

CONNECTICUT WEEKLY DIADROMOUS FISH REPORT

Report Date: March 15, 2016



This is a report generated by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection/ Inland Fisheries Division- Diadromous Program. For more information, contact Steve Gephard, 860/447-4316. For more information about fish runs on the Connecticut River visit the USFWS website at www.fws.gov/r5src. For more information about Atlantic salmon, visit the Connecticut River Salmon Association at www.ctriversalmon.org.

CONNECTICUT RIVER LOCATIONS

FISHWAY (RIVER)	ATLANTIC SALMON	AMER. SHAD	ALEWIFE	BLUEBACK HERRING	GIZZARD SHAD	STRIPED BASS	SEA LAMPREY	SEA-RUN TROUT	AMER. EEL
Rainbow* (Farmington)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Leesville (Salmon)	0	-	-	0	-	-	0***	0	0
StanChem* (Mattabesset)	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	0
Moulson Pond* (Eightmile)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
Mary Steube* (Mill Brook)	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rogers Lake+ (Mill Brook)	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-
WestSpringfield (Westfield- MA)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Holyoke (Connecticut- MA)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manhan River* (Manhan- MA)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turners Falls* (Connecticut- MA)	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	-	-
Vernon* (Connecticut- VT)	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	-	0
Bellows Falls* (Connecticut- VT)	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	-	0
Wilder* (Connecticut- VT)	0	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	0
Other (all sites)	0								
TOTALS=	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
(last year's totals)	22	416,355	237	11,822	93	21	24,573	9	20,305

Fishways listed in gray font above are not yet opened for the season. In some cases, the fishways will be opened soon. In the case of the fishways on the Connecticut River, some fishways are not opened until significant numbers of fish pass through the fishway immediately downstream of them. If that never happens, the fishway may not be opened during the season.

*There is a video camera that records passage. There is a considerable lag between the date a tape is recorded and when staff is able to count fish from the tape, so these numbers will not represent up-to-date counts until after the end of spring season.*** Population estimates based on end-of-the-season nest surveys.- +There is an electronic fish counter at this fishway.

NOTE: All fish that pass through the Turners Falls, Vernon, Bellows Falls, and Wilder fishways had to first go through the Holyoke Fishlift where they were counted. Therefore those fish are not included in the totals at the bottom.

COMMENTS:

What a difference a year makes. This time last year, we were still in the grips of a cold, late winter. All of the fish runs were late and there was still so much ice in some fishways that we couldn't even open them. Now, on the heels of an El Nino winter, the ice never really took hold, the water is warming fast, and the alewives are showing up weeks early. Typically, the first alewives show up at Bride Brook in mid-March and they first appear in the Connecticut River in the first week of April. This year they showed up at Brides Brook on February 29 (can't do that next year!) and in Mill Brook (first tributary in the Connecticut River) by March 14—at least two weeks early. Captain Mark of the RiverQuest reported this past Saturday there were very large schools of fish showing up on his sonar moving upstream on the Connecticut River. Impossible to tell what they were from those images, but the candidates are few...

We are in the process of opening fishways on the lower river but it will be a while before we can get to all of them and the upriver ones will have to wait. You can see from the table on the first page, none of the fishways are open yet. One of our challenges is that we don't have permission to hire seasonal employees yet. We normally hire three on March 1 to help us with the set up and opening of fishways. Without them (budget issues), we are scrambling to get things ready for the early season. We are likely to rely more this year on volunteers along the Connecticut River to monitor fish runs. The Connecticut River Watershed Council received a grant to support a Citizen Science project for river herring and we have recruited a handful of volunteers to help with this after holding two public informational meetings at Haddam and East Hartford. We have a training session coming up for those volunteers on the evening of March 24 in Middletown. While we pretty much have the group we need, if any reader is very passionate about joining us for this, contact CRWC River Steward Alicea Charamut at acharamut@ctriver.org and see if there is still room at the meeting. Tell her where you live and what tributary you would like to monitor and she can tell you if we already have a volunteer for that stream.

The way the fish runs progress is that at the beginning of the season (usually April), there is a lot of action to report along the shoreline and much of this report focuses on that area (the next two pages). By May, the fish start showing up along the Connecticut River sites and peaks in late May/early June. By that time, things are getting pretty quiet along the shoreline. So right now, there is not much to report on this page. Ken Sprankle is scheduled to start his electrofishing surveys for alewives March 28, about the time we start opening up more fishways. In the meantime, I will use this space to report on a new initiative along the shoreline: sea-run brown trout. Brown trout are not native to the U.S. but have been here since the mid-1800s and have naturalized. Our Division stocks tens of thousands to support popular trout fisheries. Some of them adapt an anadromous life history and go out to sea like Atlantic salmon. This is more common in Europe. We have always had some sea-run trout in our coastal streams but few and we don't know what has caused them to go to sea rather than stay inland like their brethren. In recent years, we have attempted to increase these returns through various stocking methods but nothing really worked well. So we have imported a special strain of sea-run brown trout from the Iijoki River in Finland. These fish are all sea-runs and have been certified disease free. We imported them as eggs, hatched and reared them in the Burlington State Fish Hatchery, and this month stocked out our first smolts, which are two years old. (See photos below.) All of them have a pelvic fin clipped to identify them as one of these special fish and were released into Latimer Brook in East Lyme as a test stocking. We have a fishway on that brook that we will monitor over the next few years to see how many fish come back as adults. Anglers who catch sea-run brown trout are encouraged to report the catch to us (photos are great, too) and look to see if one of those pelvic fins are missing. We will continue this for a few years to determine if these Finnish fish can adapt to southern New England and if this is a viable approach to increasing fish runs and supporting a trophy sport fishery.



Releasing sea-run brown trout into Latimer Brook. Fish Nut Kirk McPherson presides.



Biologist Tim Wildman shows off one of the sea-run trout smolts about to be released into Latimer Brook. Note the silvery hue and overall good fin condition.

OTHER LOCATIONS WITHIN CONNECTICUT

FISHWAY (RIVER)	AMER. SHAD	ALEWIFE	BLUEBACK HERRING	GIZZARD SHAD	STRIPED BASS	SEA LAMPREY	SEA-RUN TROUT	AMER. EEL
Greeneville* (Shetucket R., Norwich)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taftville* (Shetucket R., Norwich)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Occum* (Shetucket R., Norwich)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tunnel* (Quinebaug R., Preston)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kinneytown* (Naugatuck R., Seymour)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hallville Pond* (Poquetanuck Br. Preston)	-	0	0	0	-	0	0	
Trading Cove Brook** - (Trading Cove Brook, Montville)		0	0	0	-	-	0	-
Jordan Brook** - (Jordan Brook, Waterford)		0	0	0	-	0	0	0
Latimers Brook** - (Latimers Br., E.Lyme)	-	79	0	-	-	-	0	-
Brides Brook** (Brides Brook, E.Lyme)		2,665						
Clarks Pond - (Indian River, Milford)	-	0		-		-	-	
Branford Supply Pond Dam** 0 (Queach Br., Branford)		0	-	-	-	-		
Lower Guilford Lake** (West River, Guilford)		0	-			-	0	
Haakonsen Fishway* 0 (Quinnipiac R., Wallingford)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Bunnells Pond* - (Peqonnock R., Bridgeport)	-	0	0	0	0			
Wood Dam** (Saugatuck R., Westport)		0	0		0			
Mianus River Pond* ** (Mianus R., Greenwich)		75	0	0	0	0	0	-

**Fish passage is video-recorded and counts are made off of tapes several days later so these data are always lagged a little behind. This report covers passage up to the following dates for these fishways:*

Greeneville= n.a. Taftville= n.a. Occum= n.a. Tunnel= n.a. Kinneytown= n.a. Haakonsen= n.a. Hallville= n.a.

******These locations have an electronic fish counter and are used as index sites for river herring runs. The counter is checked daily Monday-Friday. Monday counts typically include all weekend passage. These counts are usually up-to-date but some may lag behind a day or two, occasionally.

+This location has a fish trap and fish are enumerated prior to release.

Counts in parentheses indicate numbers seen in a run that is now over and no further fish were counted during the past week. Typically used for alewife runs later in June.

COMMENTS:

The alewife run is on at Bride Brook—it began February 29, which is pretty early. We first received a report from colleagues in Massachusetts that the fish arrived in the Nemasket River on February 27 and two days later, we found them at Brides. We visited the Mianus Pond Fishway in Greenwich a few days later and met the new Conservation Resource Manager with the Conservation Commission—Amanda Ryan. Amanda previously worked with the Central Connecticut Regional Planning Agency and The Nature Conservancy and is the next in a line of great workers who have managed that fishway (see photo below). The first alewives showed up there on March 10 and the next day I found a few below the Latimer Brook fishway. You can see from the numbers on the preceding page that the runs are still low, but they are building. Long-time observer and fishing columnist Bob Gregorski saw small herring like fish going upstream in Bride Brook, which was very confusing. Upon closer examination, they turned out to be menhaden—probably last year’s screwy year class that never seemed to want to leave. Many of them are now being preyed upon by gulls. We don’t know why they are (still) here. The same thing is reported from a bay on the Cape where seals have targeted them and have decimated the group.

We will be opening fishways along the shoreline as soon as we can and encouraging others to do so or start monitoring the handful of fishways that never close (like Clarks Pond, Landon, etc.). If anyone opens a fishway or starts monitoring, let me know. Last week, Dave Ellis and I opened Davis Pond fishway on the Silvermine River in Norwalk and over the weekend, I checked on the Cannondale Fishway in Wilton and that is operating well (no chance for anadromous fish there yet, but hopefully in the coming years). Norwich Public Utilities hoped to have Greenville Fishlift open today but ran into some electrical issues and now hope to start lifting by the end of the week. Once they start passing fish, upstream fishways will be opened. First Light Power has some wooden baffles to replace at the Taftville fishway but we hope that will be ready in time for the first fish. You’ll notice from the list above, we hope to have two new fish counts to report, both from fishways that have been around a while. Most electronic fish counters are assigned to a specific fishway and they operate there year-after-year and we use them as index stations. We also have a “roving fish counter” that is assigned to a different fishway every year to get a snapshot of how other fishways are doing. This year, the “rover” is back to Trading Cove Brook Fishway in Montville, a tidewater tributary of the Thames. So we’ll be reporting numbers for that site. But we have a new permanent counting station going on line this year at the Jordan Brook Fishway. Thanks to a grant, the Town of Waterford bought a fish counter and we will install it. More on that in the coming weeks.

Great work was done by our partners (and us) on fish passage projects during the summer of 2015 after this report ended for the year. Six dams were removed. Three of them had fishways so our number of fishways in Connecticut actually went down. (Two more to be built in 2016 along with more dam removals.) I will be providing brief summaries of these 2015 projects in these reports, most likely in the coming weeks before the fish runs really get going strong.

This is early to start these reports but I’ll try to keep them up for the next two weeks until April when we normally start them. These reports have always benefitted from the contributions from others so submit your reports, news, and photos. We’ll focus on Connecticut but if things are slow, we will include relevant news about diadromous fish runs elsewhere, too.



The Bride Brook fish counter is installed but the trap is not yet in. Fish swim over the little weir and pass through the counting array and data are recorded in the silver lock box in the foreground. The trap, which will allow us to capture fish and truck them to other watersheds, will be installed soon.



Amanda Ryan (Town of Greenwich) and Dave Ellis (DEEP) reattach a loose wire for the fish counter at the Mianus Pond Fishway. The box-like object slides down into the fishway exit and fish swim through it to be counted.