

Natural Resources Advisory Commission Meeting

Thursday, September, 14, 2023

Update on the Slough Pond Herring Passage, submitted by Janice Riley

Thank you for allowing me to comment. I'm Janice Riley and I live at 32 Old Red Top Road on Slough Pond. For the past six and a half months I have carried out an independent study as a citizen naturalist documenting the herring migration from Walker's Pond into Slough Pond, part of the Stony Brook Watershed. My comprehensive study with photographs, scientific data, and commentary, as well as relevant links to related information can be found on my website **pondlore.com**

As the work of the Natural Resources Advisory Commission (NRAC) continues, as it relates to this migratory passage, especially with next month's guest advisor Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Biologist & Anadromous Fish Specialist Brad Chase, I felt it was critical to update the Commission on the present state of affairs at the Slough Pond passageway. You may be unaware that thousands of alewife fry were born in Slough Pond following this spring and early summer's spawning. Some have attempted to emigrate as they do in August when they have reached sufficient size and strength, however, the vast majority have not made it out nor will they be able to unless two things happen: we receive sufficient rainfall between September and early November- **the next six weeks**- to flood the channel high enough over the sediment to allow safe passage for the fish, or a contingency plan is put into effect to dig out the passage, which has been neglected for several years. Without either there will be a massive loss of life. When asked this week, the Head Warden told someone that all the fry have left the pond. He is mistaken.

Please refer to my website, under the late *August Journal*, which shows thousands of fry circling and attempting to enter the passage then turning back. As I live on the pond, I am ideally situated to observe schools of alewives passing by on a daily basis, even as recently as today. It is a beautiful sight. Just as powerful and inspiring as the arrival of the adults, if not more so, since this is why they have come.

The Alewife Committee plan for 2023 was to monitor the passage after hearing from colleagues and concerned citizens after initially considering its closure. The plan for 2024 is still undecided though Brad Chase, in his longstanding and trusted advisory role, has offered three options: 1.) close the passage, which is the stated opinion of the Chair of the Alewife Committee; 2.) embark on a two-year study of the passage under the direction of DMF, to complement studies already underway by APCC, The Cape Cod Ponds Network, and The Brewster Ponds Coalition; 3.) begin a restoration of the passage, as a partnership or collaborative effort under the direction and manpower of the DMF.

If the Town is not ready to move in the direction of partnerships and restoration at this time I advocate for the two-year study with the addition of a contingency plan for this fall, put in place no later than November first. Resources are available, such as, from AmeriCorps volunteers, Cape Cod Mosquito Control, Brewster Ponds Coalition volunteers, or a work force of volunteers under the supervision of the Natural Resources

Department (NRD) and the Alewife Committee (AC), if we start planning now. Additionally, planning ahead, I advocate for preliminary discussions with the primary landowners who have expressed their support for protecting the herring run on their property and their interest in speaking with Brad Chase and Town officials on the subject. Unfortunately, they leave on November 15 and do not return until June 15th. As a trusted neighbor of the elderly couple for two decades I would be happy to facilitate this meeting. There are three other stakeholders that abut the passageway property including the Brewster Conservation Trust (BCT), all of whom have been apprised of the situation and can be included in later discussions.

Finally, the Town is set to begin a major million dollar restoration project at the Stony Brook Mill fish ladder in 2024, having called upon experts in the field for design and construction, its intention being to improve passage for the herring into the fresh water ponds where they spawn. That being said, it is difficult to understand why the Town would want to close one of those ponds, having lost three others already.

Of the original seven fresh water ponds in the herrings' migratory route from Paine's Creek, Pine, Elbow, and Canoe Ponds have been lost over time. The three ponds of the original seven in this Stony Brook Watershed that the Town would like to keep open to migration are Lower and Upper Mill, and Walkers, two of which suffer annually from eutrophication. Slough is the cleanest pond in Brewster. Eliminating it from the migration route will have unknown consequences on the herring population, who need diversity of spawning areas for the health of their young, on the habitat the herring are an integral part of, the health of the pond, and the entire ecosystem. This decision should not be left up to one or two people.

Just as the Town has called upon experts for the fish ladder restoration, they should seek the advice of experts on the matter of closing off the Slough Pond connection and study its potential consequences. This is precisely why the Advisory Commission was established- to consider the bigger environmental picture. However, as scheduled meetings and planned studies are of critical value in that regard, we are facing a potential crisis that requires immediate attention to insure the survival of the progeny of this season's migration.

We know Brewster to be an environmentally conscious and committed town. Flexible and rigorous efforts are being practiced statewide in the management of herring populations. For all the challenges of the Walker's Slough passageway, it has been a viable herring migration route for 100 years, more likely 200. In the 40 years Dana Condit was Alewife Warden, like his father before him, he never closed the passage, though well aware of its management difficulties, and honored his role in the stewardship of the herring population in Brewster. We face new challenges today; being informed and flexible in our outlook and approach, will help us find solutions. I trust the factual evidentiary record I have compiled over the last few months will be of use.

Again, documentation is provided in great detail on *pondlore.com*.

Thank you.