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## Penobscot salmon total hits 168, lampreys thriving

Posted on **May 24, 2012**

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**Mitch Simpson of the Department of Marine Resources' Bureau of Sea-Run Fisheries and Habitat checked in on Wednesday with his weekly report on activity at the Veazie Dam fish trap on the Penobscot River.**

Of foremost concern to many, Atlantic salmon are still showing up in good numbers at the trap, which is staffed by Simpson and his colleagues. Many of those fish — especially early in the run — are transported to the Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery in Orland, where they will serve as broodstock.

As of Wednesday, this year's run stood at 168 salmon; Since Simpson's last report, which he filed on May 17, a total of 98 salmon made their way to Veazie.

The 168 fish is a solid start to the season: Since the Veazie trap was first used in 1978, more fish have arrived by May 23 only once. In 2011, 233 salmon had arrived by that date.

Salmon are certainly the stars of the show, but the fish trap crew tracks all kinds of arrivals at the dam.

For example, the number of river herring remained unchanged this week, and stands at 19 for the season. Two brook trout made their way into the trap, as did an additional 82 white suckers (making the seasonal total 165). Also, the first 33 smallmouth bass of the season were caught in the trap.



Researcher Steve Coghlan Jr. holds a sea lamprey that was found nearly dead in the Sedgeunkedunk Stream in Brewer in June of 2011. (BDN PHOTO BY GABOR DEGRE)

The most eye-popping number, however, was this: An additional 1,583 sea lampreys made their way to Veazie over the past six days, leaving the seasonal total at 2,330.

A year ago, just 2,125 sea lampreys were counted all season.

Sea lampreys have a relatively short spawning season, with lampreys arriving in the Penobscot over a few short weeks. The lampreys find freshwater streams, where they build nests; then they spawn and die. By late June last year, the run was over.

Last June I spent the day with lamprey researchers from the University of Maine, who explained that Segeunkedunk Stream in Brewer is serving as a lamprey lab during an ongoing project that will track the effects of the removal of dams on the Penobscot as part of the Penobscot River



Researchers said there is some evidence that the presence of lampreys may be beneficial to returning Atlantic salmon, because while building their own nests, the lampreys remove silt and seem to create a streambed that would be more suitable for spawning salmon.

And as researchers pointed out at the time, lampreys have gotten a bad rap in recent years: Non-native lampreys are blamed on decimating the lake trout population in part of the Great Lakes region.

Here, researchers said, they're native, and don't pose the same problems.

With the first dam removal of the project slated to begin in June, it will be interesting to monitor a variety of species that have had upriver access blocked for generations.

The lamprey — maligned or misunderstood by many — is just one of those species.

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