

RIVER HERRING (BLUEBACK HERRING AND ALEWIFE)

(06/06 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

Stock Status - Albemarle Sound Area - **Overfished** - 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 number of year classes represented in the harvest are reduced, juvenile production has been poor, (with the exception of an increase of juvenile abundance for alewife and blueback herring in 2004), and mean length at age continues to decline. Chowan River pound net harvest allocation of 200,000 lbs. has not been reached since 2001. The River Herring fisheries management plan (FMP) is being updated and is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2006.

Other areas of the state - **Unknown**

Average Commercial Landings and Value 1996-2005 - 328,197 lbs./\$125,403

2005 Commercial Landings and Value - 250,021 lbs./\$128,834 (quota-managed)

Average Recreational Landings 1996-2005 – unknown, **2005** - unknown

Average Recreational Commercial Gear License (RCGL) Landings 2002-2005 - 17,540 lbs., **2005** - 8,859 lbs.

Average Number of Citations 1996-2005 – N/A, **2005** - N/A

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 was approved October 1998. The Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) approved the Albemarle Sound Area River Herring FMP in February 2000. The FMP is currently being updated and is scheduled for completion in 2006.

Data/Research Needs - Re-evaluation of spawning areas, evaluate the survival of larvae to juvenile, further evaluate the effects of habitat loss on the river herring stock and provide protection for these habitat areas, evaluate the effect of striped bass as predators on juvenile alosines, expand juvenile sampling, determine population size in the various systems, expand the river herring study to include all of Albemarle Sound and its tributaries, and other areas of the state.

Current Regulations (2006) – Recreational: 25-fish (in the aggregate), per person, per day (in response to continued stock decline) the MFC adopted interim management measures for the 2006 harvest season which included a reduction in the recreational creel limit to 12-fish (in the aggregate) per person, per day.

Harvest Season - Outside Albemarle Sound River Herring Management Area (ASRHMA) commercial harvest season is closed by proclamation at midnight, April 14. The commercial harvest in the ASRHMA is managed on a quota system with a yearly total allowable catch (TAC) of 300,000 lbs. The quota is allocated by gear; Chowan River pound nets 200,000 lbs., gill nets 67,000 lbs., and other gear (which includes gear other than gill nets and Chowan River pound nets,) 33,000 lbs. (in response to continued stock decline the MFC adopted interim management measures for the ASRHMA 2006 harvest season which included a reduction in the commercial TAC to 100,000 lbs.; allocated as Chowan River pound nets 65,000 lbs., gill nets 30,000 lbs., and other gear 5,000 lbs.). Season is closed by proclamation when quota is reached. ASRHMA recreational harvest is closed by proclamation at midnight, April 14.

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

Historical and Current Maximum Age - 9 years/7 years

Juvenile Abundance Index 1996-2005 - blueback herring 5.4, alewife 1.3, **2005** - blueback herring 6.6, alewife 1.5

Habits/Habitats - Blueback herring and alewife are anadromous, spending 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. Albemarle Sound area is the center of the commercial and recreational fisheries for river herring.

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