

GEHR Watershed Minute #4

Alewife Herring: (201 words)

Alewife herring breed in the Great Egg Harbor River, and they are frequently caught in the spring during their breeding run and used for bait to catch the striped bass. The alewife is a small herring that runs up freshwater streams from the sea to spawn during the period from late April to early June. Spawning takes place in lakes and sluggish stretches of rivers above tidal influence.

Female alewife herring usually move to the spawning areas just before the males. Spawning takes place at night in groups of two or three fish over a sandy or gravelly bottom. Each female alewife produces 60,000-100,000 eggs. Eggs are broadcast randomly and sink to the bottom.

Adults leave the spawning area after spawning, and no care is given eggs or young by the adult fish. In less than a week, the young alewives hatch to begin feeding on very small, free-floating plants and animals. By fall, the young alewives make their way back to the sea.

Populations of alewife herring have decreased over time due to over fishing and breeding habitat loss. Clean water, increased breeding habitat, fish ladders, and catch limits are all critical for the successful restoration of alewife herring populations.