

BENTON ALEWIFE HARVEST HISTORY

Since 2009 the Town of Benton has harvested species of river herring, anadromous species, commonly called alewives and bluebacks, contracting the work to capable professional fishermen. The first harvest netted the Town over \$19,000. In 2005 the Town had been granted harvesting rights on the Sebasticook River by the Maine Department of Marine Resources [DMR], based on recorded history of traditional harvesting here until about 1811. At Town Meeting each year since 2005 voters have approved the necessary annual ordinances to harvest the fish and to sell them. We began to harvest when the Ft. Halifax Dam was removed.

The Town also purchased land in 2009 along the shore that guarantees access for a harvest, and public access for canoes, kayaks, anglers and eagle watchers. In practice the harvest occurs at the Benton Falls Dam, courtesy of Benton Falls Associates and the kindness of Mrs. Leta Young. We are fortunate to benefit greatly from their generosity.

We depend on the expert advice of the DMR assuring that the run of fish is sustainable; we start in early May, when they determine sufficient numbers have been lifted upstream of the dam. We stop when they find that daily numbers of migrating blueback herring exceed alewives. The cooperation of dam operators, harvesters, State officials, and neighbors has ensured success and substantial economic benefit to the Town. Thanks to the hard work and ingenuity of contracted harvester Ron Weeks and his partners, income has doubled for the past five years.

Numbers of river herring successfully passing upstream to spawn in Sebasticook Lake and Lake Winnecook increased from 50,000 in 2005 to over 3,500,000 in 2021, averaging nearly 4 million in each of the last few years. In 2022 the Sebasticook River counted an additional 837,000 fish migrating to spawn in China Lake thanks to the completed Alewife Restoration Initiative, supported in a small way by Benton voters.

BENTON'S HARVEST

2009	\$19,108.32	2015	\$4,196.00
2010	13,843.00	2016	12,766.60
2011	16,348.20	2017	24,959.00
2012	14,513.40	2018	40,370.00
2013	17,722.26	2019	71,988.00
2014	20,419.66	2020	37,378.98
2021	\$64,425.00	2022	91,530.00
Total Income: \$449,564.42			

Richard Lawrence
Alewife Warden