2nd Annual Meeting of the River Herring Network
Notes from the 10/25/2012 meeting

Bourne Veteran's Memorial Community Center – 239 Main St. Buzzards Bay

Abby Franklin opened the meeting and asked participants to introduce themselves. Forty one people attended representing 16 towns, two state agencies (DMF and Division of Fisheries and Wildlife), the federal agency NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, and 8 non-profit organizations. Two representatives of the Massachusetts Bays Program also attended.

Speaker #1: River Herring and the Endangered Species Act – Sarah Laporte, NOAA Fisheries, Protected Resources Division

- On 8/5/2011, a petition was filed to list both river herring species under the Endangered Species Act.
- On 11/2/2011, NMFS determined that action on the petition may be warranted and required further investigation → both river herring species become "candidate species" and a final listing determination must be made within 1 year of the original petition filing (this should have happened by 8/5/2012)
- NMFS will consider the following five factors in its decision:
    - Present or threatened destruction/modification of habitat
    - Overutilization
    - Disease or predation
    - Inadequacy of existing regulations
    - Other
- NMFS is working with ASMFC to conduct the analysis because ASMFC just released a stock assessment in May 2012 that thoroughly assessed the status of river herring
- NMFS also hosted three workshops to further investigate topics that weren't included in ASMFC stock assessment:
    - stock structure
    - extinction risk
    - climate change
- Reports from these workshops were peer reviewed and will be considered as part of the listing determination analysis
- Possible outcomes include:
    - A proposal for a listing, which would result in 60-90 days for public comment and public hearings with final determination no later than 1 year after the proposed rule
    - A proposal for no listing, which would be announced but would not be accompanied by a public comment period
- NMFS plans to publish the determination ASAP
- Check NMFS Regional Office river herring website for periodic updates

Speaker #2: Acushnet River Restoration Project: A test pilot case study for future restoration projects in MA, John Sheppard, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries

- Large scale project with many partners, including state and federal level government and nonprofits
- Acushnet River is 8.2 miles long and located in southern MA
- Stream had been subjected to heavy metal contamination
- In 1982 it was declared a superfund site and funds were designated for this cleanup project
- Restoration effort focused on protecting both species of river herring by creating fish passage improvements at 3 dams that impeded the passage of diadromous species (New Bedford Reservoir Dam, Acushnet Sawmill Dam, and Hamlin Street Dam)
- Objective of project was to improve passage 1000%
- Following improvements to fish passages, biological monitoring program showed that the numbers of fish making it all the way upstream increased significantly- ~1140% as compared to baseline river herring numbers
- Restoration project was successful and has resulted in improved access to spawning and nursery habitat for river herring
- Future dam removal projects are in the works at Mill River (Taunton), Jones River (Kingston), and Fore River/Monatiquot River (Weymouth, Braintree)

Speaker #3: NOAA Restoration Center Funding Opportunities, Eric Hutchins, NOAA Restoration Center

- Goals of the Restoration Center are to rebuild lost habitat due to impacts such as oil spills, development, erosion, and degradations and to engage local citizens
- Community-Based Funds are designated for projects that restore habitats with ecological and socio-economic benefits, and leverages collaboration/participation from the community
- Community-Based Funds are distributed through a national and regional partnership program in which the federal government gives funds to local nonprofits to spearhead these initiatives
- Restoration Center also runs a damage assessment/remediation/restoration program
- Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, ~$35 million was awarded to 11 projects across the region, 9 of which are fish passages or have a fish passages component
- NOAA is honing in the on focus of its mission and investing more efforts into protecting fish directly and fewer efforts into indirect/fringe fish benefit projects
- Prioritized regional restorations projects include:
    - Diadromous fish restoration
    - Dam removal and fish passage
- NOAA's role in these projects is to provide funding and project support as needed
- FY2013 Funding Opportunities
    - American Rivers/NOAA- Due 12/7

    - Trout Unlimited/NOAA- Due Jan
    - Gulf of Maine Council- Due Jan
    - NOAA Direct Solicitation- Due 2/19 (These funds will depend on whether NOAA gets congressional appropriation funds- there may not be much money in the budget for this in 2013)
- www.restoration.noaa.gov

Speaker #4 River Herring Network Accomplishments and Present Situation, Abby Franklin, Cape Cod Conservation District

- Jeff Hughes,Ben Martens started discussions about river herring network in 2009
- At Herring Count training workshop in March 2010 reached out to other wardens
- Applied for and received a 2011 grant from Mass Bays program
- Outreached to MADMF and shellfish officers Association
- Received a 2nd round of funding in 2012 from Mass Bays program
- Goals:
- 1. Facilitate communication among herring wardens and other river herring enthusiasts.
- 2. Support herring wardens in their role as active participants in fisheries management processes.
- 3. Document and communicate the natural and cultural history of the herring runs.
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- Accomplishments to date:
    - 2011
        - Development of comprehensive contact list
        - Creation of RHN website
        - Hosted first annual meeting
        - Drafted best management practices document
    - 2012
        - June and September workshops
        - Updates to website
        - Revisions/refinements to Wellfleet best practices document
        - Hosted 2nd annual meeting

Future Actions: we need a new funding source and to address planning committee changes for 2013

Speaker #5: Design and Operation of Fish Ladders, Dick Quinn, US Fish and Wildlife, retired

- Various types of fish passages include: chutes, pools, mechanical devices and breaches
- Successful fish ladders require careful attention to design flows

- Fish ladders are designed for fish to go up, not down- mechanisms to facilitate going down are included when possible
- MADMF is a resource for river herring wardens- if you are having issues with your fish passageways, please do not hesitate to call them for help!

Speaker #6: Reducing River Herring Bycatch in the Atlantic Herring Midwater Trawl Fishery,
Bill Hoffman & Brad Schondelmeier, Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, Dave Bethoney, School for Marine Science and Technology

- Project working with midwater trawl fleet is funded by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and TNhe Nature Conservancyand consists of two parts: a port sampling program and a river herring avoidance system
- Port Sampling Program
    - Between 2010-2012, 59% of midwater trawl landings have been sampled in MA
    - Sampling on-shore allows collection of large amounts of bycatch data on the midwater trawl fishery- it is more accurate due to slower offloading process than at-sea, it is cheaper, and it prevents an "observer effect"
        - However, there are some benefits to at-sea sampling- it provides real-time data and accuracy plus bycatch cataloging
    - Sampling process includes a systematic procedure that accounts for stratification of species during the pumping process
    - Data collected during the sampling process includes catch composition, biological info for all species, and samples as needed
    - This data is used to support SMAST/DMF River Herring Avoidance System
- River Herring Avoidance System
    - Here is the feedback loop for the program:
        - Vessels target herring/mackerel→ vessels land and go through portside sampling, including providing data on the locations they fished → river herring quantities and location data is sent to SMAST where they create a grid that allows them to identify areas with high RH bycatch → warn vessels not to fish in those areas
        - SMAST coded grid areas are specific to three areas frequented by midwater trawl vessels:
            - Inshore Maine
            - Off the backside of the Cape/Nantucket Shoals area
            - Southern New England
    - 13 out of 14 midwater trawl vessels are participating in the program and following SMAST's advice, which indicates that the system is working- there is a demonstrated
    - reduction in bycatch levels for vessels participating in the program

- Future direction:
    - Because Amendment 5 will result in 100% observer coverage, SMAST will try to increase integration with the observer program and decrease its notification lag-time
    - This program has the potential to be helpful in keeping midwater trawl vessels below river herring catch cap limits once they are implemented
    - Hope the program will become proactive rather than reactive by incorporating RH biology into predictions of where they will be and when

Abby Franklin wrapped up the meeting with a brief discussion about the afternoon breakout session questions. Participants suggested charging a nominal annual fee for membership to the group – similar to what the MA Shellfish Officers Association does to keep financially stable. Another suggestion was to charge a small amount of money for each workshop as an interim step. Some participants who are employed by a town thought this idea was workable. Members of some non-profit groups commented that a workshop fee would be a more difficult structure. Abby concluded by suggesting that a survey could be sent out to determine which arrangement would work best for the largest number of participants.