Celebrate spring with an alewife adventure!

Maine’s annual spring alewife migration is inspiring. We created a map to help you find locations to witness this natural wonder.

We recommend using a mapping program like Google Maps, with the local information included here. In many instances you can see a fish ladder or dam in Google Maps, satellite view.

Alewives are anadromous (sea-run) fish that spend the majority of their lives at sea but return to freshwater to spawn. Alewives (also known as river herring) are guided by their sense of smell to migrate upstream from the ocean to rivers, streams, ponds and lakes to spawn. Runs generally occur between May 15 to June 15 depending on water temps and river flows.

Pilgrims were taught by Native Americans to put a fish in the ground as fertilizer when planting corn. Those fish were very likely alewives. Back then nearly every stream would have been swarming with alewives just as the planting season arrived. When dams were built to power the industrial revolution alewife runs were decimated. Today because of many substantial efforts to remove dams and install fish ladders, alewives are returning to Maine rivers by the millions. Rebounding numbers of alewives mean more food for the creatures that eat them—striped bass, bluefish, tuna, cod, haddock, halibut, American eel, rainbow trout, brown trout, landlocked salmon, smallmouth bass, pickerel, pike, white and yellow perch, seabirds, bald eagles, osprey, great blue heron, cormorants, seals, whales, otter, mink, fox, raccoon, fisher, and turtles.

A single female alewife can lay 60,000-100,000 eggs, but as few as three may survive to adulthood. Adults make their way back to the ocean after spawning, and many return the following spring to spawn again.

Commercial harvesting rights are held by towns where there are sustainable runs of alewives. The harvest can generate substantial income for a town, and it is often used for the maintenance of fishways and dams.

Harvested alewives are sold for lobster bait. To get a permit the town must show that a run is sustainable by doing annual fish counts and taking scale samples to age fish. If a site has a harvest the word harvest, is listed here as with the day and time.

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Alewives and shad can’t make their way past the first dam in the Mousam River. The best viewing is from the opposite side of the river but you will still be well above the dam.

**Presumpscot River**

Mill Brook, Highland Brook, and Webber Pond Waterfalls are a must-see. The Presumpscot Regional Land Trust’s Mill Brook Preserve provides a trail system along Mill Brook stream, where alewives migrate upstream to Highland Brook. It is difficult to see alewives underwater so use polarized sun glasses and search for places like riffles that concentrate the fish. Viewing is possible from bridge on Duck Pond Road. The best spots are two pools in Mill Brook labeled on the map at https://www.prlt.org/mill-brook-preserve.

**Sebasticook River**

Located on the Brunswick Dam, a large hydropower dam located behind Fort Androscoggin, the Brunswick Dam fishway has a see-through panel allowing visitors to watch the fish pass over the dam before they are trucked upstream to reproduce. It normally opens May 1st until early June. Wednesday-Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Cobossecontesquete Stream**

Pleasant Pond Gardner

This migration block is located by a small, privately owned fish ladder about a mile upstream of where the stream flows into the Presumpscot. There are often opportunities to view the alewives just below the dam, using the trail on the Hanson Avenue side of the stream. The Maine Department of Marine Resources has trucked alewives from other locations to Pleasant Pond above the dam and a small run does return to the base of the dam each year. Before dams, this stream hosted about 175 weirs and rock pools that enable fish to pass over the dam. Visitors can stay left on Mill Creek Road to the boat ramp.

**Seven Mile Brook**

Webber Pond Vassalboro

Alewives have had access to Webber Pond since the removal of Edwards Dam and the construction of a fish ladder at the Webber Pond Dam. This is a great place to see a medium size run and has good access. There is a boat ramp and a parking lot at the dam where visitors can watch the alewives ascend the ladder into the pond. Take Route 301 north from Augusta to Webber Pond. Turn right and follow Webber Pond Road to Dam Road and the dam. The harvest typically is Sunday through Wednesday in the mornings.

**Sebasticook River**

Sebasticook Lake

Sebasticook Lake Dam

The historic fish ladder along this river has been restored and provides fantastic spots to watch this large alewife run. In 2018 the escapement of alewives into Damariscotta Lake was over 1 million fish. The website https://damariscottamills.org/ has good background information about alewives, the fish ladder restoration, great photographs, and good directions to the site. The Ladder Restoration Festival typically takes place late in May. Damariscotta Lake Dam has a fishway where the alewives can be viewed. To get there if you are heading north on Route 1 take the Damariscotta exit to business Route 105 straight at the way stop just past the Congregational Church. Take Route 219 north for approximately 16 miles. Look for a parking area just past the Austin Road on the left. Or, take the next left into the Fish House parking lot. From this house, follow the path behind the building the harvesting area is ahead on the left and the fish ladder makes a right turn. The harvest takes place twice daily Monday through Friday, once at 5:00 AM and again at 10:00 AM.

**Sebasticook River**

Sebasticook Lake

Sebasticook River Dam

The Orland River hosts a large run of alewives that meet their first barrier at the head of tide near Orland. The run is harvested Monday through Thursday using a weir and pulley system. From Route 1 take Route 175 towards Castine Road towards Orland and cross the bridge to the west side of the Orland river. Take the first right immediately after the bridge onto a dirt road. Continue up the dirt road to the dam. Walk down the dirt road to the harvest area. Please use caution around the harvest trucks and equipment if a harvest is in progress. The fish ladder on the east side of the river is not accessible.

**Blackman Stream**

Chemo Pond at the Maine Forest and Logging Museum

Brayley

The Maine Forest and Logging Museum collaborated with the Atlantic Salmon Federation to install a fish ladder at the original Leonard’s Dam site. There are 17 weirs and rock pools that enable fish to pass over the dam. Visitors can view the fishway from the logging museum property. There is a small admission fee for anyone over 12. See www.maineforestandloggingmuseum.org/fish-restoration-fish-ladder-for-directors.

**Penobscot River**

Pushaw Stream

Pushaw Lake

Old Town

This large run of alewives migrates up the Penobscot River past Bangor and Onono to Pushaw Stream and Pushaw Lake. Fish congregate at the fishway on the north side of the dam that sets the lake level at the end of the stream. The site is about 0.5 miles from the I-95 exit at Vassalboro Ave in Onono, main campus of the University of Maine. From the I-95 exit go to Vassalboro Road then turn left onto Kirkland Rd, then left onto the Maine Turnpike 2, at then at 301 (Maine Turnpike 2) then at I-95/196 the Maine Turnpike 2.

Landing turn right on Woodland Ave, then right on Lakeside Lane, then right on Beechwood Ave. Stay on Beechwood until Driftwood Lane on the left and the host for 200 years. The river is now 1 mile wide and is an un-marked dirt road on the right that leads to the dam. The dam is about 0.5 miles from Beechwood. A 4-wheel drive, high clearance vehicle may be required to traverse this road or you can easily walk to the dam. The dam and fishway are visible on Google map, satellite view.

**Somes Stream**

Somes Pond

Somerset (Mt Desert Island)

Alewives travel out of Somes Harbor and into Somes Pond also called Somesville Hill Pond in Mount Desert. A newly constructed version of the fishways on the stream, alewives can now again be seen traveling into the pond. Parking is located at the Historical Society Museum, where there is an interpretive sign explaining the fish ladders. FHMI: www.downeastfisheriestrail.org/sites/somesville-mill-pond/

**East Machias River**

Gardiner Lake

East Machias

Alewives travel out of Machias Bay into the river to the dam at the outlet of Gardiner Lake. The dam has a fishway where the alewives can be viewed. There is also a unique harvest here. The fishway also leads next to a small hatchery. Since the fishway doesn’t have a pen, nets are strung out around the beach to trap the alewives and once enough are encased, the nets are pulled to the beach. From Highway 1 take Chase Mills Road past Machias Lake. A boat ramp and parking lot is located just past this dam. This is a medium size run.

**Bagaduce River**

Mill Brook, Pierce Pond

Penobscot

Pierce Pond, 12 acres, hosts a small run of alewives that run the Bagaduce River from Penobscot Bay. A newly constructed, natural looking fishway is adjacent to a small parking area and a boat ramp. Penobscot is a small town just north of Castle. From Route 1 take Route 175 through Orland and south towards Castine. Stay on 175 towards Penobscot, turn left on Pierce Pond Road and then stay left on Mill Creek Road to the boat ramp.

**Bagaduce River**

Black Brook, Walker Pond

Brooksville

Walker Pond, just south of Pierce Pond, hosts a small run of alewives that run up Black Brook from the Bagaduce River. The site has a weir and pulley system. FMI: www.maineforestandloggingmuseum.org/fish-restoration-fish-ladder-for-directors.

**Mills**

Mills is located a few miles north of the town of Damariscotta. To get there if you are heading north on Route 1 take the Damariscotta exit to business Route 105 straight at the way stop just past the Congregational Church. Take Route 219 north for approximately 16 miles. Look for a parking area just past the Austin Road on the left. Or, take the next left into the Fish House parking lot. From this house, follow the path behind the building the harvesting area is ahead on the left and the fish ladder makes a right turn. The harvest takes place twice daily Monday through Friday, once at 5:00 AM and again at 10:00 AM.

**Bristol Mills Fishway**

Bristol

In the town park off Route 175 near Bristol Dam Loop.

**Damariscotta River**

Damariscotta Lake

Damariscotta Mills

The Historic, fish ladder along this river has been restored and provides fantastic spots to watch this large alewife run. In 2018 the escapement of alewives into Damariscotta Lake was over 1 million fish. The website https://damariscottamills.org/ has good background information about alewives, the fish ladder restoration, great photographs, and good directions to the site. The Ladder Restoration Festival typically takes late in May. Damariscotta Lake Dam has a fishway where the alewives can be viewed. To get there if you are heading north on Route 1 take the Damariscotta exit to business Route 105 straight at the way stop just past the Congregational Church. Take Route 219 north for approximately 16 miles. Look for a parking area just past the Austin Road on the left. Or, take the next left into the Fish House parking lot. From this house, follow the path behind the building the harvesting area is ahead on the left and the fish ladder makes a right turn. The harvest takes place twice daily Monday through Friday, once at 5:00 AM and again at 10:00 AM.

**Sebasticook River**

Sebasticook Lake

Sebasticook Falls

Androscoggin River

Pattee Pond

Benton

A small run of alewives ascends to Pattee Pond to spawn. The pond and brook are natural and have no dams or permanent fishways. Alewives can be observed near where the brook enters the Sebasticook River and goes under Garland Road. The concrete foundation of the bridge creates a small waterfall that the alewives cannot pass so high school students install wooden fish ladders each May. For directions see the next entry. Continue down Falls Road to where Pattee Pond Brook is. There is a small turn for parking.

**Sebasticook River**

Sebasticook Lake

Sebasticook Falls

The Sebasticook lake run is Maine’s largest. The fish ladder at the Benton Falls hydroelectric dam lets fish reach Sebasticook Lake and other ponds north of the dam. A commercial harvest at the dam typically occurs every day of the week after 250,000 have passed through the fishway. Alewives congregate in large numbers below the dam but the public cannot descend to the river from the dam access off Clinton Ave (Route 101) downstream from the Route 19 bridge. The best viewing is from the opposite side of the road but you will still be well above the river. From the Clinton Ave access use the RT 19 bridge to cross the river, turn right onto Falls Road and then right onto Brimstone Hill Road where harvesters access the river. Bring binoculars to observe the harvest and eagles but stay clear of heavy equipment and trucks.

**Sebasticook River**

Sebasticook Lake

Sebasticook Falls

This is a large run with great viewing. At the Sebasticook Dam, a fish ladder provides easy access to this large lake. A small parking lot on North Street next to the ladder provides convenient viewing of the alewives ascending the ladder and moving into the lake. Fish congregate by the thousands below the dam as they await their turn to go up the fish ladder.

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