



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMERICAN SHAD RETURN TO MUSCONETCONG RIVER IN HUNTERDON AND WARREN COUNTIES AFTER MORE THAN A CENTURY DAM REMOVALS FUNDED BY DEP AND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE OPEN RIVER TO MIGRATORY FISH TO SPAWN

(17/P65) TRENTON – After an absence of at least a century, American shad have returned to the Musconetcong River in Hunterdon and Warren counties, the Department of Environmental Protection’s Division of Fish and Wildlife and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

This milestone in the ecological recovery of the river is the result of the removal of dams on the lower Musconetcong River several years ago, followed by the removal of the Hughesville Dam in Warren County last year.



These projects – made possible by a partnership of state, federal, nonprofit and private entities – opened nearly six miles of the Musconetcong to migratory fish, such as shad, that spend much of their lives in the ocean but return to rivers and their tributaries to spawn.

“The return of shad, a benchmark species indicative of the overall ecological health and diversity of a waterway, is an exciting milestone,” said DEP Commissioner Bob Martin. “This achievement is the direct result of an ongoing

partnership among state and federal agencies, nonprofit groups, and dam owners – all committed to making this beautiful waterway free-flowing again.”

“The confirmation of American shad in the Musconetcong River marks a significant milestone in the effort to restore this fish in the Delaware River Basin,” said Eric Schrading, Supervisor of the New Jersey Field Office for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We must continue the critical work of the Musconetcong River Restoration Partnership to restore free-flowing waters that support water quality, wildlife, and recreational fishing and boating, and reduce the danger and costs associated with dams.”

As the shad population continues to rebuild, anglers are reminded that this fish may not be taken from any New Jersey freshwater area except the Delaware River.

The return of shad to the Musconetcong was confirmed earlier this month after anglers fishing for trout reported seeing small schools of shad in the river above the site of the former Hughesville Dam. Biologists from the DEP's Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries responded and captured shad at the base of the Warren Glen Dam in Holland Township, Hunterdon County.

American shad is the largest member of the herring family, weighing from four to eight pounds at maturity. Shad once supported important commercial and recreational fisheries along the Atlantic coast, especially the Delaware River. But dams built to generate power, for mills and for other now-obsolete purposes greatly reduced their spawning habitat.

The DEP is working with partners in developing plans to remove the Warren Glen Dam, largest on the river, as well as others to open even more stretches to migratory fish.

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The 48-mile-long Musconetcong flows from Lake Hopatcong in the northwestern part of the state and through the wooded and rocky hills of Morris and Warren counties. It flows into the Delaware River at a point in Hunterdon County about 10 miles south of Phillipsburg.

Long stretches of the Musconetcong are on the National Park Service National Wild and Scenic Rivers inventory. The DEP classifies much

of the river as a Category 1 stream, affording it the state's highest level of protection due to its exceptional ecological and fisheries values.

The DEP and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided funding from Natural Resource Damage settlements for the Musconetcong dam removals.

Partners in restoring the Musconetcong to a free-flowing river also include the Musconetcong Watershed Association; American Rivers, the National Park Service, the federal Natural Resource Conservation Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, North Jersey RC&D, Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and International Process Plants and Equipment Corp.

For more information on shad, visit: www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/fish_shad.htm

PHOTO/New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife biologist Pat Hamilton holds a shad near the Warren Glen Dam

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