

Alewife/Herring and Hood Pond Project, November 13, 2019

Hi everyone,

Recently, Skip and I attended a meeting of Trout Unlimited. The first hour of the meeting was devoted to the introduction of alewife to Hood Pond. Two staff members of Ipswich River Watershed Association were the presenters. If you're interested, I'd like to share a bit of what we learned. (And I hope I have this right.)

Hood Pond, then known as Pritchard's Pond was a spawning ground for alewife until the mid to late 1800's. The last alewife was seen in Hood Pond in 1870. The last alewife in the Ipswich River was spotted in 1900. Water withdrawals, obstructions, pollution and poor water quality contributed to the decline.

Females spawn in the spring. If successfully introduced to Hood Pond, they'll lay their eggs (up to 300,000 of them) in the shallow areas of the pond. Juvenile herring (alewife) stay for a few months, returning to the sea in the fall. They mature in the ocean. When they are about 3 - 4 years old, and about 12", they return to the pond to spawn. They are considered valuable for a number of reasons. One is that they are key to the fish food chain. Cod, tuna, stripers and tuna depend on them. They are also beneficial to water quality.

The goal of the Department of Marine Fisheries, IRWA and Trout Unlimited is to restock the pond with juveniles, possibly next year if they are able to clear the way from ocean to pond. A three year study of Hood Pond, which included the monitoring of dissolved oxygen, turbidity, temperature, PH and some other data confirmed that Hood Pond is a favorable spawning habitat. Stream maintenance (Pye Brook and Howlett Brook, the two streams connecting Hood Pond with the Ipswich River), the replacement of the culvert under Pond St, and some dam work among other things must be accomplished before the fish can be introduced. Our work, as Friends of Hood Pond, has been instrumental in this effort. In addition, our timing was good. Our work needed to be done before theirs could begin. A coordinated effort between their work and ours must be maintained.

The IRWA newsletter reads "The Howlett Brook Watershed Restoration Project encompasses parts of Topsfield, Boxford and Ipswich, including Hood and Four Mile ponds. We are hopeful that both ponds could be future river herring spawning grounds. The herring habitat assessment for Hood Pond is complete and is progressing for Four Mile Pond. Many of the areas in the Ipswich River watershed that once hosted herring are now inaccessible to the migratory species. Restoration of herring runs hinges on opening up access to tributaries and ponds for spawning. Most recently, we were recognized for this work by being awarded a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to conduct a comprehensive barrier and fisheries restoration project in the Pye/Howlett Brook sub-watersheds of the Ipswich River."

For us, as Friends of Hood Pond, to be able to be part of this process is exciting and gratifying.

We appreciate your interest and support.

Robi, Skip and Friends of Hood Pond