

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

(06/05 ARCHIVE - NCDMF)

**Stock Status - *Overfished*** - Albemarle Sound Area- 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. **Unknown** for other areas of the state.

**Average Commercial Landings and Value 1995-2004** - 348,593 lbs./\$126,013

**2004 Commercial Landings and Value** - 188,541 lbs./\$80,694

**Average Recreational Landings 1995-2004** – unknown, **2004-** unknown

**Average RCGL Landings 2002-2004** - 20,433 lbs., **2004-** 9,089 lbs.

**Status of Fishery Management Plan** - The ASMFC Fishery Management Plan for Shad and River Herring was approved in 1985 and Amendment 1 was approved October 1998. The MFC approved the Albemarle Sound Area River Herring FMP in February 2000. The FMP is currently being updated and is scheduled for completion March 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 alosids, expand juvenile sampling, determine population size in the various systems, expand the river herring study to include all of Albemarle Sound and its tributaries.

**Current Regulations (2005)** – Recreational: 25 (in the aggregate), per person, per day.

**Harvest Season (2005)** - Outside Albemarle Sound Herring Management Area (ASHMA) commercial harvest season is closed by proclamation at midnight, April 14. The commercial harvest in the ASHMA is managed on a quota system with a yearly total allowable catch 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 Chowan River pound nets, and gill nets) 33,000 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** – 6 inches-10 inches FL/Males: 2 years-4 years; Females: 4 years-5 years

**Historical and Current Maximum Age** - 9 years/7 years

**Juvenile Abundance Index Average** (# of individuals per unit of effort) **1972-2004** - blueback herring 59.9, alewife 2.3 **2004-** blueback herring 14.8, alewife 2.1

**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](#)