

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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BEST ATLANTIC SALMON RUN OF THE CENTURY ON CONNECTICUT RIVER

For the first time in over 100 years significant numbers of Atlantic salmon have returned to the Connecticut River system--a result of one of the most successful fish restoration efforts ever, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The river system, once barren of the species due to dams which acted as physical barriers, is being used again by the salmon, reared at Federal and State hatcheries. In the last 3 weeks more than 50 adult Atlantic salmon have been captured in fish lifts and traps--a tenfold increase over 1977--and are being held in the Berkshire National Fish Hatchery in Hartsville, Massachusetts.

"This is a heartening conservation story," Greenwalt said. "It's what we've been waiting for--fish that home in on the Connecticut River and that might eventually become established as a Connecticut River strain for the first time since George Washington's era. It so clearly illustrates that almost impossible feats can be accomplished when Federal and State agencies work together."

Most of the fish appear to be in good health, weigh between 11 and 13 pounds, and are between 30 to 32 inches in length. While most have no markings or tags, all of the 4-year-old fish were stocked as 6 to 8 inch smolts in the lower Connecticut River system in 1976.

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The fish will be kept at the hatchery until the fall when artificial spawning will be performed. Then the offspring will be raised in hatcheries until they reach smolt size (the size at which they are ready to enter the ocean). In the spring of 1981, they'll be released in the lower Connecticut River. Usually, the salmon will spend the next 2 years at sea until they mature and return to the river system to spawn. Each female salmon produces between 8,000 and 10,000 eggs, but commonly less than 1 percent of the offspring which make it to smolt size survive until spawning stage.

The salmon were caught beginning May 24 at the fish ladder at Rainbow Dam on the Farmington River at Windsor Locks, Connecticut, and at the Holyoke Fish Lift on the Connecticut River in Massachusetts, about 80 miles from the mouth. More salmon are expected to be caught, and many more are thought to be in the river below the fish lifts.

This cooperative restoration effort was begun in 1967 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Commerce Department's National Marine Fisheries Service, and the States of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont through the formation of a Policy Committee for Fisheries Management of the Connecticut River Basin. As a result of the work of these and other agencies, pollution of the river system continues to subside, and fish passage facilities have been or will be constructed to pass the salmon over major obstructions.

A total of 50 fish has been captured in fish lifts and ladders as of June 12, including five which died in captivity. Five others were incidentally taken in commercial shad gill nets and died.

As a cautionary note, Greenwalt added, "These fish have been to sea and have undergone stresses and strains both in the ocean and on their return up river. Because of the stresses endured, we may lose a few--this is normal. Even so, what we're seeing is a result of what may be one of the most significant fish restoration efforts of all time."