

Town River Fisheries Committee

2022 Annual Report

The joint Town River Fisheries Committee (TRFC) was established in 1994 by the towns of West Bridgewater and Bridgewater in order to protect and restore the diadromous river herring population which is a historic natural resource of the Town River. Whereas the Town River is a major tributary to the Taunton River, the formation of the TRFC facilitates the stated goals of the local *Open Space and Recreation Plans* and the *Wild and Scenic Taunton River Stewardship Council*. The TRFC is a sub-department of Parks and Recreation in the Town of Bridgewater and is under the Department of Conservation, Preservation and Recreation in the Town of West Bridgewater.

By statute, the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is responsible for securing the safe and efficient passage of diadromous fish such as river herring. The DMF works cooperatively with communities in the discharge of their stewardship of this fishery. The DMF offers legal, technical, and substantive support to the fishery committees of these communities in order to achieve the goal of maintaining this fishery. In 2006, the National Marine Fisheries Service designated both Alewives and Blueback herring as species of special concern. Subsequently, DMF banned the harvest and possession of river herring until further notice and established the *Diadromous Fish Project* to facilitate the recovery of this fishery.

In compliance with the DMF's *Fishway Operations and Management Plans* issued in 2019, the TRFC continues to oversee the operation, maintenance, and repair of the fishways at both the Bridgewater High Street Iron Works and the West Bridgewater War Memorial Park dams on an annual basis. Water levels at both sites were monitored and measured throughout the year to insure the unobstructed passage of adult herring upstream in the spring and downstream passage of juvenile herring in the fall. In addition, with authorization of the respective Conservation Commissions of both towns, potential obstructions to fish passage in the river itself were monitored. During the 2022 spring run, an electric fish counter was installed and maintained at the High Street Iron Works fish ladder.

During the 2022 spring herring run period from 25 March to 20 May, the fish counter recorded a discouraging upriver passage count of 4510. This represented a decrease of 108% over the previous year's count of 9377 and a 74% decrease over the running five year running average of 7854. Given that river herring are thought to reach sexual maturity at three to four years of age, this year's lower count may be attributed to a smaller than average return to the ocean of juvenile herring during the fall of a previous year.

The TRFC was represented at the Massachusetts River Herring Network annual meeting and the Bridgewater Parks and Trail Meet and Greet. The plans for the removal of the antiquated Bridgewater Iron Works dam and the overdue replacement of the failing High Street Bridge have been approved. The projects are now pending subject to funding.

Respectively Submitted, Rick Benton, Secretary Hank Estabrook, Chairman

TRFC members: Rick Benton (B), Skip Copeland (B), John Cruz (WB), Hank Estabrook (B), Bob Hanson (B), Jim Sniger (WB), Jim Souza (WB).