



# NEWS RELEASE

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## ALEWIVES ARE HEADING UP INTO THE ST. CROIX RIVER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 22 YEARS

### *Poised to become largest alewife run in the nation*

Baileysville, Maine – This week marks a big leap in the lives of river herring of the St. Croix River. For the first time in 22 years, this year alewives will be passing the Grand Falls Dam to return to spawn in high-quality lakes upstream. A new law, LD 72, An Act to Open the St. Croix River to River Herring, was passed by the Maine Legislature this session to reopen the river by removing obstacles to alewives.

As of this morning, more than 600 alewives were headed towards Grand Falls; they first arrived at the Milltown fishway downstream on May 7.

The St. Croix River, which forms the border between Maine and New Brunswick, may become the largest alewife run in the United States.

Fishways are already in place at the dams on the river, so restoration primarily required the removal of a wooden obstruction in the fishway, an action that did not require additional funds. Alewife restoration has been supported by the Passamaquoddy and other tribes, legislators, scientists, conservationists, lobstermen, fishermen, and others.

Opening the watershed to alewives, a native Maine river herring, will benefit the Passamaquoddy people, Maine's commercial fishing industry, and fish and wildlife throughout the Gulf of Maine.

"Our ancestors would be very proud today. The arrival of alewives at the Grand falls Flowage of the St. Croix River is an historic event for the Passamaquoddy People, and for all of our neighbors in Maine and Canada," said Brian Altvater, Founder and Chair of the Passamaquoddy group, Schoodic Riverkeepers.

"The tribe has always maintained a connection to the environment and having alewives returned to our river is important to the Passamaquoddy People, Canadians, the State of Maine, groundfishermen, lobstermen, and to all who live in the Passamaquoddy Bay region. It is important also to all the creatures that depend on alewives for food—cod, halibut, pollack, ospreys, and eagles, to name a few. We call alewives 'the fish that feeds all.'"

"After years of work on the part of US and Canadian Federal, state, Provincial, environmental and Tribal partners, alewife on the St Croix River may have a chance to make a comeback," said NOAA Fisheries Northeast Regional Administrator, John Bullard. "NOAA has long history of involvement on the St. Croix, including providing staff consultations on hydropower licensing projects on the river and providing funding through our Restoration Center for alewife/small mouth bass studies, and we are thrilled to join our partners to celebrate this monumental moment."

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is excited for the opening of the St. Croix River watershed for migratory fish and for the opportunity for people, fish, and wildlife to benefit as the alewife run is restored," said Service Northeast Regional Director, Wendi Weber. "This watershed has the highest potential for alewife production of any watershed in Maine, resulting in many local and regional ecological and economic benefits, as well as significant cultural benefits for the Passamaquoddy People. Restoration of these fish has been a priority for the Service, beginning with the establishment of Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in 1930s, continuing through the funding of fishways in 1963, and most recently with the monitoring of the fish run at Milltown Dam. We look forward to more opportunities to advance these efforts."

"The return of alewives to the St. Croix River offers new hope for the health of the Gulf of Maine and its fisheries. The St. Croix may now become the nation's largest alewife run," said Lisa Pohlmann, Executive Director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). "NRCM has been working with others to reopen this river to its native fish since 2001, to make this ecosystem whole again. As the alewife population rebounds, it will help rebuild Maine's groundfish populations and supply bait for Maine's lobster industry, which is now importing expensive bait from away."

"We are enormously pleased and honored to join with the Schoodic Riverkeepers to celebrate the rebirth of this river. We celebrate the return of native alewives, coming back as they have

for thousands of years, and we celebrate the strong partnerships and the years of work that made this the day possible,” said Landis Hudson, Maine Rivers executive director.

“This day is truly an historic occasion and one that would not have been possible without the commitment and hard work of a coalition of fishermen, environmentalists, the Passamaquoddy Tribe and many others,” said Sean Mahoney, Executive Vice-President and Director for CLF Maine. “The law that CLF and others fought so hard to enact corrects a practice of fisheries mismanagement that has been allowed to stand for almost two decades. To be sure, there are still challenges to meet to ensure that the St. Croix native fisheries are fully restored to the watershed, but today we are proud of our shared victory and welcome these fish back to their native spawning grounds.”

“Alewives are critically important to several life stages of Atlantic salmon and we know that any river in North America that has lost its alewife run has also lost its Atlantic salmon run,” said Andrew Goode of the Atlantic Salmon Federation. “After 12 years of work by our Maine and New Brunswick Council staff and volunteers, along with many other groups, we are looking forward to watching the resurgence of the native St. Croix alewife run.”

In the 1980s, more than 2.6 million alewives traveled up the St. Croix River watershed to spawn in upstream lakes, but the number of returning alewives collapsed to fewer than 1,000 fish after the closure of the fishways at Woodland and Grand Falls Dams in 1995. The reopening of the fishways gained broad support after research demonstrated that smallmouth bass and alewives can coexist in lakes and waterways throughout Maine and the east coast of North America.