Alewives, Other Anadromous Fish and Brook Trout

Brook Trout: Like Atlantic salmon, brook trout require excellent water quality and habitat in order to survive. They serve as the "canary in the coal mine" for our rivers and streams, because they are among the first species to disappear when water quality or habitat are degraded. The presence of brook trout in a stream is an indicator of excellent stream health. Brook trout are also Maine's most popular freshwater game fish. Among Maine's first tourist destination resorts were the excellent brook trout fisheries in the Rangeley Lakes, Moosehead Lake, and the Belgrade Lakes.

Alewives: Alewives are the most numerous anadromous (fish that spawn in freshwater but return to the ocean to feed and grow) fish in most Maine rivers. A small herring, they spawn in lakes, ponds, and slow flowing sections of streams in May and early June, and their young descend the rivers to the ocean in late summer and fall. In the ocean they grow to about 9-12 inches, then return to the lake or pond where they were born. Because of their great numbers--Maine's larger rivers historically supported millions of alewives every spring--alewives formed the basis for important local commercial fisheries. Alewives are still harvested where runs are healthy. Most are used for lobster bait; a few are still smoked for human consumption.Alewives are also a critical source of forage for a variety of fish, bird, and mammal species. Because they arrive at the height of the bird breeding season, alewives provide critical forage for ospreys, bald eagles, and other fish eating birds.

Photo Credit Maine Department of Marine Resources

Other anadromous fish: Maine rivers also support runs of shad, and blueback herring (both very similar to alewives, but typically present in smaller numbers). Shad are an important gamefish where populations are healthy, frequently referred to as "the poor man's salmon". American eels are a catadromous fish, meaning that they spawn in salt water, then return to rivers and lakes to grow up. Maine has commercial fisheries for all life stages of American eel.

Shared Streams

Shared Streams is a national riparian conservation program of the American Forest Foundation