

Appendix C

Kennebec River fishery

Status

The Kennebec River boasts an extremely diverse fishery from Moosehead to the sea. The value of this fishery, while very different depending upon location, is strong throughout the entire corridor as fishing is an activity that occurs along all sections of the river. It must first be noted that sections of the Kennebec fishery have gone through extensive changes over the last 75 years. The beginning of the log drives in the early 1800's, municipal sewage and industrial pollution entering the river in the 60's and 70's, the end of the log drives in 1976 and the Clean Water Act of 1972 are all events that have greatly influenced and shaped the Kennebec Fishery.

The Kennebec, below the old Edwards Dam location in Augusta, is classified as a Distinct Population Segment (DPS) Atlantic salmon river and Kennebec salmon were listed as endangered in 2000. This listing includes the all remnant populations downstream of this location. This could dictate future salmonid management in the lower section of the Kennebec.

Management of the lower Kennebec fishery inland to below the Lockwood Dam, is handled by the Department of Marine Resources and the Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries. Management from the overlapping (DMR and IFW) section between Gardiner and the Lockwood Dam to the north is managed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (IFW).

An up to date fisheries management plan for the Kennebec River is an important element in the implementation of Phase II. While all sections of the River need a careful look, information about the central and upper reaches is less well developed; these sections need particular attention. A fisheries management plan should include inventories of the fishery, current regulations, a list of the challenges and obstacles to successful management and a well thought out plan to make the Kennebec a truly world class destination for anglers. Anglers who travel specifically to fish the Kennebec will demand a more robust fishery than currently exists in the upper and central reaches of the River. Density and larger fish are two keys to attracting angling tourism to a region. Several participants in the public meetings urged that the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries

work with an experienced planning consultant in preparing the Kennebec fishery management plan.

Following is a list of recommendations for various species that inhabit the Kennebec: Information was gathered from stakeholders at the Fisheries Focus Meeting

Lower Kennebec – This section of the Kennebec River from head of tide in Augusta to the sea has rebounded incredibly well from the years of abuse it had endured. The Lower Kennebec is one on the true success stories in the history of river recovery.

Striped bass are abundant in the Lower Kennebec and are targeted by anglers due to both size and numbers available. A decline in the largest stripers (breeding females) seems to be occurring as a result of angling mortality of these large fish. This issue is not unique to the Kennebec as stripers are highly migratory and may move in and out of the Kennebec several times during a year. Stripper tournaments held along the east coast are generally catch and kill and may be having an impact on the bigger fish as well.

Several guides run trips for paying customers on the Kennebec specifically for striper fishing.

An unanswered question about the stripers in the Lower Kennebec is whether there is a *resident* population of striped bass living and breeding there. Maine currently has some of the strictest laws protecting stripers on the east coast and if a resident population exists and is managed correctly, Maine could potentially produce significant numbers of very large stripers.

Recommendations

- Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries should determine if a resident population of stripers exists in the Kennebec.
- Continue to protect large stripers and promote catch and release of these important fish.

Alewives are an extremely important food source for all fish species in the Kennebec. Significantly increasing their numbers could have two effects on the Kennebec fisheries. More baitfish in the river might attract more fish from a greater distance. Secondly, greater numbers of large baitfish in the river could lead to larger fish. Evidence of this occurs each year during the alewife run when stripers gorge themselves on what alewives they can find.

The limiting factor for alewives is access to suitable spawning habitat (freshwater lakes and ponds). Dams along the Kennebec corridor have cut off access to much of the historic alewife spawning grounds which has led to a decline in populations. A partial solution to this obstacle is to trap alewives that congregate below dams and truck them to the pond or lake above the dam. This is occurring at the Cobbossee Stream inlet in Gardiner as well as at the Lockwood Dam in Winslow. These efforts should be increased at other locations as well. In some cases dam headwalls may need to be slightly modified to allow for successful out migration. A more permanent solution would be to make improvements to the fish lifts at the Lockwood Dam to allow greater numbers of alewives and various other species to access more habitat.

Another impact on alewives has been the harvest below the Winslow-Waterville and Fort Halifax Dams for use as lobster bait. Many believe overharvest of these fish is occurring and further impacting the species. Regulation changes on the management of alewives changed in 2007 from a DIFW permit system which allowed for significant harvest to a Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries (DMR) regulated fishery. The new rules allow for 1 bushel per day harvest per person and rules may become stricter in 2008.

Recommendations

- Increasing the numbers of alewives in the Kennebec may enhance the striper fishery
- Expand alewife trap and truck efforts and further explore the possibility of fish lifts and dam modifications to open up more habitat to these fish.
- Better enforcement on overharvesting below Winslow-Waterville and Fort Halifax dams. Continue to re-examine harvest laws and modify if necessary.

Rainbow Smelt are an economic asset to the lower Kennebec but the fishery is lacking a coordinated marketing effort by the smelt camp owners to draw more people to the sport. Smelt populations in the Kennebec are estimated to be in the tens of millions. (Maine Rivers.org)

Recommendation

- Coordinate marketing efforts by the smelt camp owners to draw more people to the sport

Baitfish composition seems to have changed in the lower Kennebec and needs an inventory by DMR.

Recommendation

- Inventory baitfish composition in lower Kennebec

American Shad were once very abundant in the lower Kennebec but pollution and dam construction severely impacted the population. Shad are making a good comeback but more stocking is needed to help them rebound. Anglers up and down the east coast are looking for good shad fishing but guides need to invest effort in learning these fish and marketing trips to people both inside and outside of Maine.

Recommendations

- Increase shad stocking program
- Increase guiding effort and promotion of this fish

Carp: Some very large Carp roam the flats in the lower Kennebec. While Mainer's largely ignore this species, carp are pursued worldwide and are extremely popular in Europe. Carp could become a very profitable species for the Kennebec corridor towns if guides buy into the idea and organized and coordinated marketing takes place outside the U.S. as well as closer to home.

Recommendations

- Work with interested guides to explore carp fishery in Lower Kennebec
- If there is buy in from local guides, help promote fishery

Both **short-nose and Atlantic sturgeon** are present in the Kennebec up to the dam in Winslow. Removal of the Edwards Dam has opened up 17 more miles of spawning habitat to these fish and while historic populations may never return a very limited fishery for Atlantic sturgeon could become a reality.

The short-nose sturgeon was placed on the Endangered Species List (ESL) in 1967. It is now unlawful to fish for or possess these fish. The Atlantic sturgeon is not listed as endangered or threatened but the current rules do not allow for fishing or possession of them due to the similarities in habitat and the danger of mistakenly catching short-nose.

The Sturgeon in the Kennebec River are not known to compete with other species in the river for food or habitat. If a sport fishery is established, many believe it would present little to no conflict with the management of other species.

Recommendations

- Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries should determine if Atlantic sturgeon could support limited, catch and release sport fishery.

Central and Northern Kennebec

Salmonids become prevalent moving north of the lower Kennebec . While there are some guided float trips offered between Waterville/Winslow and Sidney/Vassalboro, this section of river is underutilized. Lack of access (put-in and take-out) points on the east side of the river may be a factor in the lack of angling effort here.

The Shawmut section of the Kennebec has seen a decline in brown trout density over the past 3-5 years (2002-2006) and IFW will reduce the rainbow trout stocking numbers in 2007. It remains to be seen whether reducing the numbers of rainbows will improve the health of the brown trout in this section.

Portions of the Kennebec offer excellent smallmouth bass fishing while the Fairfield section above the Shawmut Dam is an excellent largemouth and smallmouth bass fishery. This stretch is a true destination for bass anglers and hosts several large bass tournaments through the year.

It may be true that the region of the Kennebec River north of Skowhegan already is a destination fishery however promotion of this fishery is lacking. This large section of the fishery could certainly be enhanced through fisheries inventory and better angler data.

A difficult issue that comes up often is the conflicting views between various types of user groups of the Kennebec Corridor. Some anglers want sections of the Kennebec to be off limits to all motorized use. Concerns over noise pollution from ATV's using the trails adjacent to the River are voiced regularly while others who utilize these recreational trails greatly appreciate the opportunity to ride in a designated area. The various interest groups need to stay open minded and take a careful look at what type of activities will truly benefit the region while protecting what is special about the area.

Recommendations

- Thorough inventory of species in the Solon Stretch of the river. Determine which feeder streams fish spawn in and identify any impediments to fish access such as hanging culverts. Also identify the most appropriate salmonids for stocking to match the conditions in given stretches. *IFW has completed portions of this proposal already.*
- Currently there is a float stocking program that may help to spread out the fish that are stocked in the river. While there are several ways accomplish this, the float stocking method has attracted significant media attention. Expanding the float stocking program that has been successful in the Kennebec to additional areas and stretches would serve the dual purposes of fish dispersion and marketing the River.
- No relaxation of the current gear and tackle restrictions on salmonids.
- Better promotion of this fishery, growth of more diverse guide offerings and experiences for tourists and investment in infrastructure would all lead to more people fishing this large section of the Kennebec.

Large fish often lead to economic development. Creation of destination fishery on the Kennebec is vital as fishing is one of the few activities common to the entire river. The Upper Andro Anglers Alliance, www.upperandro.com/, out of Bethel, has successfully created a destination fishery on the Androscoggin River and the model used by this organization would certainly apply to the Kennebec. Higher volume stocking of larger fish along with an organized and coordinated marketing effort has created a fishery with large fish and increased numbers for anglers to enjoy. While these fish constitute essentially a "put, grow and take" fishery meaning that many of the larger fish were stocked to be caught and are not wild fish, people seem to be

excited to catch large fish regardless of their origin. These efforts are paying off as people are now traveling to the Androscoggin to lodge, dine and fish.