New England Fishery Management Council
50 WATER STREET | NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS 01950 | PHONE 978 465 0492
Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD *Executive Director*

MEETING SUMMARY

Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team Webinar

via Webinar
April 27, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met on April 27, 2026, at 10:00 am via webinar to discuss development of an action and PDT analysis for Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031, river herring and shad measures, and other measures, and other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Dr. Jamie Cournane (PDT Chair), Emily Bodell, Julian Garrison (NEFMC); Dr. Daniel Hocking, Carrie Nordeen, Danielle Palmer, Marianne Randall (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Jon Deroba (NMFS/NEFSC); Dr. Matt Cieri (ME DMR); Ben Gahagan, Dr. Micah Dean (MA DMF); James Boyle, Dr. Katie Drew, Caitlin Starks (ASMFC); Kevin Job, Kurt Gotschall (CT DEEP); J.A. Macfarlan (RI DEM); Jason Didden (MAFMC); Robert Atwood (NHFG) (PDT members and supporting analysts); Peter Whelan (Committee Chair). In addition, about 14 other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The PDT discussed several potential topics and alternative sets for the 2026 management action, including the Atlantic herring specifications process, management uncertainty buffer options and other specifications, carryover provisions, and river herring and shad catch caps.

The PDT Chair opened the meeting at 10:00 am. There were no changes to the agenda. The Chair welcomed Caitlin Starks from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), who will be filling in for Emilie Franke temporarily.

AGENDA ITEM #1: 2026 MANAGEMENT ACTION
ATLANTIC HERRING SPECIFICATIONS PROCESS

Council staff reviewed discussion from the March 23, 2026, Herring Advisory Panel (AP) meeting regarding specifications items set to 0 in recent years, noting that the AP suggested retaining the specifications items. Staff also suggested working with GARFO and other staff to propose clarifications to the regulatory text about herring specifications. **The PDT supported leaving all specification items in the action and working to clarify the regulatory text.**

ATLANTIC HERRING SPECIFICATIONS FOR 2027-2031

The PDT discussed options for the management uncertainty buffer. In Herring Framework 8, the PDT provided options for 3-, 5-, and 10-year averages of Canadian catch, though 3 years may be too short based on recent data. The PDT Chair suggested considering the most recent 5- and 10-year averages and providing those to the stock assessment scientist. The stock assessment scientist stated that a final choice for the buffer is not required before the assessment peer review. The peer review panel will review and approve the method, and the PDT can alter the buffer that is used as needed. A PDT member noted that one large catch year in the New Brunswick weir fishery can have a more substantial impact on the 5-year average than the 10-year average, and there tend to be years with large amounts of catch in the fishery. The stock assessment scientist clarified that the assessment would not be changing projection methods because it was just tested in the research track stock assessment. Another PDT member suggested remaining consistent with past recommendations, noting that New Brunswick weir catch has varied widely in the last 10 years, though there is an overall declining trend. The PDT Chair asked when the Canadian data would be ready, and the stock assessment scientist stated that there is a data meeting in mid-May, after which the final data will be available. While the stock assessment scientist did not anticipate any major issues with the data, they plan to flag any changes with the PDT. **The PDT supports continuing to use the 10-year average, reiterating its conclusions on its prior analysis.**

GARFO staff will continue to develop an analysis of Area 1A transfers and report back at another PDT meeting. Analysis will focus on using Canadian landings.

The PDT supported continuing the status quo approach for the remainder of the specifications items.

CARRYOVER OF UNHARVESTED CATCH

The PDT discussed potential alternatives for the carryover provision, including making stock status a condition for whether carryover occurs. A PDT member suggested it may be prudent to make sure the stock is not overfished when carryover occurs, and if that condition is set, it would not have to be revisited until the stock is not overfished. Another PDT member noted that it is a risk tolerance question for the Council. GARFO staff consulted with NOAA General Counsel regarding the carryover language in the regulations, which states that there shall be carryover. The regulations could be revised to say that there will be carryover unless the Council determines that carryover would be inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the fishery management plan and notifies NMFS, which could occur via a letter. **Based on the PDT's discussion, the PDT chair outlined three possible alternatives for carryover to develop further in the action: 1) no action/ leave the carryover provision as is, 2) carryover will occur unless the stock is overfished, and 3) carryover will occur unless it is inconsistent with the FMP goals and objectives.** GARFO staff noted that there may be interest in selecting both alternatives 2 and 3 if there is a situation where the stock is not overfished but there is a large swing in catch advice that may require suspending carryover. They also explained how carryover occurs – carryover can be up to 10% of the applicable sub-ACL provided the overall ACL was not exceeded. It also does not increase the total ACL. There was a question from a Herring AP member about ways to streamline the Area 1A transfer process.

RIVER HERRING AND SHAD MANAGEMENT MEASURES – CATCH CAPS

The PDT reviewed a draft table summarizing various catch cap approaches and discussed data needs. The PDT Chair suggested developing summary tables similar to those in Appendix I of the 2016-2018 specifications action document and will report out at the next PDT meeting. A PDT member recommended changing "biological" to "dynamic" in the description of the river herring catch cap proof-of-concept model from the 2024 river herring stock assessment, noting that the catch caps would be based on a reference period and would be able to increase and decrease with changes in abundance. ASMFC staff stated that the proof-of-concept model was not tied to biological reference points and explained that more work is required to create a maximum sustainable yield concept for river herring. The PDT Chair asked ASMFC staff whether they considered applying the proof-of-concept model for shad species. ASMFC staff explained that it was beyond the scope of the assessment, and that the ASMFC does not assess hickory shad, though there is a separate American shad assessment. A similar model could be developed for other species, but it would be significantly more work for hickory shad as there are no indices of abundance. A member of the public asked if there are any other catch cap methods being explored and suggested looking into the Alaskan pollock fishery and salmon bycatch caps.

AGENDA ITEM #2: MAY 26 PDT MEETING PLANNING

The PDT Chair outlined several potential topics for the May 26th PDT meeting, including: Area 1A transfer analysis, updates to the river herring/shad catch cap analysis and species distribution models, and any Atlantic herring stock assessment considerations that may arise. A Committee member asked if there would be further discussion about challenges with monitoring/ data availability, and strategies for overcoming some of these challenges. The PDT Chair noted that this would be included in discussion of the tradeoffs between different catch cap approaches.

FOLLOW-UP ITEMS

- Cournane, Bodell – note that the PDT supports leaving all specifications items in the 2026 action.
- Cournane, Bodell, Nordeen, Trudeau, Starks, Kerns, Didden – review Atlantic herring specifications regulatory text and propose clarifications/other revisions as appropriate.
- Cournane, Bodell – note that the PDT supported using a 10-year approach for Canadian catch averages in the management uncertainty buffer.
- Cournane, Bodell, Nordeen, Trudeau, Starks, Kerns – develop alternatives for carryover provisions.
- Cournane, Bodell – continue to develop working paper on catch caps.
- Cournane, Hocking, Bodell – draft river herring and shad catch cap data tables for PDT review.

With no other business, the PDT meeting adjourned at approximately 11:15 am.

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MEETING SUMMARY

Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team Webinar

via Webinar
May 26, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met on May 26, 2026, at 1:00 pm via webinar to discuss development of an action and PDT analysis for Atlantic herring specifications for 2027-2031, river herring and shad measures, and other measures, and other business, as necessary.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: Dr. Jamie Cournane (PDT Chair), Michelle Bachman, Emily Bodell, Julian Garrison (NEFMC); Dr. Daniel Hocking, Carrie Nordeen, Danielle Palmer, Marianne Randall (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Jon Deroba (NMFS/NEFSC); Dr. Matt Cieri (ME DMR); Dr. Micah Dean (MA DMF); James Boyle, Dr. Katie Drew, Toni Kerns, Caitlin Starks (ASMFC); Kevin Job, Kurt Gotschall (CT DEEP); J.A. Macfarlan (RI DEM); Jason Didden (MAFMC); Robert Atwood (NHFG) (PDT members and supporting analysts); Peter Whelan (Committee Chair); Dr. Maria Abate, Andrew Jacobs, Dr. Eric Palkovacs (Invited Speakers). In addition, about 24 other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The PDT discussed several potential topics and alternative sets for the 2026 management action, including the Atlantic herring specifications process, management uncertainty buffer options and other specifications, carryover provisions, and river herring and shad catch caps.
- The PDT received a presentation from the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) Natural Resources Division and the University of California on recent river herring bycatch genetics work, an overview of the Tribal connection to river herring, and historical and current monitoring and research efforts in the Menemsha Pond complex.

The PDT Chair opened the meeting at 1:00 pm. There were no changes to the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM #1: MANAGEMENT UPDATES

Council staff provided an update on quota monitoring for Atlantic herring, river herring and shad catch caps, and Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank haddock catch caps, as well as an overview of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Area 1A management measures.

AGENDA ITEM #2: OVERVIEW OF ADVISORY PANEL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS, MAY 20-21

Council staff reviewed the meeting motions from the Advisory Panel (AP) and Committee meetings. Staff asked the PDT about the fixed gear set-aside data. A PDT member offered to gather the data for the area west of Cutler, ME, which would likely have to be aggregated to maintain confidentiality. Staff plans to present this information at the June 8 AP and Committee meeting if available.

AGENDA ITEM #3: 2026 MANAGEMENT ACTION

Updates on the Atlantic herring stock assessment (Deroba)

The stock assessment scientist provided an update on the stock assessment. The final Canadian catch data has been received, and the stock assessment process will likely look similar to the research track stock assessment. The fall 2025 acoustic survey data is not available due to a calibration issue, but it should not impact the model run.

Draft regulatory text for the specifications process section (Nordeen)

GARFO staff worked with NOAA General Counsel to put together some draft text for Action 1, Alternative 2, streamlining the regulations and making process regulations less prescriptive. Council staff explained that they started working on potential regulation edits early to help understand the Council's intent and clarify what may need revisions.

Preliminary Area 1A transfer analysis (Nordeen)

GARFO staff presented a preliminary analysis of transfers from the Canadian weir fishery to the Area 1A sub-ACL for the past 10 years, including the Canadian landings reported to DFO through October 1st and whether or not the threshold was exceeded. The analysis also included the final reported landings to determine if the threshold was exceeded after October 1. Staff noted that the landings data used in the analysis are slightly different than the data provided for the assessment, and staff asked if the table should be revised with the assessment data. The data assessment scientist stated that the data used in the stock assessment undergoes more quality control than the initial landings data.

Preliminary analysis of carryover from 2025 to 2027 (Nordeen)

GARFO staff also provided preliminary 2025 catch data and potential carryover into 2027. There was an overage in Area 1B but is not large enough to be deducted based on the preliminary data. There likely would be carryover for the other three management areas.

Data discussion for river herring and shad estimates by gear (Hocking)

Dr. Hocking prompted some discussion from the PDT regarding the approach to use to summarize river herring and shad catches in the Atlantic herring fishery by gear type (midwater trawl, purse seine, and small-mesh bottom trawl). The river herring and shad catch caps estimation method (see 2016-2018 Specifications, Appendix I) is different than that used for ASMFC's 2024 benchmark stock assessment of river herring. In addition to the differences in stratification approaches, there are some changes due to CAMS. The PDT discussed using the prior catch cap method or taking a fresh look at the data. GARFO staff acknowledged that the same trip can stratify into multiple estimates depending on how trips are categorized. The PDT also talked about the 6,600 lb trip landings threshold for the catch caps, noting that it could be lowered to 2,000 lb, though this may pull in other fisheries (e.g., squid, mackerel, butterfish, menhaden). The approach could employ a mesh cutoff since trips are reported at the sub-trip level. The PDT acknowledged some challenges due to observer coverage and lower Atlantic herring effort in recent years. **The PDT supports using the CAMS modified approach to summarize the river herring and shad catch data by gear type (midwater trawl, purse seine, and small-mesh bottom year), year (2016-2025) and catch cap area (Gulf of Maine, Cape Cod, Southern New England/Mid Atlantic, and Georges Bank), and at two trip landings thresholds (2,000 lb and 6,600 lb landings of Atlantic herring)**.

Update on species distribution models for river herring and shad and Atlantic herring (Dean)

Dr. Dean presented an update on species distribution models for Atlantic herring, river herring, and shad. A PDT member appreciated moving away from using only bottom trawl sampling data as it is constrained to certain times of the year. They noted the importance of relaying that the probability of encounters (illustrated in the model, which is based on occurrence) does not equal magnitude of an encounter, though reducing the probability of an encounter would inherently reduce the magnitude. Dr. Dean agreed,

explaining that modeling magnitude may have a looser fit and would likely be similar. There was some discussion about potential closure areas, which could be different sizes and shapes based on occurrence data, though a static closure may not capture annual variation. Dr. Dean considered offering flexibility to capture shifting distributions, but there was not a strong signal. A PDT member relayed the importance of considering the impacts of certain areas, giving the example of scup closure areas that changed where scup bycatch occurred. The model could be used to confirm that closure areas would not have an adverse impact on fishing and the species.

Public Comment:

- **Jeff Kaelin (Lunds Fisheries, Herring Advisory Panel)** – asked how offshore survey abundance factored into the analysis. Dr. Dean explained that the model includes observations from all relevant surveys, including the NOAA offshore bottom trawl survey, were included, along with fishery observer data. These datasets help inform the probability of occurrence offshore. The datasets can also provide information on the probability of encountering species by environmental factors such as depth or temperature.
- **Kevin Job (CT DEEP)** – asked if increasing blueback herring run sizes would be reflected in the model. Dr. Dean noted that the important areas flagged in the model would likely be similar, and large changes over time are not expected. If blueback herring become more abundant, the PDT will want to ensure that this increase is accounted for in the information that helps inform closure areas. The PDT could make decisions regarding weighting species equally or if there are other appropriate strategies.

AGENDA ITEM #4: OVERVIEW OF RIVER HERRING RESEARCH, WAMPANOAG TRIBE OF GAY HEAD (AQUINNAH)

Dr. Maria Abate and Andrew Jacobs from the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) Natural Resources Division provided a description of the Tribal connection to river herring and some history of the fishery and stewardship in the Menemsha Pond complex, including ongoing research initiatives related to the river herring run. Dr. Eric Palkovacs (UCSC) presented an overview of recent genetics work, which examined the occurrence of Herring Creek alewife in bycatch events around southern New England. The study aimed to assess the differentiation of Herring Creek alewife from surrounding rivers and the occurrence of Herring Creek alewife in bycatch from 2012-2015.

Questions and Discussion

The PDT had some questions on the conversion rate used to estimate the number of individual fish. Dr. Palkovacs confirmed that the conversion rate was the same as that used in the Reid et. al. (2023) paper, which used bycatch expansion factors provided by MA DMF. Scientists applied a mixing proportion to the total number of fish caught as bycatch to break down the number into stock composition. A Committee member asked if there could be a path forward for time-area closures with a genetic composition component. Dr. Dean noted some potential challenges with the approach, including developing an assessment of the size of each reporting group. The PDT Chair noted that literature on the topic could be helpful for understanding the impacts of time-area closure options. The Committee member stated that certain areas may have more benefits to certain genetic groups and asked if there was a robust enough genetic library in the focus areas of the study. Dr. Palkovacs explained that the baseline data was fairly comprehensive but more fishery independent samples from offshore would be helpful to better identify marine migratory patterns. Dr. Abate commented that potential time area closures could protect river herring in certain areas, as well as donor populations for the Herring Creek run. Dr. Abate also underscored the importance of tribal ecological knowledge (TEK), which could be used to validate trends over time. A PDT member asked whether there has been work done to tie in mitochondrial DNA analysis. Dr. Palkovacs noted that their work mostly dealt with nuclear markers to look at whether there were multiple distinct populations of river herring, but there has not been a wide-ranging mitochondrial DNA study.

Public Comment:

- **Jeff Kaelin –** asked a few questions about the project, including whether the impacts were projected for small-mesh bottom trawl and midwater trawl gear separately or combined, the number of samples included, and whether information came from SAFIS dealer reports. Dr. Palkovacs stated that the data was combined across gear types, and data from thousands of genotyped fish was included in the analysis. Mr. Kaelin also recommended sharing the research with the ASMFC River Herring Technical Committee and was interested in seeing the magnitude of the fish offshore. Dr. Palkovacs noted that when certain reporting groups decline to low abundances, they are hard to detect in the samples, but that does not mean it is not present in bycatch.
- **Rich Hittinger –** asked if this analysis has been completed for other runs in southern New England. Dr. Palkovacs pointed to the Reid et al. paper, which includes the same analysis for other reporting areas, noting that the analysis completed for the Herring Creek population could be completed for other individual populations with the understanding that genetic differentiation is lower between neighboring populations.

With no other business, the PDT meeting adjourned at approximately 4:10 pm.