

Town River Fisheries Committee

2018 Annual Report

The joint Town River Fishery Committee (TRFC) was established in 1994 by the towns of West Bridgewater and Bridgewater in order to protect and restore the diadromous river herring population which is a historic natural resource of the Town River. Whereas the Town River is a major tributary to the Taunton River, the formation of the TRFC facilitates the stated goals of the local *Open Space and Recreation Plans* and the *Wild and Scenic Taunton River Stewardship Council*. The TRFC is a sub-department of Parks and Recreation in the Town of Bridgewater and is under the Department of Conservation, Preservation and Recreation in the Town of West Bridgewater.

By statute, the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is responsible for securing the safe and efficient passage of diadromous fish such as river herring. The DMF works cooperatively with communities in the discharge of their stewardship of this fishery. The DMF offers legal, technical, and substantive support to the fishery committees of these communities in order to achieve the goal of maintaining this fishery. In 2006, the National Marine Fisheries Service designated both Alewives and Blueback herring as species of special concern. Subsequently, DMF banned the harvest and possession of river herring until further notice and established the *Diadromous Fish Project* to facilitate the recovery of this fishery.

In compliance with the DMF's *Operations and Management Plan for Herring in the Town River*, the TRFC continues to oversee the operation, maintenance, and repair of the fishways at both the Bridgewater High Street Iron Works and the West Bridgewater War Memorial Park sites on an annual basis. During the spring run, a fish counter is installed and maintained at the High Street Iron Works fish ladder. Water levels at both locations are monitored and measured throughout the year to insure the unobstructed upstream passage of adult herring in the spring and downstream passage of juvenile herring in the fall. In addition, with authorization of the respective Conservation Commissions of both towns, potential obstructions to fish passage in the river itself are monitored and removed as warranted.

The TRFC is pleased to report that the fish counter recorded the upriver passage of 10,039 herring at the High Street Iron Works site during the spring run of 2018. This represented a slight but significant decrease of 411 (-4%) over the previous year. The unseasonably cold weather during the spring months may have contributed to the slight decrease.

Due to the general deterioration of the aging Iron Works dam and fishway, the DMF and the TRFC, in cooperation with the dam's owner, solicited the Nature Conservatory to undertake a comprehensive impact study of the current status of the dam and to recommend viable options to correct deficiencies. The study was completed and a hearing was held to discuss its findings.

Respectively Submitted, Rick Benton, Secretary Hank Estabrook, Chairman

TRFC members: Rick Benton (BW), Skip Copeland (BW), John Cruz (WBW), Hank Estabrook (BW), Bob Hanson (BW), Don MacDonald (WBW), Jim Sniger (WBW), Jim Souza (WBW).