

NOTES ON RIVER HERRING STATUS

by

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I. The river herring fishery is one of the oldest in North America - Native Americans established fishing camps along banks of streams with river herring runs long before the coming of Europeans. Early European settlements often depended on these runs to provide an abundance of fresh food after a long winter.

II. In the Chesapeake Bay and adjacent regions, these stocks consisting of two species of fish, alewife and blueback, supported a U.S. fishery which consistently harvested these stocks at close to the estimated MSY of 25000 metric tons. In 1967 distant water fleets entered this fishery, primarily the USSR, and catch rose in 1969 to 35000 tons. Following this the abundance declined precipitously. USA catches which occur generally on the spawning runs have dropped to about 8000 tons in 1975. Distant water fleet catches however continued to be 25-40% of the catch between 1970 and 1974. This has resulted in fishing morality being kept at a level high enough to impede stock recovery and reduce the fish available to be harvested by US fishermen which had been capable of utilizing close to 25000 tons.

III. Research studies by the states of Virginia and North Carolina on the spawning runs have observed a precipitous decline in the streams. National Marine Fisheries Service fall trawl surveys in the offshore areas show the same drastic reduction in stocks.

IV. River herring mature at 4 years of age and the spawning runs consists of fish aged 4, 5 and 6. Therefore once the spawning stock has been rebuilt the fishery will require an additional 4-6 years before one could expect to harvest at MSY levels.

V. The US through Bilateral Agreements has sought to protect river herring. Romania agreed to limit her catch to 1/3 of 200 tons. (66 tons).

Yet Romania reported a 1974 catch of 252 tons of river herring to ICNAF.

VI. In addition, on Mar. 24, 1974 the Romanian trawler INAU seized for violation of the US CFZ had 20 tons of river herring and 20 tons of mackerel, out of a total of 41 tons on board.

VII. The changes proposed by the US of tighter incidental catch regulations and additional area closures are intended to give greater protection to river herring.