

# Alewife Harvesters of Maine



“Conserving to preserve Maine’s heritage”

Dear Shad and River Herring Management Board Commissioners and Members,

Thank you for reading this letter submitted to you from the Alewife Harvesters of Maine. We write to you today to express our enthusiasm for the advances in river herring restoration work, research, and organization of individuals, entities and communities around this keystone species, both in terms of ecosystems, but also socio-economic systems. We have seen glimpses of collaborative management, where state agencies work with communities and individuals that exist at the same scale as the runs of fish that we harvest and manage. Federal managers like Jon Hare have shown support for this collaborative effort in research and management of a species that does not know state or Federal boundaries.

The fastest and best results have occurred where these collaborative approaches have been implemented and we would ask that you continue this momentum towards a collaborative approach to understanding and managing river herring. Further, as you work through a benchmark stock assessment designed to inform you on the health of the run and to plan the upcoming year’s priorities and strategies, please consider the volume of biological data collected by fishermen and citizen scientists. As you take this important step as fishery managers, we ask you to see beyond spawning ratios, age structure, and z-estimates, and we ask you to make decisions also based on metrics like:

- “What (and who) ensures the most fish come back next year”
- “Who is collecting the data we need to manage these fish?” and “what data gaps will appear if citizen scientists stop collecting biological data?”
- “How do we not lose more fish”
- “Who has the capacity (physically and in experience and local knowledge) to best do this work?” and what is the incentive to do this work?

Consider that we are having to rethink the way we manage fisheries and natural resources in this country, and time and time again, we find that the best solution is the one that is built on the most trust and that brings the most diverse and numerous capacities to bear on the problems we face.

The government is responsible for managing river herring and other fish species, but the ones that are the most connected to these fish, are the communities and fishermen that are socially, ecologically, economically, and culturally connected to them. These groups have the most knowledge and capacity to steward these fish that return to our communities every year.

When evaluating metrics for local and small scale Commercial fisheries, decisions are based on data obtained through harvest records, volunteer collected manual counts, scale samples, otoliths, and other traditional metrics that fishery managers use. It is just as important to consider what keeps individuals and communities spending hundreds of hours each year maintaining water levels, keeping brooks seasonally open to passage through countless beaver dams. What keeps them prioritizing their time spent towards counting fish and collecting biological samples, and attending meetings, and working together to support and fund restoration projects?

In Maine and other states with coastal communities that are culturally connected to river herring, harvests are sometimes the answer to that question "why?" Harvest, or the potential to harvest these fish might be that connection and reason for stewardship, and in some cases, it may be far more important than a percent probability of reaching a theoretical point on a statistical curve.

In closing, we thank you for the part you have played in this forward momentum in river herring management and restoration, and ask that you continue to prioritize a collaborative approach to management, and that you incentivize this connection and local stewardship, using the tools at your disposal.

We intend to work through our Maine Department of Marine Resources Commissioner's office and through the technical committee to propose more detailed policies and metrics for harvest that acknowledge sustainability goals, and that also incentivize the local work that keeps managers informed and that makes more fish.

Thank you for reading this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeffrey Pierce', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jeffrey Pierce

Alewife Harvesters of Maine