



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
GREATER ATLANTIC REGIONAL FISHERIES OFFICE
55 Great Republic Drive
Gloucester, MA 01930-2276

APR 21 2015

Senator Linda L. Baker
Chair, Marine Resources Committee
Committee on Marine Resources
c/o Legislative Information
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Representative Walter A. Kumiega III
Chair, Marine Resources Committee
Committee on Marine Resources
c/o Legislative Information
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Chairs Baker and Kumiega:

I am writing to convey our continued support for unfettered access for river herring (i.e., sea-run alewife) in the St. Croix watershed. I have provided four recent letters conveying our record on this issue and the importance of restoring the St. Croix River's run as completely and quickly as possible (attachments 1-4). Alewife, along with other native sea-run fish, are an important prey species for many species of commercially valuable fish in the Gulf of Maine. Given the current status of those fisheries, diversifying the prey base of the Gulf of Maine is a priority goal for our agency. Fully restoring alewife runs throughout the St. Croix watershed, which has the potential to be the largest such run in the Gulf of Maine, would be a substantial step toward that goal.


In addition, my agency has regulatory responsibilities to protect imperiled species. We recently reviewed the status of alewife and blueback herring throughout their range under the Endangered Species Act. In 2011, we were petitioned to list both species as threatened. In August 2013, we concluded that listing river herring as threatened was not warranted, in part because of the recent and ongoing restoration initiatives in Maine. We did, however, recognize that there are significant data gaps for both of these species and uncertainties associated with the available data. In order to address the data gaps and implement proactive conservation efforts throughout the full range of both species, we undertook a significant effort in partnership with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission by establishing a technical expert working group for river herring. This group is comprised of over 80 river herring experts from Canada to South Carolina. We have been actively engaged in the work of the technical expert working group to identify and mitigate threats to both species, develop a conservation plan for river herring, as well as provide continued financial support for many on-the-ground restoration and research projects from Maine to South Carolina.



Since 2013, we (along with partners from the Passamaquoddy Tribe, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, among others) have been particularly active in the St. Croix River. Indeed, the Schoodic River Statement of Cooperation (attachment 5) further affirms our recent and ongoing support for the continued collaboration in the St. Croix River. We are currently supporting ongoing fish tracking studies, river herring counts, and fish passage assessments and restoration led by the Passamaquoddy Tribe. The St. Croix River is vital to the full restoration of this species and thus, we are committed to working with our partners to ensure that they are able to access important spawning habitats in the watershed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John K. Bullard', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

 John K. Bullard
Regional Administrator