

October 27, 2014

Re.: Alewife mortality at Union River

The following information details alewife mortality events which I witnessed and documented on Friday, October 24th 2014 at the Union River below the Ellsworth Dam.

Event 1:

At approximately 2:00 PM I was travelling East on Route 1 across the Union River bridge and was stopped in traffic on the bridge. Upstream of the bridge, beginning approximately 50' away from the bridge and extending upstream as far as I could see, there were numerous gulls (perhaps 35 – 40) continuously dipping in to the water from the surface or hovering above the water and plunging their bills in to the surface of the river and exhibiting other typical feeding behaviors. At this time the tide was quite high.

I was concerned that the gulls may be preying upon young of the year alewives that had been injured or killed as they passed through the hydro-electric dam. I was unable to investigate at that time and immediately planned to visit the site on a later trip to Ellsworth, which I had scheduled for 5PM.

Event 2:

At 5 PM I returned to the river and parked near the gated entrance to the hydro site. At this time there was only one gull on the water and none were observed when I crossed the Route 1 bridge, though there were 15 – 20 on the dam and powerhouse. There were 3 or 4 cormorants on the dam as well.

Upon reaching the river bank just downstream of the fenced area and near the small building, I immediately noticed three YOY alewives on the river bottom about 1' from shore in about 1' of water. I retrieved the fish and identified them as alosids - probably alewives. I then began looking along the shoreline and began to notice dead alewives in the water and in the wet rocks. These rocks had been below the tide line a few hours previously. By this time the tide had dropped about 2.5' based upon the wet rocks over which I was climbing. I found approximately 75 fish between the small building and the large granite ledge located about 150' downstream. About 50 of these fish were found on the shore below the recent tide line and about 25 were seen below the water at a depth of 1 – 2'. None of the fish I observed were alive and many were stiff with rigor mortis. Several fish were soft and appeared to have been dead for a few days – though most were bright silver and appeared to have died very recently. A number of fish (approximately 10) were decapitated or cut in half. I did not have time to turn over the rip rap or search closely through the vegetation. I am quite sure there were more fish than I observed in this small area. I took a number of photos and videos documenting these observations – including some underwater video. I gathered 3 – 4 alewives and placed them in a plastic bag and they were frozen when I arrived at my home at about 7PM.

At approximately 5:30 PM I called Dr. Mark Whiting of ME DEP to report the incident.

Sincerely,



Dwayne Shaw
Executive Director