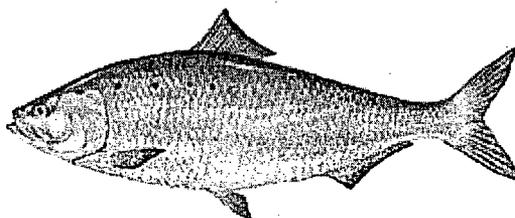


CBP 2008a

Chesapeake Bay Program - A Watershed Partnership

[General Info](#)[News & Press](#)[How's It Doing](#)[Photos](#)[Publications](#)[Maps](#)[Home](#) > [Bay Restoration](#) > [Managing Fisheries](#) > American Shad Management

American Shad Management and Restoration



The commercial fishery for American shad has been closed Bay-wide since the mid-1990s. Image courtesy: Duane Raver / USFWS

See Also:

- [About American shad](#)
- [American shad profile](#)
- [American Shad Harvest](#)
- [Fish Passage](#)

The commercial fishery for American shad has been closed Bay-wide since the mid-1990s. In addition to the shad fishing moratorium, researchers and managers are stocking hatchery-raised fish, removing dams and installing fish passages on key Bay tributaries to restore this historically important species. Still, Bay Program partners are far below the long-term restoration goal of two million fish in the Susquehanna River stock each year.

Current Restoration Goal

One of the ways scientists estimate spawning shad populations in the Bay is by counting the number of fish lifted over the fish passageway at Conowingo Dam, near the mouth of the Susquehanna River in Maryland. In 2001, the shad count reached a high of nearly 200,000. However, since that time the number of shad counted has been in decline. Potential causes may include:

- A decline along the Atlantic coast.
- Bycatch problems at sea.
- Problems attracting shad to the fish lift.

Scientists counted 25,464 shad over Conowingo Dam in 2007, far below the long-term restoration goal of two million fish per year.

Assessing the annual Bay-wide spawning shad population is difficult, since each river stock is unique. To provide better Bay-wide estimates, scientists are developing new ways to monitor and estimate shad populations in other key Bay tributaries, including the James and Potomac rivers.

Fishing Moratorium

After years of dwindling American shad numbers in the Bay, the commercial fishery for alosines was closed in 1980 in Maryland; in 1986 in the District of Columbia; and for the Virginia Bay fishery in 1994. Recreational shad fishing is also closed Bay-wide, although catch-and-release fisheries are allowed along the Susquehanna River.

As shad are migratory and spend much of their lives in Atlantic coastal waters, management of shad outside the Bay is crucial to maintaining a viable stock. Coast-wide shad stocks are managed under an interstate plan developed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in 1998. Restoration actions in coastal waters with implications for the Chesapeake shad stock have been:

- A five-year phase-out of the ocean intercept fishery, which began in January 2000. The fishery was completely closed in 2005.
- An aggregate 10 fish daily creel limit for recreational fisheries.

Stocking Hatchery-raised Fish

Each year, Bay states, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Pamunkey and Mattaponi Tribal governments rear and mark 15 to 25 million or more larval shad and stock them in suitable tributary waters.

- In 2006, 24.4 million American shad fry and fingerlings were reared in hatcheries and released into Bay tributaries.
- A total of 455 million have been stocked since 1986.
- In 2004, 72 percent of the shad returning over Conowingo Dam originated from the restocking program.

Removing Dams and Installing Fish Passages

Adult shad migrate from the ocean each spring to spawn in fresh water areas of Bay tributaries. Dams, culverts and other obstructions currently block over 1,000 miles of habitat that shad historically used to spawn. Removing the blockages or constructing fish passages (such as fish lifts or ladders) are critical steps toward restoring healthy populations of shad and other migratory fish. Bay Program partners are now 76 percent of the way towards their goal of opening 2,807 miles of rivers and streams to migratory fish by 2014.

Other Sites of Interest:

- American Shad Restoration in the Potomac River: Summary of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin's Potomac River Shad Restoration Project.
- On the Road to Recovery: American Shad Restoration: Restoration efforts in Virginia tributaries from the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.
- Shad Restoration: Information from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources on shad restoration activities in Maryland.

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