

THE POTOMAC RIVER SHAD RESTORATION PROJECT

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Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB)
2007

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[Learn more about what the schools are doing this year to help the American shad.](#)

Project Status Summary

This project is part of an effort by a coalition of federal, state, regional and local agencies and nonprofit groups, organized as a Task Force, to open historic spawning and nursery habitat for native and anadromous fishes in the Potomac River. An important milestone for this project was accomplished in January of 2000 with the completion of the fishway at the Little Falls (Brookmont) Dam by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USCOE). However, the fishway alone was not all that was required. Migratory fishes have been excluded from the ten mile area from Little Falls upstream to Great Falls for over fifty years and they needed to be re-imprinted to that area to help them return and use it.

American shad stocks in particular had remained depressed in the Potomac River, despite significant improvements in water quality made over the last several decades and a river harvest moratorium that has been in effect since 1982. The American shad stocking project began in 1995 and was designed to imprint shad to the historic spawning and nursery waters and help rebuild Potomac River shad stocks. One million stocked shad fry was an annual target. In the eight years of the project over

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15.6 million shad fry were stocked into the Potomac River. Hundreds of volunteers have helped the project, many of them spending very late-night hours during the springtime collections of adult brood shad. The Schools-in-Schools partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, with assistance from the Earth Conservation Corps' Living Classrooms, the Anacostia Watershed Society and the Potomac Conservancy, has successfully involved many area schools and hundreds of students have participated, both on the river and raising shad fry in the classroom. Through the student's efforts an estimated 143,000 additional fry have also been released.

The ICPRB assists the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) in monitoring the progress of the project. Springtime monitoring of the Little Falls fishway has been performed by boat-electrofishing, gill and dipnets at Mather Gorge, an area approximately one mile downstream from Great Falls. The numbers of adult American shad collected at Great Falls has steadily risen; from zero in the four years prior to the fishway's completion in January 2000, to three in 2000, fifteen in 2001, and forty-four in 2002. Summer monitoring for young-of-the-year (YOY) American shad have been conducted in the tidal freshwater Potomac River since 1997. This survey complements the Maryland Department of Natural Resources haul seine survey which has been conducted annually since 1958.

Since this project started in 1995, the number of adult American shad collected during the Spring brood-stock collections has more than doubled and the number of fry stocked has tripled. Young-of-the-year shad have also become substantially more numerous, setting records in both Maryland and USFWS/ICPRB monitoring surveys (See Figures 1 & 2, Page 4). American shad numbers in the Potomac River should also be significantly increasing each year for the next seven years (foreseeable future). The ICPRB and the USFWS have successfully completed an eight-year American shad stocking program, the fishway at Little Falls has been constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and our understanding of the shad in the Potomac River continues to expand. Interest in angling for American shad is growing rapidly thanks to a strong public outreach and participation component. The efforts of the multi-state, multi-agency/organization Little Falls Task Force are coming to fruition.

Future Needs

The need to monitor and keep track of the restoration progress still remains. In addition, due to the long time that this fishery has been closed and changes in tastes since they were abundant, more education is necessary to restore public interest in

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this remarkable fish, not only as a delicious food and exciting gamefish, but also because of its importance in river and coastal ecosystems and its significance in the history of this country.

Past Funding Support

Since the project's inception in 1995 it has been supported by a number of collaborating agencies and organizations including the Virginia Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund, the Maryland Chesapeake Bay Trust, the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the US EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program, Maryland's Department of Natural Resources, and private donations from members of the Congressional Sportsmens Caucus.

Get Involved

If you are interested in learning more about this project, please contact [Jim Cummins](#) on the Living Resources team or the [Living Classrooms Foundation of the National Capital Region](#) at 202-488-0627.