

EPA Official Record

Notes ID: 53BABB5D1BE21E9186257A380067EAB6

From: Ralph Abele/R1/USEPA/US

To: Phil Colarusso/R1/USEPA/US@EPA

Delivered Date: 06/28/2012 10:09 AM EDT

Subject: AS info

Phil:

A few tidbits from the 2007 AS status report. Only two MA rivers were mentioned - Merrimack and Taunton. Also clipped some info from dredging and wq sections

Taunton River – Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Historical records indicate that Atlantic sturgeon spawned in the Taunton River at least until the turn of the century (Tracy 1905). A gill net survey was conducted in the Taunton River during 1991 and 1992 to document the use of this system by sturgeon. Three subadult Atlantic sturgeon were captured but were determined to be non-natal fish (Burkett and Kynard 1993). In June 2004, a fisherman fishing in state waters noted that the first three fathoms of towed up gear held three juvenile Atlantic or shortnose sturgeon (Anoushian 2004). ¹¹ Trawlers fishing in state waters (less than three miles offshore) also occasionally report Atlantic sturgeon captures. Since 1997, only two sturgeon have been captured by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Trawl Survey (RIDEM), one measuring 85 cm TL was captured in 1997 in Narragansett Bay, and another (130 cm TL) was captured in October 2005 in Rhode Island Sound (A. Libby, RIDEM, Pers. Comm. 2006). The NMFS observer program has also documented Atlantic sturgeon bycatch off the coast of Rhode Island in Federal waters. Since spawning adults were not found during the expected spawning period of May and June, it is likely that a spawning population of Atlantic sturgeon does not occur in the Taunton River, though the system is used as a nursery area for Atlantic sturgeon (Burkett and Kynard 1993).

To reduce the impacts of dredging on anadromous fish species, most of the Atlantic states impose work restrictions during sensitive time periods (spawning, migration, feeding) when anadromous fish are present. NMFS also imposes seasonal restrictions to protect shortnose sturgeon populations (where present) through Section 7 consultations that may have the added benefit of protecting Atlantic sturgeon.

Taunton River – Rhode Island and Massachusetts

Historic upstream migration of Atlantic sturgeon in the Taunton River is unknown. Currently, Atlantic sturgeon are restricted to the lower 70 km of the river as a result of the Town River Pond Dam, allowing access to 89% of the river. However, there has been no evidence of Atlantic

sturgeon spawning in this river in recent years (last 15 years). Though spawning habitat is likely available, it is unlikely that water quality conditions are favorable for supporting nursery habitat as the river suffers from low DO (< 5 mg/L) and high ammonia-nitrogen levels (> 0.2 mg/L) (Taunton River Journal 2006). Surveys conducted in 1970 for American shad noted DO levels as low as 0.3 mg/L and ammonia-nitrogen levels as high as 1.22 mg/L (Taunton River Journal 2006). Low DO and excessive nutrient levels are still observed in the river, but water quality has slightly improved since 1970 (Taunton River Journal 2006). The river passes through several municipalities from which 23 million gallons of treated wastewater is added to the river daily; the majority of which is produced from a single treatment facility in the city of Brockton. In 2003, the EPA noted the Brockton facility was in violation of its discharge permit on many occasions, when it released water with excessive nutrient loads. There are no fish consumption advisories in effect for the Taunton River.