

SRWA Assists with Alewife Migration Study by Brandon Kulik

Alewives are an important migratory fish that is native to the Sebasticook River watershed. Every spring vast schools of adult alewives navigate the ocean and the lower Kennebec River to spawn in the watershed. 2006 marked the first time in over 100 years that new fishways at the Benton Falls and Burnham dams were operational, allowing sea-run fish to freely ascend the main stem of the Sebasticook from Winslow. Prior to this year it was necessary to trap alewives and truck them to spawning grounds.

The SRWA partnered with Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) on a pilot study designed to better understand the fish migration. The study will measure the number of alewives migrating upstream and correlate environmental conditions to how long the migration takes to various spawning destinations. Magnetically coded wire tags were implanted in some of the fish as they entered the river, and then each tagged fish was recorded, and all the fish counted by electronic counters and scanners operating at each fishway as checkpoints. Volunteer members assisted DMR by periodically checking the fishways and scanning equipment, and reporting fish movements to DMR staff. In addition Jim Dyer and Don McDougal coordinated Nokomis High School student monitoring of the fish ladder at the outlet of Sebasticook Lake. According to the counters, nearly 46,000 alewives passed the Fort Halifax Dam in Winslow and about 23,000 fish passed the Burnham dam. Abnormal high river flows due to May and June rains curtailed some of the migration, so studies will be continued in 2007. Many thanks to the SRWA members who helped on this project. If you would like more information, or are interested in volunteering for the study program next year, Please contact Brandon Kulik, at: Brandon.Kulik@KleinschmidtUSA.com.

