Joint Tribal Council of the Passamaquoddy Tribe passes St. Croix River Alewife Resolution

Citing the vital linkages that sea-run alewives create in the food chain of the St. Croix River, Passamaquoddy Bay and the Bay of Fundy, members of the Joint Tribal Council of the Passamaquoddy Tribe voted unanimously to pass a resolution that calls for reopening the St. Croix Rivers for alewives. The resolution states that sea-run alewife are a vital link in the food chain of the St. Croix River that sustained the Passamaquoddy for thousands of years, “without which we may not have survived.” The Joint Tribal Council resolution supports the June 14, 2012 Passamaquoddy Chief’s Declaration of a State of Emergency within the St. Croix River, and calls for overturning Maine’s 1995 law that blocks alewives from the St. Croix.

In early June 2012 members of the Schoodic Riverkeepers advanced the Passamaquoddy river restoration effort with a 100-mile sacred run up the St. Croix River, a run that mirrored the annual trek of native alewives. The route extended from Pleasant Point, near Eastport, to Mud Lake Stream, a 4,000-year-old ancestral fishing site for the Passamaquoddy at the head of Spednic Lake.

Maine Rivers has been working for nearly a decade on advocacy efforts to reopen the St. Croix River and applauds this recent decision of the Joint Tribal Council.

Clockwise from top: Runners and tribal elders at the halfway point of the 2012 alewife run: the blocked Grand Falls fishway; canoeist on the St. Croix; the St. Croix River; runners arriving at Mud Lake Stream; Ed Bassett (L), tribal alewife organizer and runner, presents an eagle feather to Indian Township chief Joe Socobasin; Vera Francis and Newell Lewey passing the deer antler baton.
Mousam and Kennebunk Rivers Alliance Update

Local River Alliance Puts Alewives Back in Alewife Pond

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July 26, 2012 2:00 AM • KENNEBUNK — Volunteers with the Mousam and Kennebunk Rivers Alliance recently stocked Alewife Pond with 200 alewives, completing the first phase of a four-year MKRA effort aimed at restoring a self-sustaining alewife run in Ward Brook and Alewife Pond.

“There’s been a great deal of success in restoring runs of river herring in Maine’s rivers,” said Dr. Jack Ney, a volunteer with the MKRA who helped coordinate the stocking effort. Ney explained that alewives are members of the herring family and are related to American shad and blueback herring. “Adults grow to between 10-15 inches in length, have slender bodies, and weigh between half a pound and a pound. They’re found in lakes and ponds, and also in slower moving stretches of rivers and streams. They are a sea-run fish that spend the majority of their life at sea, but return to freshwater to spawn. Scientists call this an anadromous life history.

“Given this success, the MKRA is optimistic we can rebuild a robust alewife population in the Kennebunk River watershed. Historically, 75 to 100 million adult alewives entered Maine’s rivers every spring, producing hundreds of billions of juveniles. As a high-energy food source, bald eagles, osprey, herons, beavers, mink, otters, gulls, cormorants, seals, dolphins, whales, striped bass, bluefish, cod, haddock and myriad species in the Gulf of Maine were dependent on alewives.”

Crooked River Update

In July 2012 Maine Rivers and partners submitted comments to the Maine Department of Environmental Protection opposing the Scribner’s Mill Preservation, Inc. application to rebuild a dam on the Crooked River. This application will be the last that can be submitted to build a dam on the Crooked River; the river has been classified “AA” and given the highest level of protection.

The Crooked River, Sebago Lake’s largest tributary, provides excellent spawning and juvenile habitat for native landlocked salmon. Sebago Lake, including the Crooked River tributary, supports one of only four known indigenous populations of landlocked Atlantic salmon in Maine. The unique genetics of these fish and the allure of angling for wild landlocked salmon in their indigenous waters has brought international acclaim to Sebago Lake and has assisted researchers seeking to restore salmon populations in other parts of the world.

The unfortunate conflict over rebuilding a dam on the Crooked River has been going on for several years (as Nick Mill wrote in his blog the Virtual Angler back in April, “I cannot believe the Scribner’s Mill dam proposal is still alive! This thing is like Rasputin!”). Over this time the value of the Crooked River and its watershed have been under review. Economists have been evaluating whether comprehensive watershed management of the Crooked River is a more cost-effective way to protect Portland’s drinking water instead of water treatment plant upgrades, and scientists have been studying the watershed’s role in carbon sequestration.
Granite, muscles and pulleys attract media attention -- that was one of the lessons project partners learned while working to remove obstacles from a side channel of the Royal River. The project moved 30 granite blocks, some more than 4 feet long and 2 feet wide, that had likely formed a dam and bridge across a side channel to Yarmouth’s Factory Island, site of the former Forest Paper Company. Using a grip hoist and pulley system positioned between trees, the granite blocks were moved from the channel to rest on ledge out of the water. Work started in July and was completed in September, with funding and assistance from the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership. Project partners working with the Town of Yarmouth included Steve Koenig from Project SHARE, Matt Craig from the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, Jed Wright from the Gulf of Maine Coastal Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Landis Hudson, Maine Rivers executive director, who coordinated the project.

For more than 219 miles, the Royal River and its tributaries flow through 90,000 acres of land in the towns of Auburn, Durham, Gray, New Gloucester, Pownal, North Yarmouth and Yarmouth. The main stem of the river flows from its source in Sabbathday Lake through Yarmouth to its outlet in Casco Bay. As part of the Royal River Restoration Project, the Town of Yarmouth is evaluating options to remove the two Royal River dams that it owns. Both dams block access for sea-run species. The next phase of work will model the section of the river above Yarmouth’s East Elm Street Dam.

Photos, top to bottom:
Thirty granite blocks, remnants of an industrial era, clogged the channel around the Middle Falls section of the Royal River in Yarmouth.

After more than 100 years, the channel of the river flows freely.

Project partners used a grip hoist and pulley system to move the granite out of the channel, here Steve Koenig of Project SHARE adjusts strapping to move a block.
This year was a strong year for alewives; there were record numbers of returning adults at fish passage facilities monitored by DMR (Maine Department of Marine Resources), and the highest state-wide harvest recorded since 1979. At the Brunswick fishway on the Androscoggin River, 165,322 adult alewives were counted, the highest number of alewives ever counted at the facility since it opened in 1982. Similarly, the Lockwood fishlift in Waterville passed 179,343 alewives, also the largest number ever passed at that facility.

The high numbers of returning alewives in 2012 may be due to many different factors, not all of which can be measured or tracked. These can include the ability of the adult fish to successfully make it into a lake or pond and spawn, the survival of the juvenile alewives while they grow in the lake or pond and also during their journey out of the rivers and into coastal waters during the fall, and the survival of these fish in the open ocean.

One of the factors that we can control to help alewife populations is the amount of habitat available for their spawning, and improving passage to these places. Removing dams, installing fishways, and improving passage at undersized culverts all make a big difference. Since most alewives do not return to spawn until they are 4-years-old, we don’t see the effects of habitat changes on the number of returning adults until four years later. In the Androscoggin River basin, the amount of available spawning habitat has changed over time; as the amount decreased in the early- to mid-1980’s, the number of returning adults was also observed to decrease 4-years later. Yet as the amount of habitat increased again in the late 1990’s and stocking efforts increased in the 2000’s, the numbers of returning adults were seen to increase again.

This year was also a very successful year for alewife harvesters state-wide. Nineteen municipalities are allowed to harvest alewives 4-days/week, allowing free passage during the other 3-days for alewives to reach their spawning habitat. Towns may also have another conservation measure to make sure that enough alewives reach their spawning grounds to sustain the population. DMR works very closely with these towns on an annual basis to make sure that the number of returning adults at each harvest location is maintained or increases over time.

In the early 1980’s, the alewife harvest crashed to historic lows. During this time, harvesters were allowed to operate 6-days/week. In 1989, DMR required a 2-day/week closure so that fewer alewives would be taken.
for harvest and more would enter the lakes above the harvest locations and spawn. In 1994, DMR required a 3-day/week closure because the populations were not rebounding as hoped. Combined with other factors, such as fishway improvements, the number of returning adults at the harvest locations, and the amount of harvest, has continued to steadily increase to a 30-year record high in 2012, due in part to these management measures.

Alewife Pond - John R. J. Burrows
Dear Friend of Maine Rivers,

As I write this, my term as Maine River Board President is winding down. I am reminded of Yogi Berra who once said, “the future ain't what it used to be.”

For more than 14 years, I’ve been an active member of the Maine Rivers Board of Directors. I look forward to continuing in that capacity once again as a regular board member. Over the years, my work with Maine Rivers has offered me a strong connection to other river activists in this state. I count many of them as my friends, and our successes have meant a lot to me professionally and personally. My Maine Rivers work has also informed and expanded my capacity to work on river-related projects throughout the state, including efforts to protect the Crooked River and to reopen the St. Croix River to alewives.

I am pleased to report that as an organization Maine Rivers is in good shape, an able and active advocate for the health of Maine’s rivers and streams. I look forward to working with Dan Marra as he makes the transition to be our next President.

Yogi Berra also said: “If the world was perfect, it wouldn’t be.” If the world were perfect, environmental advocates might be doing something different with our lives. But until the day when our rivers flow freely and native fish return in healthy and sustainable numbers, until the day when pollution and remnants of long gone industries do not degrade our rivers, we will continue our work.

Thank you for joining me to support Maine Rivers.

Sincerely,

Nick Bennett

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**CURRENTS**

**Maine Rivers Board of Directors elect Daniel Marra President and Laura Sewall Vice President**

A long time board member of the Kennebec Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited, **Daniel Marra** lives on the Sebasticook River and can frequently be found fishing in, or paddling on, one of Maine’s rivers or streams. A graduate of Colby College and the University of Maine School of Law, Daniel practices law in Waterville.

**Laura Sewall** has worked as a furniture maker, fish farmer, boat captain, researcher, professor, writer, watershed coordinator and conservationist. She earned her doctorate in visual psychology from Brown University and a master’s degree in environmental law from Vermont Law School. Laura is the author of *Sight and Sensibility: The Ecopsychology of Perception*. She lives on the coast of Maine where she serves as the Director of the Bates-Morse Mountain Conservation Area for Bates College.

**Natural History Takes Note of Maine Restoration Efforts!**

**Natural History Magazine** recently featured an article “Restoration of the Alewife: A fish that links marine and freshwater environments is finding allies in Maine” written by **Clinton B. Townsend**, Maine Rivers board member and past president.

“The article wrote itself,” noted its author.

A digital version of the article can be found online at http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/perspectives/262286/restoration-of-the-alewife
The mission of Maine Rivers is to protect, restore and enhance the ecological health of Maine’s river systems. We are a 501©(3) organization, gifts are tax-deductible.

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