



New England Fishery Management Council

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DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team

Webinar

via Webinar

March 2, 2026

The Atlantic Herring Plan Development Team (PDT) met on March 2, 2026, at 11:30 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); Michelle Bachman, Emily Bodell, Dr. Rachel Feeney, Julian Garrison (NEFMC); Ashley Asci, Carrie Nordeen, Danielle Palmer, Marianne Randall, Ashley Trudeau (NMFS/GARFO); Dr. Jon Deroba (NMFS/NEFSC); Dr. Matt Cieri (ME DMR), Ben Gahagan, Dr. Micah Dean (MA DMF), James Boyle, Dr. Katie Drew, Emilie Franke (ASMFC), Kevin Job, Kurt Gotschall (CT DEEP), J.A. Macfarlan (RI DEM), Jason Didden (MAFMC), Robert Atwood (NHFG), Peter Whelan (Committee Chair), Kaitlynn Wade (UNC; Invited Speaker). In addition, about 13 other people attended.

KEY OUTCOMES

- The PDT reviewed the draft action plan for the 2026 Atlantic herring management action, including 2027-2031 specifications and river herring and shad measures.
- The PDT discussed current Atlantic herring specification items and possible items to remove from the list.
- The PDT received a draft report from the task 3 PDT sub-group, which examined the river herring and shad bycatch estimation methods, and discussed the group's recommendations.

AGENDA ITEM #1: 2026 MANAGEMENT ACTION

REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

Council staff reviewed a draft action plan for the 2026 Atlantic herring management action, which may be a framework or amendment depending on the management measures included in the action, and would likely require an environmental assessment. The Council is anticipated to review some draft alternatives (not specifications) in June, with final action slated for September.

REVIEW OF CURRENT ATLANTIC HERRING SPECIFICATION ITEMS

Council staff presented a list of items that are typically updated in each specifications action, including three values that have been set to zero in recent years (research set-aside, U.S. at-sea processing, and border transfer). The PDT discussed whether any of these items might be removed from the specifications process (see Attachment). A PDT member noted that trans-shipment is written into the Magnuson Act, and border transfer corresponds to that, so it may need to remain in the specifications. The research set-aside (RSA) has been set to 0 since 2023 due to low fishing quotas, but eliminating it altogether then

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adding it back to specifications would require re-establishing the RSA. The PDT felt that it may be best to keep RSA as a specifications item in case quotas increase and there is renewed interest in the program. The PDT also noted that they were not aware of any recent interest in U.S. at-sea processing, so that might be an item to remove. Council staff plan to flag this for discussion by the Herring Advisory Panel.

RIVER HERRING AND SHAD PDT TASK 3 REVIEW

Council staff reviewed the herring outlook by quarter, noting that the PDT will be completing river herring and shad tasking between now and June. The PDT started addressing these tasks with task 3, which called for the PDT to analyze and develop recommendations for improving the accuracy and precision of river herring catch estimates in the Atlantic herring fishery. A PDT sub-group completed this task, and the sub-group lead presented an overview and a draft report to the PDT. The sub-group recommended using a gear-specific global rate when data is available, but other methodological changes to increase observer data in the calculations did not improve accuracy or precision of estimates. The PDT chair asked about the next steps should the PDT forward the sub-group's recommendation. The work has been reviewed internally by GARFO APSD staff and likely would not have to undergo any additional peer review beyond the PDT since it is not a major methodological change. Council staff explained that an option to fully wrap up task 3 could be to present the work to the Committee, then if they forward the recommendation, the Council could write a letter to GARFO with some context for the conclusions. A PDT member supported the sub-group's recommendation but noted that it would be helpful to consider the recommendation as part of the river herring and shad tasking more broadly.

RHAPCAST PROJECT OVERVIEW

The PDT invited Kaitlynn Wade, a PhD student at the University of North Carolina, to provide a brief presentation on RHAPCAST, a river herring avoidance model developed under a Mid-Atlantic Council Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) project.

A PDT member asked if the model had been used to predict relative abundance. The researchers had not tried to estimate abundance using the current model, but are working on a new iteration of the model that may be able to provide abundance estimates. There was another question about how the model incorporated the migration ecology of river herring and shad, noting that in the spring, the fish move to inshore southern New England. The model currently uses sea surface temperature and the day of the year to track migration, but since the base model is data limited, it is difficult to answer these migration questions. There was also a question about whether the model would incorporate fishery dependent data – while the current model does not include fishery dependent data, it may be incorporated into the next version of the model. A member of the public asked if shapefiles of the model predictions are available, which Ms. Wade offered to provide if there is interest. Council habitat staff asked about the process for identifying areas with high target species abundance and low bycatch species abundance. The individual species presence/absence are estimated using separate general additive models, then researchers calculate the joint distribution by multiplying Atlantic herring probability by standardized river herring probability. The model included alewife and blueback herring in the river herring data. A PDT member suggested exploring modeling for each species, noting that the probability may be driven by one species more than the other, and flagged that the Council's catch caps include shad as well. A herring Advisor asked whether there was a way to validate the model using hindcasting and comparing it to large river herring bycatch events in the observer data. The model has been validated by hindcasting to a particular date and reviewing observer data with the maps to see how well presence/absence is predicted, and the model is able to correctly predict river herring presence and absence around 60% of the time.

FOLLOW-UP ITEMS

- Council Staff – add question for Advisory Panel regarding US at-sea processing to the herring specifications outline document; finalize river herring and shad task 3 report
- Dr. Courneau – poll for upcoming PDT and PDT subgroup meetings

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- PDT – reach out to Dr. Cournane with interest in participating in sub-groups

With no other business, the PDT meeting adjourned at approximately 1:00 pm.

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ATTACHMENT

Atlantic Herring Fishery Specifications Overview – DRAFT – Revised March 10, 2026

Specifications for the Atlantic herring fishery are annual amounts specified for the fishing year (January – December), and are typically updated every two years. Some of the specifications values such as the overfishing limit, acceptable biological catch, and annual catch limit are updated during each cycle based on new fishery data, stock assessment results, and other information sources. Other specifications have remained static in value for a number of years, such as border transfer, the fixed gear set-aside, and river herring and shad catch caps. The following table defines each herring fishery specification, including how frequently the values and/or methods are updated. Specifications that have remained set to 0 for a number of years are highlighted in green.

| Herring Fishery Specification | | Description |
|---|-----------------|--|
| Overfishing Limit (OFL) | | Updated every specifications action using ABC control rule |
| Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) | | Updated every specifications action using ABC control rule |
| Optimum Yield (OY)/Annual Catch Limit (ACL) | | Updated every specifications action; ABC - management uncertainty |
| Management Area sub-ACLs | Area 1A (28.9%) | Percentages have remained static; values updated every specifications action based on ACL |
| | Area 1B (4.3%) | |
| | Area 2 (27.8%) | |
| | Area 3 (39%) | |
| Management Uncertainty buffer | | Calculated as most recent 10-year average catch from the Canadian/ New Brunswick weir fishery |
| Domestic annual harvest (DAH) | | Equivalent to or less than ACL/OY; value updated every specifications action |
| Domestic annual processing (DAP) | | DAP = DAH – border transfer specification; value updated every specifications action |
| Border Transfer (BT) | | US-caught herring shipped to BT was set to 4,000 mt from start of herring FMP through 2018; revised to 0 mt for 2019 using an in-season adjustment. Has been set to 0 mt since 2019 |
| US at-sea processing (USAP) | | Has been set to 0 mt since 2010 |
| Fixed gear set-aside | | Allocated for fixed gear fisheries in Area 1A; Set to 30 mt since 2020 |
| Research set-aside (RSA) | | Grant process administered by NEFSC. Value is set as a percentage of the sub-ACL for any or all herring management areas, up to 3%. Has historically been either 0% or 3%; no herring RSA program in recent years, set to 0% since 2023. |
| River herring and shad (RH/S) catch caps | | Values set based on the reference period (2008-2014); current values have not changed since 2016. |

Definitions of Specifications currently set to 0 (Adapted from [Herring Framework 8](#))

Border Transfer: The Border Transfer (BT) specification is U.S.-caught herring transshipped to Canada via Canadian carrier vessels and used for human consumption. This specification is not a set-aside; rather, it is a maximum weight of Atlantic herring caught by U.S. vessels from Area 1A that can be transshipped to Canadian vessels for human consumption. GARFO tracks BT utilization through a separate dealer code. Note that setting border transfer at a value above 0 does not require that such transfers occur, but it provides the possibility for transfer, as opposed to, for example, selling the herring for bait.

US At-Sea Processing: The Atlantic Herring FMP states that “part of DAP may be allocated for at-sea processing by domestic vessels that exceed the vessel size limits” (Herring FMP, Section 3.6.6). This allocation will be called the ‘U.S. at-sea processing’ (USAP) allocation. The term ‘at-sea processing’ refers to processing activities that occur in the Exclusive Economic Zone outside state waters. When determining this specification, the Council will consider the availability of other processing capacity, development of the fishery, status of the resource, and opportunities for vessels to enter the herring fishery.” The USAP specification serves as a cap for USAP activities, it is not a separate allocation but a limit within the domestic catch limit to be used for this purpose.

During the 2007-2009 fishing years, the Council maintained a USAP specification of 20,000 mt (Areas 2/3 only) based on information received about a new at-sea processing vessel that intended to utilize a substantial amount of the USAP specification. At that time, landings from Areas 2 and 3 – where USAP is authorized – were considerably lower than allocated sub-ACLs for each of the past several years. Moreover, the specification of 20,000 mt for USAP did not restrict either the operation or the expansion of the shoreside processing facilities during the 2007-2009 fishing years. However, this operation never materialized, and none of the USAP specification was used during the 2007-2009 fishing years. The Council has set USAP at zero in each specifications cycle since 2010.

Herring AP: is there industry interest in conducting at-sea processing?

Research Set-Aside: The Research Set-Aside (RSA) program is a competitive grants process administered by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. Proposals are requested for research, and incoming proposals are reviewed and ranked by a technical body. With competitive grants awarded through this process, different entities will apply. In the past, the Council has allocated either 0% or 3% of the sub-ACL for each management area for the RSA program. The regulations allow a set-aside of up to 3% in any or all herring management areas. The RSA program has not been active in recent years, and the set-aside has been set to 0% since 2023.