

## **RIVER HERRING (BLUEBACK HERRING AND ALEWIFE)**

(06/08 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status** - Albemarle Sound Area - **Depleted** - The most recent stock assessment completed in May 2005 outlines increased mortality rates, decreased recruitment and reduced spawning stock biomass as key indicators of continued decline in the river herring stock in the Albemarle Sound Area. The numbers of year classes represented in the harvest are reduced, juvenile production remains low, and mean length at age continues to decline. The North Carolina River Herring Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) Amendment 1 received final approval by the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) in September 2007. Amendment 1 set aside up to 7,500 pounds for research at the discretion of the Division of Marine Fisheries's (DMF) director, and implemented a no harvest provision, commercial and recreational, beginning with the 2007 season.

Other areas of the state - **Unknown**

**Average Commercial Landings and Value 1997-2006** – 286,171 lbs./\$120,545

**2007 Research Set Aside Landings and Value** – 1,103 lbs./\$856 (quota-managed)

**Average Recreational Landings 1998-2007** – unknown, **2007** - unknown

**Average Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) Landings**

**2002-2007** – 12,685 lbs.,

**2007** – 1,045 lbs.

**Status of Fishery Management Plan (FMP)** - The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (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, which will pertain specifically to river herring, is being developed. The MFC approved the first North Carolina River Herring FMP in February 2000 for the Albemarle Sound Area. The Amendment 1 revision to the FMP was approved by the MFC in September of 2007.

**Research and Data Needs** – Currently the DMF is re-evaluating spawning areas, assessing blockages of historical spawning habitat, expanding juvenile sampling, further evaluating the effects of habitat loss on the river herring stock, and providing protection for these habitat areas. More research and data are needed to continue this sampling as well as to evaluate the effect of striped bass as predators on juvenile alosines, determine population size in the various systems, expand the river herring study to include all of Albemarle Sound and its tributaries as well as other areas of the state.

**Current Regulations** – The MFC, through the 2007 North Carolina River Herring FMP Amendment 1, implemented a no harvest (commercial or recreational) provision for the joint and coastal waters of the state. This amendment set aside up to 7,500 pounds for research to be allocated at the discretion of the DMF's Director. The Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) 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 permit 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** -

**1997-2007:** blueback herring 3.59, alewife 0.87,

**2007:** blueback herring 0.02, alewife 0.16

**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 the majority 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.

For more information, see [DMF Species Leads page](#).