

River Herring Proactive Conservation Planning Process
River Herring Technical Expert Working Group
Terms of Reference
Draft
[March 26, 2014]

1. Introduction and Background:

On August 12, 2013, NOAA Fisheries announced that listing river herring under the Endangered Species Act as either threatened or endangered was not warranted. NOAA Fisheries also announced the agency would provide funding to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) in order to work with our partners to implement a coordinated coastwide effort to proactively conserve river herring and address data gaps. The primary objective of this initiative is to develop and implement a dynamic conservation plan to help restore river herring throughout its Atlantic coastal range. This will include identifying important conservation efforts, addressing critical data gaps, and monitoring and evaluating progress in achieving the goals. This effort will coordinate and build upon the many previous and ongoing efforts to further river herring conservation, including fisheries work by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) and the New England Fishery Management Council (NEFMC) and habitat restoration by the Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership and the Nature Conservancy. A Technical Expert Working Group (TEWG) will be compiling information that will be used by NMFS and ASMFC in the development of this plan. The plan is intended to increase public awareness about river herring, stimulate cooperative research efforts, and foster efforts to conserve the species.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Structure:

Given the many threats that river herring face, conservation of river herring must be holistic. Therefore, we have worked with various organizations to identify individuals who possess expertise related to river herring, threats to their survival, and/or methods for assessing human and non-human impacts to river herring (e.g., connectivity, water quality/quantity, climate change, etc.) to participate on the TEWG. The TEWG will establish subgroups by topic and/or region to focus discussions where the group deems is necessary. NOAA Fisheries and ASMFC will look to volunteers from the TEWG to chair subgroups. There may be times that the TEWG may also call on other Federal and non-Federal subject matter experts to provide expert information to the working group for consideration.

The majority of meetings will be convened by conference call/webinar, and all meetings will be open to the public and may be recorded. Any documents produced by the TEWG will be made

available to the public. TEWG member affiliation and contact information will also be made available to the public.

2.2 Function and Charge:

The TEWG is being established to help NOAA Fisheries and ASMFC develop a dynamic conservation plan to help restore river herring throughout their Atlantic coastal range. This will include the following:

- Identify threats to both species throughout their range
- Identify and create a list of conservation actions to address critical threats and associated costs
- Identify key data gaps
- Create a list of research projects and associated costs to fill existing data gaps
- Provide/compile information for NMFS/ASMFC to use in the development of a dynamic, long term conservation plan
- Track and monitor progress of conservation actions and research
- Revise actions as needed

The goal of the TEWG meetings will be information gathering, whereby individual expert opinion on data, ideas, or recommendations will be sought from all participants. The meetings are not consensus driven. Larger discussions of the TEWG will take a broad look at the issues and not focus on only one topic. Meetings of the subgroups will provide an opportunity for detailed focus on specific topics. The TEWG is not charged with making listing recommendations or other management recommendations.

TEWG participation may include meetings (e.g., in person, video, web/teleconferences), e-mail exchange, analyses/modeling, writing and review of documents. The level of participation (e.g., time commitment) will be determined by the individual member, but participation and contribution as appropriate in the larger TEWG discussions is expected. A long-term (i.e., multi-year) commitment is requested to ensure continuity and minimize disruption during the conservation planning process.