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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

ADVANCE RELEASE

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Production of alewives in Maine may be more than doubled as a result of recommendations for the improvement of this fishery submitted to the State by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the basis of a survey of Maine streams last season.

Present catches of the alewife, a fish closely related to the shad and sea herring, are only about two million pounds a year in Maine, compared with four million in the 1890's. In New England in general the decline has been even greater--from twelve million pounds to three.

Although alewives were formerly used chiefly for salting and smoking, there is now a good market for the canned product. The pack increased from 24,000 cases in 1940 to 77,000 in 1942 and was well over 100,000 last year. Further increases will depend largely upon restoration of the runs of fish wherever possible.

At the request of Commissioner Arthur Greenleaf of the Main Sea and Shore Fisheries Department, Dr. George A. Rounsefell and Louis D. Stringer, biologists of the Fish and Wildlife Service, supervised a survey of 115 Maine streams--many of which once had large runs--to discover where it may be possible to restore conditions suitable for alewives.

The chief causes of the decline, the survey revealed, are impassable dams, poorly designed and maintained fishways for passage over dams, and excessive fishing. Alewives migrate into coastal streams from the ocean each year to spawn--usually in ponds or small lakes--and free access to the spawning grounds is essential.

Alewife catches in Maine can be restored to the 4,000,000 level, the Fish and Wildlife Service believes, by the adoption of a State program including the following: (1) measures to allow alewives to reach their spawning grounds; (2) proper management of the fishery to insure a sufficient number of spawners; (3) continuation of the stocking program carried out jointly last season by the State and Federal Governments.

The Pemaquid, Sheepscot, Saint George, East Machias, and Medomic Rivers are included in a list of 17 streams in which it is recommended that the restoration program should be concentrated.

Nine of these streams were stocked with alewives in 1943 and three others will require stocking to get runs established. Construction of 18 fishways and repair or redesigning of three others are recommended. Three of the streams need work to clear away obstructions such as abandoned dams and rock slides.

One of the chief causes of over-fishing, the investigators report, is the long established custom of leasing alewife streams to a company or private individual, usually for only one season. The successful bidder has no interest in future runs, and excessive fishing results. The towns themselves should do the fishing, with proper regard to the brood stock, and then sell the fish, it is recommended.

The progeny of the alewives stocked in 1943 will not return as spawners until 1947. The stocking program must be continued for four years in order to build up or establish runs in each year of the alewife's four-year cycle. A total of some 7,500 alewives were planted in 13 streams during the 1943 runs and a subsequent check showed that spawning had been successful.

Maine now takes about two-thirds of New England's catch of alewives. New Hampshire now has no runs of commercial importance and in Rhode Island the catch has declined from nearly 3,000,000 pounds to 20,000. Connecticut takes only about 40,000 pounds, and in Massachusetts the catch has fallen from about 5,000,000 pounds in 1905 to less than a million. The causes of the decline in these States are the same as in Maine, but because of the greater industrialization the chances of restoration are considered less favorable.