



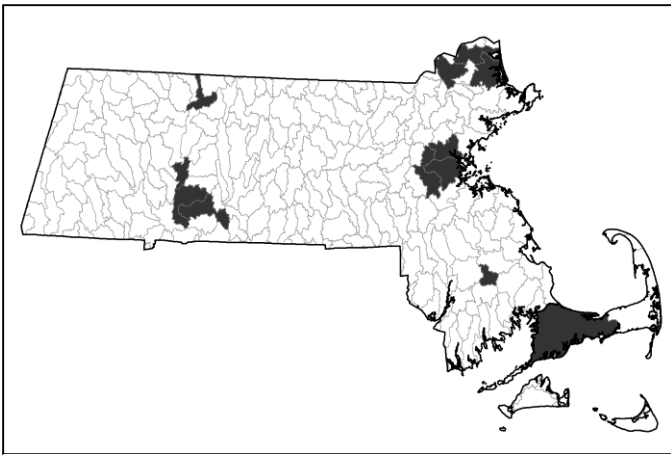
Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

Blueback Herring *Alosa aestivalis*

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

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Blueback Herring is a member of the herring family, similar in appearance to the Alewife, but the diameter of the Blueback's eye is less than or equal to the length of the snout, and the peritoneal lining of the body cavity is dusky-gray to black. The Blueback Herring's back and upper sides tend to be a bluish color. Adults are usually 10 to 12 inches in length. Young-of-the-year are generally less than 3 inches long while in freshwater. Blueback Herring are anadromous, spawning in swift-flowing sections of rivers and streams with gravel or rocky bottoms. The adults migrate back to salt water after spawning. The young form large schools and slowly work their way downstream to the sea. In freshwater, young Bluebacks eat copepods and some cladocerans. In marine waters, adults feed on a variety of marine invertebrates, including pelagic shrimp. Their first spawning migration occurs at 2 to 4 years of age, and the fish frequently live to eight years.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: Blueback Herring are common in Massachusetts and enter numerous coastal streams and the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers. Since they were often confused with Alewives, little information is available regarding their historical abundance.



Data from DFW Fisheries Surveys and Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Blueback Herring spawn in a wide range of lotic environments connected to the ocean.

THREATS: Like other river herrings, Blueback Herring populations have been reduced or eliminated in some areas by damming and pollution. The factors that have caused an apparent decline in this species are unknown, but may involve over-fishing. Further research and monitoring are required.

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

Updated 2015

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

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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