

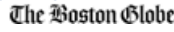


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GLOBE EDITORIAL



Alewife: Returning an old favor

November 2, 2010

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Alewife is best known as the end of the Red Line, the last stop for thousands of commuters. Some know the name derives from a breed of river herring that fed the region's early settlers. But few, if any, realize that the beloved alewife may be going the way of the passenger pigeon.

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Numbers of river herring have dwindled so quickly that the three southern New England states banned fishing of it in their waters. But the fish have not rebounded to levels of even a decade ago. Conservation groups think they know why: Trawlers for sea herring are dragging

the smaller river herring, which spawn in sea water, into their nets.

The best course would be strict caps on bycatch of river herring, enforced by monitors. About a third of the region's 25 or so herring trawlers go out with such monitors now. In Alaska, all large trawlers have monitors on board.

River herring have been endangered before. Dam construction caused a drop in their numbers, and overfishing by foreign factory ships cut them down further. They returned, however, after the foreigners were banned from US waters in the 1970s.

Marine scientists are not sure why the population has declined so steeply since 2000. But even if the trawlers are just one factor, it is at least one that fishery officials can control. The herring are prey for cod and whales, whose numbers have also been in decline. The New England Fishery Management Council can help stabilize the entire marine ecosystem by ensuring that trawlers take as few river herring as possible.

It's the least that the region owes its old friends. ■

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