



Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

American Shad *Alosa sapidissima*

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The American Shad is the largest member of the herring family found in Massachusetts waters, commonly reaching a length of 1.5 to 2 feet or more. It has more gill rakers (59-75) than all of the other herrings except the Gizzard Shad. The species is anadromous, ascending several coastal rivers to spawn, and often moves long distances up major rivers such as the Connecticut and Merrimack. After spawning, adult American Shad migrate back to marine environments. The young form large schools and feed in the river until they grow to about four inches, then migrate to the sea. Adult American Shad eat a wide variety of zooplankton, shrimp, and small fishes. In freshwater, the adults eat little and only occasionally feed on small prey. The young-of-the-year feed on small midwater copepods, ostracods, and insects. American Shad first spawn at the age of four or five years, and adults may live to 10 years of age.

Connecticut, Blackstone, and Charles rivers. Since the mid-1950s, with new or improved fishways and fish lifts, shad numbers have increased dramatically, especially in the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers.

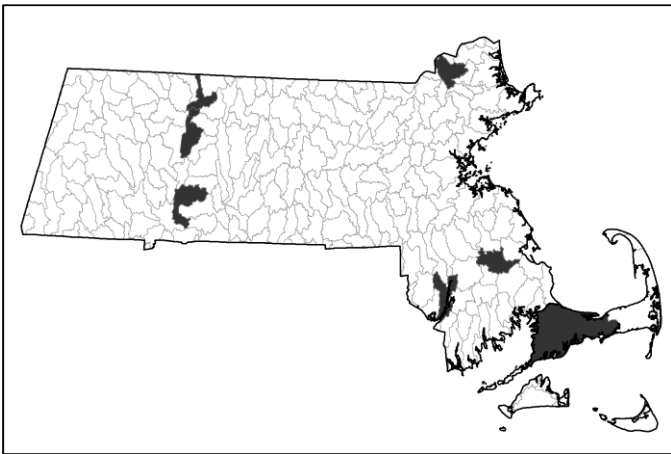
HABITAT DESCRIPTION: American Shad spawn in a variety of lotic aquatic environments connected to the ocean.

THREATS: Dams, inadequate or poorly maintained fishways, and pollution are all threats to the continued health of this commercially and recreationally valuable fish.

REFERENCE:

This species description was adapted, with permission, from:

Karsten E. Hartel, David B. Halliwell, and Alan E. Launer.
2002. *Inland Fishes of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.



Data from DFW Fisheries Surveys and Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: Historically in Massachusetts, the American Shad entered most coastal streams. Damming, dredging, pollution, and other alterations of Massachusetts waters caused large declines in the mid-1800s, when American Shad were eliminated from the Massachusetts portions of the

Updated 2015

A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

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