

RIVER HERRING (BLUEBACK HERRING AND ALEWIFE)

Stock Status – Albemarle Sound Area - **Depleted** – Currently the stock is being managed in accordance with Amendment 1 to the N.C. River Herring Fisheries Management Plan (FMP), which was approved by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) in September 2007. Amendment 1 set aside up to 7,500 pounds for research at the discretion of the DMF's Director, and implemented a no harvest provision, for commercial and recreational fisheries in the joint and coastal waters of North Carolina, beginning with the 2007 season. The DMF continues to collect data to monitor all stock recovery indicators as well as conduct sampling to identify and enhance spawning and nursery area habitats. Amendment 2 to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Interstate FMP for Shad and River Herring received final approval by the ASMFC Shad and River Herring Management Board in May 2009. Amendment 2 prohibits commercial and recreational fisheries in state waters coast wide beginning in January 1, 2012, unless sustainability is demonstrated through state-specific management plans. A sustainable management plan must be developed and submitted for approval by January 1, 2010. The amendment also requires states to implement fisheries dependent and independent sampling programs which will assist in the development of a coast wide river herring stock assessment, which is expected to be completed in 2012.

Other areas of the state – **Unknown**

Average Commercial Landings and Value - 1997-2006 – 286,171 lbs./\$120,545
(Commercial harvest prohibited since 2007)

2009 Research Set Aside Landings and Value – 643 lbs./\$836

Average Research Set Aside Landings and Value - 2007-2009 – 1013 lbs./\$822

Average Recreational Landings - 1998-2006 – unknown
2007-2009 – no recreational harvest permitted

Status of Fishery Management Plan (FMP) – The ASMFC FMP for Shad and River Herring was approved in 1985 and Amendment 1 to the ASMFC FMP was approved October 1998. Amendment 2 to the ASMFC FMP for Shad and River Herring received final approval by the Shad and River Herring Management Board in May 2009. Amendment 3 was approved in February 2010, and deals directly with American shad. The North Carolina MFC approved the first N.C. River Herring FMP in February 2000 for the Albemarle Sound Area. The Amendment 1 revision to the N.C. River Herring FMP was approved by the MFC in September of 2007.

Research and Data Needs – Currently the DMF has expanded sampling to evaluate, protect, and enhance potential spawning and nursery areas, as well as assess blockages of historical spawning habitat throughout the Albemarle Sound and its tributaries. Spawning area surveys have been conducted in the Chowan River during the 2008-2010 spawning seasons, as well as the Yeopim River (2007), Meherrin River (2008), Scuppernong River (2009), Mackey's Creek (2009), Perquimans River (2010), and Little River (2010). The DMF is assessing and evaluating all impediments in the Chowan River system, which will aid in future projects to expand and enhance potential spawning habitat. All of these surveys are continually expanding to cover all of Albemarle Sound and its tributaries to evaluate the effects of habitat loss on the river herring stock and provide protection for these habitat areas. Additional research is needed to evaluate striped bass predation on juvenile alosines, determine population size in the various systems including other areas of the state, and determine the effects of bycatch.

Current Regulations –There is a no harvest provision for commercial and recreational fisheries in joint and coastal waters of the state. The Wildlife Resources Commission has also implemented a no harvest provision for all inland waters of the state for river herring greater than 6 inches. Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries passed rules that no longer permits river herring harvest in drainages flowing into North Carolina (Meherrin, Nottoway, Blackwater, Northwest, and North Landing rivers) as of January 1, 2008.

Size and Age at Maturity – Males: 6-10 inches fork length (FL)/2-4 years
Females: 6-10 inches FL/3-5 years

Historical and Current Maximum Age - 9 years / 7 years

Juvenile Abundance Index - 2000-2009 – blueback herring 3.36, alewife 0.66
2009 – blueback herring 1.02, alewife 0.00

Habits and Habitats – Blueback herring and alewife are anadromous, spending the majority of life in the ocean, returning to fresh water to spawn. Spawning occurs from March into May in coastal rivers and tributaries. Juveniles spend their first growing season in fresh to brackish waters and migrate to more saline waters as the water temperatures decrease in the fall. Some may spend their first winter in the sounds, but majorities migrate to the ocean and remain there until sexual maturity. The Albemarle Sound was historically the center of the commercial and recreational fisheries for river herring.

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