC been established? A: Not really. Would towns want to open a run? Not many at this point. Do not want just one run to be the only run open in the state.
- What would be the threshold of a town that would want to open a run? A: DMF looks at mortality rate, other factors
- If no pressure to open runs, will that perpetuate bad management?
- Mystic Lake – had there been a run to the lake for several years and does the pond need to be restocked? A: the lower lake had a great population of alewives, but since 1850 they couldn't get to the higher pond. The day it opened, thousands of herring entered the upper lake.

John Sheppard, MA Division of Marine Fisheries

Title: Monitoring Activities of Anadromous Fisheries Program

Monitoring: Population estimates

- Census monitoring: using electronic measuring and traditional traps; conducting fish counts
- Ex. Nemasket River: population peak in 2002, decline sharply to the moratorium. Now increase trend.
- Town River
- Mattapoissett River: alarming pop picture – peak in 2000, sig decline by over 90% until moratorium, and not good recovery
- Monument River: also bad picture – rise and fall of populations until peak in 2000, decline to moratorium, but no recovery
- Back River

- Fisheries Independent Monitoring – DMF initiated in 2004 to collect samples and establish time series for each population, focus on mortality rates and growth rates among rivers/regions
- Determined different growth rates of herring in river systems, smaller as move farther north
- Moratorium likely to continue because of lack of recovery in populations

Questions and Answer Discussion:

- Trends in data: was 2000 an anomaly? Was crash as extreme as we've been hearing, and what do we know about the big years that could be reproduced? A: in major systems – Connecticut and Merrimack, peaks and subsequent declines happened earlier – 8 years earlier – can be seen as warning signals. In East, peak was later. Recruitment dependent? Study with Gary Nelson and Mike Armstrong: with Monument River data – fitting population with precipitation, and showing close relationship – precipitation influences recruitment in upper headwater ponds.
- Older records accessed? A: have tried to incorporate more historical data before the 1970s, mostly in larger systems. Belding's report.

Break-out session (See separate summary)

Melissa Sanderson, Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association

Title: River Herring network Website Tour: www.riverherringnetwork.com

- Send your river's information to cchfa@riverherringnetwork.com and it will be posted to your town's page.
- Sign up for the forum to have discussions with other wardens, managers, and volunteers. There is also a place to recruit/find volunteers.
- Resources section is rich in links: management bodies, grant writing/opportunities, research projects, published papers on river herring, etc.
- We have some funds set aside for training if folks need help learning to use the website. Contact cchfa@riverherringnetwork.com.

Questions and Answer Discussion:

- Suggestion: Have a page with all the towns' blogs; one-stop shop for anyone who wants to get involved with river herring
- Q: what are resources for continued management of website? A: server currently paid for by Mass Bays grant. Want to train group members also to manage website. The group will evolve.
- Suggestion: Group applying for funding: need to highlight outreach, and website is good for that.
- Suggestion: add something for eels on the site.

Eric Hutchins, NOAA Restoration Center

Title: Informal update on river herring count data

Eric distributed copies of the draft document, "A Summary of Volunteer River Herring Counts in Massachusetts" and explained the methodology and plans for reporting on data in future

years. He also gave an update on the petition of list river herring as “Threatened” under the Endangered Species Act.

Jo Ann Muramoto, Association to Preserve Cape Cod & Mass Bays Program

Title: River Herring Count Programs

Mass Bays work along the MA coast

- Focus on Cape Cod river herring monitoring
- Volunteer counts: importance, methods
- New river herring count software
- Examples of recent count data
- Are peak counts an indicator of run size?
- Kevin Galvin has developed software for keeping track of herring count data

Abby Franklin, Cape Cod Conservation District asked people to answer a few questions about the future of the Network that were written on flip charts.

Jeff Hughes gave closing remarks and thanked the Mass Bays Program for the grant funding that made the meeting possible. He also introduced Nancy Civetta the Media Liaison for Cape Hook and informed the Network that if there is information you want the media to know, and/or want to be a source for news/press releases, contact Nancy: nancy@ccchfa.org.