

PRESS RELEASE

Photo Release: State Environmental Officials Celebrate Success of Rebuilt Upper Mystic Lake Dam and Fishway

Facility has Greatly Increased Herring and American Eel Populations

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Department of Conservation & Recreation

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MEDFORD — Officials from the Baker-Polito Administration today gathered to celebrate the success of the Upper Mystic Lake Dam and fishway, which has dramatically increased river herring and American eel populations within the Mystic River, Lower and Upper Mystic Lakes, and into the Aberjona River. Over the past several years, the Upper Mystic Lake Dam’s fish ladder and eel ramp have enabled the safe passage of millions of fish and eels from the Lower Mystic Lake into the Upper Mystic Lake. Additionally, officials from the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) announced a Request for Proposals (RFP) to improve additional safe passage for river herring when the fish species moves downstream from the Upper Mystic Lake. The RFP seeks designs for structural improvements of the facility’s spillway for better downstream passage.

“Rebuilding and upgrading important assets, such as dams, remains critical to not only protecting both infrastructure and private property, but also supporting the natural world

and wildlife,” **said Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Leo Roy.** “The success of the Upper Mystic Lake Dam and its fishway is nothing short of incredible, and I am proud that the Baker-Polito Administration has recognized this success and is working to further upgrade the dam to ensure more fish are able to survive passing through the structure for years to come.”

In 2012, the first year that the fish passage system was fully operational, a count of herring was conducted identifying that approximately 200,000 river herring passed through the facility that year. The Mystic River watershed is now home to one of the most productive river herring runs in the Commonwealth with 630,000 herring counted in 2017 alone, marking the highest population among all of Massachusetts rivers. Furthermore, current passage on such a large scale prior to 2012 was not possible since the Upper Mystic Lake Dam was constructed for water supply purposes during the American Civil War.

“The fish passage system completed in 2012 at the Upper Mystic Lakes Dam included a modern fish ladder, an eel ramp, and downstream passage gates and channel, the first time these features were integrated into a coastal river in Massachusetts,” **said Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Ron Amidon.** “Thank you and congratulations to the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Division of Marine Fisheries, and advocates including the local legislative delegation, the Mystic River Watershed Association, and the Medford Boat Club for making this the most productive herring run in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

“It is amazing that this urban watershed supports such a vibrant herring run, with a tripling of counter numbers from 2012 to 2017 when 630,000 were counted, followed by 590,000 in 2018,” **said Division of Marine Fisheries Director David Pierce.** “With continued work by the Mystic River Watershed Association and others to improve the water quality in the watershed, we can expect even better habitat conditions for these migratory fish and other aquatic life in future years.”

Historic Upper Mystic Lake Dam, which was originally built in the 1860's, was rebuilt in 2012 at a cost of \$6.6 million. The upgraded structure included a state-of-the-art fishway and eel ramp that has greatly improved the spawning of river herring and passage of American eels, with between 5,000 and 15,000 utilizing the eel ramp each year. Because of its historic use, in 1990 the Upper Mystic Lake Dam and its gatehouse were listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“The significant enhancements to the Upper Mystic Lakes’ dam and spillway showcase the urgency this administration and their environmental team have made to the historic waterways in our area, and highlight their priorities to improving both inland and coastal fisheries throughout the state,” **said State Representative Paul J. Donato (D-Medford)**.

“I am so pleased with the success of the Upper Mystic Lake Dam and fishway and the overall improving health of the Mystic,” **said State Representative Christine Barber (D-Somerville)**. “This is a critical urban watershed, and I look forward to continuing the investment in this important environmental resource.”

“I am proud to have been part of the process to revitalize the Upper Mystic Lake Dam and Fishway,” **said State Representative Sean Garballey (D-Arlington)**. “It will continue to be a tremendous resource for the region.”

“I applaud all of the parties who have worked together to make improvements to the spillway that have increased the herring count exponentially,” **said State Representative Michael S. Day (D-Stoneham)**. “These improvements have led directly to the return of a healthier ecosystem and better water quality for us all.”

For additional information regarding river herring, American eel, and other fish populations and their habitats, please visit DMF's [webpage \(/orgs/division-of-marine-fisheries\)](/orgs/division-of-marine-fisheries).

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Department of Conservation & Recreation

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