

# CONNECTICUT RIVER ATLANTIC SALMON COMMISSION

## Connecticut River

# Sea Lamprey

*The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission and its member agencies are working with partners to restore Atlantic salmon, American shad, and other migratory fish to the Connecticut River basin through fisheries management including hatchery production and release of salmon, harvest management, habitat restoration, fishway construction, dam removal, research and public education.*



CONNECTICUT RIVER  
ATLANTIC SALMON  
COMMISSION

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### Sea Lamprey Trivia

- (1) Adult sea lamprey are how long? (a) 1 foot (b) 2-3 feet (c) 4 feet (d) 5-6 feet
- (2) Lampreys are good for Atlantic salmon because they:  
(a) clean out streambed sediment when they build nests (b) fertilize the stream when they die (c) do not usually prey on salmon in freshwater (d) all of the above
- (3) A female lamprey produces about how many eggs?  
(a) 100,000 (b) 200,000 (c) 300,000 (d) 500,000
- (4) Sea lamprey are not a threat to recreational and commercial fisheries in the Connecticut River (a) true (b) false
- (5) How long do sea lampreys live in in the ocean? (a) 10 years (b) 5 years (c) 1-2 years (d) 4-6 months

Trivia Question Answers: (1) b (2) d (3) b (4) a (5) c

## Lamprey Facts: Did You Know?

- Sea lamprey adults return from the ocean in May and spawn in June;
- Lamprey nests, built by the males from gravel, form hummocky grooves in the streambed that are free of silt and sediment;
- When the adults die after spawning, their bodies return elements from the ocean, called micronutrients, to the stream; These nutrients are used by the tiniest plants and animals, like diatoms, protozoans, and algae, which are then filtered out and eaten by the young lamprey larvae;
- Lamprey larvae soon burrow into the silty or muddy part of the streambed where they remain and grow to a length of 6 inches and an age of about 5 years before they migrate to the ocean;
- In the ocean, lampreys become parasites, sucking the blood from host fish using special teeth to tear the fish's flesh and secreting anticoagulants to keep the blood flowing;
- When lampreys return to spawn in freshwater, they lose their teeth so they cannot feed and they become blind and defenseless;

### When Lampreys Are Unwelcome

Sea lamprey are not native but have adapted to life in Lake Champlain and the upper Great Lakes. In those waters, the lamprey feed on lake trout and other fish during their adult or "ocean" phase and reproduce in tributaries to the lakes. That's why lamprey are considered to be a problem there and why their populations are managed in those lakes and not in the Connecticut River.



Sea lamprey parasitizing a lake trout.

**American eel** Sea lamprey look like American eels but lampreys have no bones, no jaw, no paired fins, and the two have very different lifestyles.



The most sea lamprey ever recorded in the Connecticut River is 101,758 in 1998.

### Status of Lamprey

- The Connecticut River once supported the largest native sea lamprey population on the East Coast and numbers now range around 30-50,000 lampreys monitored annually;
- Lampreys benefit from fish passage facilities constructed for other species;

### Lamprey Geography

- Lampreys range from Labrador to Florida on the East Coast and in Europe;
- Within the Connecticut River, they range well north in NH and VT;

To find out how many sea lamprey have returned to the Connecticut River, call the Fish Hotline: 413-548-9628