



PHOTO: FIELD AND STREAM

AMERICAN SHAD

A CELEBRATED SPECIES OF THE ATLANTIC COAST

American shad populations are in serious decline along the Atlantic Coast. By restoring American shad we can protect rivers and coastal ecosystems where shad provide a crucial source of food to other wildlife including striped bass, bluefish, shorebirds, and marine mammals. At the same time, we can revive a favorite sport fish and a prized delicacy.

HISTORIC TREND

50,000,000

Pounds of coast-wide commercial catch in 1896

American shad spawned in virtually every coastal river and tributary along the Atlantic Coast.

That Was Then.



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Shad's historic, cultural, and economic significance earned it the nickname the "Founding Fish." Shad supported one of the most important commercial and recreational fisheries in North America and contributed to the local economy of East Coast river towns. George Washington was a commercial shad fisherman, and during the American Revolutionary War, shad was an important food for the Continental Army.

RECENT TREND

540,000

Pounds of coast-wide commercial catch in 2005

American shad populations are at an all-time low and do not appear to be recovering.

This Is Now.



PHOTO: DELAWARE RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

East Coast states will be required to ban all commercial and recreational American shad fishing in state waters by January 2013 unless they can prove fishing is being done sustainably. Overfishing, pollution, and habitat loss have been identified as the primary causes for the shad's decline. A modern threat—the unintended at sea catch of shad—remains unaddressed and unregulated.

Declining Commercial Catch of American Shad ●— American Shad



www.HerringAlliance.org

The Herring Alliance is a growing coalition working to protect and restore ocean wildlife and ecosystems along the U.S. Atlantic Coast through precautionary and science-based management of herring, mackerel, and other forage fish.

What's the Catch? Spotlight on the Hudson River.



PHOTO: CLAY EMERSON

Fish Facts

AMERICAN SHAD

Alosa sapidissima (meaning most delicious): Largest of the herrings

Life Cycle

Shad begin their lives in rivers and coastal waters. As juveniles they move offshore to ocean waters. Once mature, they retrace their route to spawn in their home rivers.

Maximum Weight

12 pounds

Maximum Size

30 inches

4 to 6 years

Spawning Season

January to June

Eggs Per Year

100,000 to 600,000

Range

Southern coast of Newfoundland to St. Johns River, Florida

Diet

Plankton, shrimp, and small fishes

Predators

Seals, porpoises and other marine mammals, other fishes, tuna, sharks, king mackerel, bluefish, striped bass, surgeon, and birds

Although habitat and water quality have improved in the Hudson River, the American Shad population continues to decline, exemplifying an East Coast trend. Signs point to ocean catch as a reason. The Hudson River once supported one of the most robust shad populations and fisheries in North America. But today, commercial and recreational fishing for shad is closed in the Hudson River as well as all the marine and coastal waters of New York.

Historic Threats

Habitat Loss: In the Hudson River, destruction of habitat occurred from the late 1800s through the mid 1900s from dredging and filling. However, major habitat alteration has not occurred over the past 50 years.

Pollution: Poor water quality in rivers has contributed to the historic decline in shad. However, the recent decline in shad populations has occurred despite improved water quality in the Hudson River.

Modern Threat

Accidental Catch in the Ocean: Although targeted commercial fishing for shad in state ocean waters closed in 2005, industrial boats that fish for Atlantic herring, mackerel, and squid continue to incidentally catch shad. Up to 165 feet long, these are the largest fishing vessels on the East Coast, with football field-sized nets. These fishing operations are poorly monitored, and the total recorded incidental catch of American shad in ocean waters averaged more than 115,000 pounds per year since 2005.

Coastwide, American shad stocks have fallen substantially from historic levels. Between 1998 and 2007, only two East Coast rivers showed an increase in population.

Population

Key: ↓ Declining → Low ↑ Some Rebounding

River	State	Historic Trend	Recent Trend
Merrymeeting Bay	ME	↓	↓
Exeter River	NH	↓	↓
Pawcatuck	RI	↓	↓
Hudson	NY	↓	↓
Susquehanna River and Flats	PA, MD	↓	↓
James	VA	↓	↓
Edisto	SC	↓	↓
Altamaha	GA	↓	↓
Merrimack	MA	↓	→
Connecticut	CT, MA	↓	→
Delaware River and Bay	MD, PA, NJ, DE	↓	→
Nanticock	MD	↓	→
Rappahannock	VA	↓	→
Albermarle Sound	NC	↓	→
Roanoke	NC	↓	→
Winyah Bay	SC	↓	→
Cooper	SC	↓	→
Savannah	SC, GA	↓	→
St. Johns	FL	↓	→
Potomac	MD, Washington DC, VA	↓	↑
York	VA	↓	↑

Steps Toward Recovery

Restoration of this founding fish will require an integrated approach to reduce mortality on all life stages as quickly as possible by implementing protections for shad in their freshwater and ocean habitats. The Herring Alliance recommends the following steps to protect shad in the ocean:

- Increase monitoring of commercial Atlantic herring mackerel, and squid fisheries in order to identify, quantify, and characterize American shad catch.
- Federally-managed limits on total catch and reduce the annual amount caught at sea.
- Include American shad as a non-target stock in the fishery as a species that is in need of conservation and management



www.HerringAlliance.org

Take Action

GET INVOLVED at www.HerringAlliance.org/takeaction. **SIGN UP** for our email newsletter to get the latest campaign updates. **CONTACT** the Herring Alliance with any questions or ideas at 617-728-0300 or info@herringalliance.org.