



THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER of the **MAINE** LOBSTERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Better Informed, Better Decisions

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Let the alewives swim free!

By MELISSA WATERMAN

In April, the Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, Earthjustice and several individuals, including Penobscot East Resource Center co-founder Ted Ames, Doug Watts, and Kathleen McGee, filed suit in U.S. District Court against the commissioners of the Maine Department of Marine Resources and the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife on behalf of the alewives and



Local fishermen capture alewives below one of the dams that blocks their spring passage. Photo from Friends of Merrymeeting Bay.

blueback herring of the St. Croix River (collectively, known as river herring). The basis of the suit is a 2008 Maine law which prevented the fish from traveling to their spawning areas in the upper St. Croix that the plaintiffs argue is preempted by and illegal under the Clean Water Act, according to attorneys Roger Fleming of Earthjustice and David Nicholas.

"What the Maine legislature did in 2008 in response to a few shrill voices is absolutely unconscionable as well as in total violation of the Clean Water Act," said Ed Friedman, chairman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay. "Neither the other fish species dependant on river herring nor the endangered Gulf of Maine ground-fishing industry can afford the continued collapse of St. Croix alewives. We need healthy rivers to maintain a healthy Gulf and alewives make that connection." The basis of the suit is that Maine's 2008 law created a degradation of the St. Croix River's water quality. Under the Clean Water Act, a river is considered degraded if the use of the river is compromised (generally because of negative changes in

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Herring, pogies and alewives, oh my

By SARAH PAQUETTE

With last year's lack of herring still fresh in everyone's mind, it's hard to be cheerful about the bait outlook for the upcoming season. "I try to be an optimist, but this industry beats you down," said Wyatt Anderson, manager of O'Hara Corporation's bait division in Rockland.



Fresh herring is a prized bait in the early summer for Maine lobstermen. Photo from O'Hara Corporation.

To compensate for the poor showing of herring last year, O'Hara Corporation began using hard bait and

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Women in the lobster industry

By MARY LYONS

A wave of change has been slowly making its way through the lobster industry. At first glance, it's still a man's world comprised of men hauling their traps day after day. But you don't have to look far to see that women now play a significant role in Maine's most valuable fishery.

According to Maine Lobstermen's Association executive director Patrice McCarron there are simply a lot more women in the business now than there were ten years ago. When she was recruited from the New England Aquarium to become MLA associate director in 2000, people remembered her because she was one of only "girls" at any meeting.

McCarron says there's been "quite a nice transition, having women in

those organizing roles which didn't exist before, in associations like the Downeast Lobstermen's Association or nonprofits like the Island Institute."

Asked if she faced any challenges specifically related to being a female in the lobster industry, she replies, "Honestly, my experience is not one of discrimination at all. From the get go, the fishermen I worked with knew I worked hard and would do what I said. They worked hard themselves so there was a mutual respect between us. I never felt like I didn't belong, it always felt like a really great fit."

Some women in the industry agree with McCarron that gender is a non-issue; some say it's an issue that is overcome with time, gaining respect through hard



Patrice McCarron, MLA Executive Director, has seen an increase in the number of women involved in the Maine lobster industry during her ten years with the organization. Photo by Mike Young.

work and staying power.

Jennie Bichrest, Maine Fishermen's Forum board member and owner of Purse Line Bait in Sebasco Estates, re-

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water chemistry). However, the law considers a river degraded if a pre-existing use disappears. Since the passage of migratory alewives was a pre-existing use, closing the river to alewives was a reduction of water quality under the law, the suit argues. Reduction of water quality is allowed under the Clean Water Act, but only after a Use Attainability Analysis has been conducted and approved by the Environmental Protection Agency. Such an analysis has never been done by the state of Maine.

The St. Croix River is shared by the United States and Canada and jointly managed through the International Joint Commission (IJC). In 1995, however, the Maine legislature passed a law prohibiting the passage of spawning alewives to their native habitat in the St. Croix River watershed above the Woodland Dam near the river's head of tide. In 2008, the legislature amended this 1995 law to allow alewife passage at the Woodland Dam but continued prohibiting alewives from migrating past the Grand Falls Dam, effectively removing them from their traditional spawning grounds in order to protect the smallmouth bass population, a non-native fishery economically important to local guides and sportsmen. Since then, the St. Croix River alewife populations have diminished, from a high of 2.6 million fish in 1987.

The IJC published a plan in 2010 to improve the chances of alewives making it to their spawning grounds. Dams would be removed at two locations chosen to avoid affecting prime fishing areas for smallmouth bass. The number of migratory alewives passing by would be tied to the population of smallmouth bass. If smallmouth bass numbers drop, then alewife numbers would be held in check or decreased. Governor Baldacci supported this compromise plan, as did the Maine Lobstermen's Association.

Researchers keeping track of migrating alewives in 2010 noted an increase in numbers that year. The total of 58,776 counted last spring exceeded all the fish counted during the previous eight years, combined. The sudden increase in St. Croix alewife numbers was thought to be due to fish returning to spawn for the second, third or fourth time in the river above the Woodland Dam.

"Alewives and river herring are vital cogs in the wheel of the Atlantic Ocean ecosystem," said Ted Ames. "These fish played a critical role as forage for nearshore populations of cod and other commercially valuable groundfish. We must find ways to restore and protect them."

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now has over a million pounds in stock for this year. O'Hara's inventory is like a tour of the globe. The company carries redfish from Canada and Iceland, sole from British Columbia, Asian carp from the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, Pacific hake and other species. The company also carries frozen and fresh pogies, though Anderson doesn't think he will see fresh pogies until June with the cold spring thus far.

Jennie Bichrest, manager of Purse Line Bait in Sebasco Estates, says her customers actually prefer pogies. "That's how I started," she said. "I sell more pogies than herring." Last year, Bichrest built a new 50 x 100 foot freezer to hold more hard bait. "I've sold hard bait since beginning in 1996," said Bichrest. "It's been pretty much the same since then because of availability." She is planning a trip to the west coast soon to see if she can obtain different types of hard bait.

Bait Man Co., LLC, a subsidiary of Live Lobster Company of Chelsea, Massachusetts, is also expanding into the former Stinson/Bumble Bee's sardine plant in Prospect Harbor. Live Lobster recently purchased the plant to open a lobster processing operation which will be run as Lobster Web Co., LLC, another subsidiary of Live Lobster. Bait manager Al West said he has an inventory of frozen bait for the season and plans to become a major sup-

plier of bait for downeast Maine with new cooler space at the facility. He hopes to have the coolers up and running by early June, but also has freezer space off-site. West said they will run a smack from Gouldsboro to Jonesport to provide bait and fuel to numerous small harbors and fishermen. In addition to the newest location, Bait Man Co. LLC will also have a variety of baits available in Stonington, Rockland and Phippsburg.

Last year, lobstermen reported seeing lots of small herring and a scarcity of big fish in the bait brought in by seiners. Danny Fill, a purse seiner from Sedgwick, explained, "There were big fish out there, but they were way out then they dispersed before they could be caught." When asked how he thought this year might bring, he responded, "There are big fish out there, it's just a matter of catching them." He went on to say that the stock for this year looks good, especially off Georges Bank. "I think this year will be better than last year," he said. "And if it's not, I probably won't be going out again after this year." Whatever the season brings, there will be bait, whether frozen or from Canada. "But it will be there," he said.

At the Atlantic States Marine Fishing Commission (ASMFC) Herring Days Out meeting, held in May in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, man-

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