



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES

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Production of the prized Atlantic coast shad, which has fallen off 80 percent in the Chesapeake Bay and has shown similar declines in most of the once important shad waters along the coast, may be restored through a program which is now before several of the states for consideration, Coordinator of Fisheries Harold L. Ickes announced today.

Problems of the shad fishery of the Chesapeake Bay watershed have recently been under consideration by a committee composed of representatives of the states of Maryland and Virginia and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The committee's recommendations for restoring the shad fisheries of the Bay to their full productivity were presented by the chairman, Louella E. Cable of the Fish and Wildlife Service, at a recent meeting of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The 3-point program outlined by state and federal representatives calls for (1) adoption of a management plan by Virginia and continuation of the licensing plan already adopted by Maryland; (2) development of pond cultivation of shad to hasten recovery of the runs; and (3) continuing observations - biological and statistical - of the progress of recovery under this program.

In spite of heavy wartime demands for increased production in the fisheries, the shad in most areas are so depleted that it will be necessary to take a smaller percentage of the runs during the next several years in order to obtain more food from this resource in the future, Coordinator Ickes said.

In the Hudson River, where the shad fisheries were almost wiped out early in the present century, the runs have made a remarkable recovery and fishermen are able to catch as many shad as were taken 50 years ago. In the opinion of conservationists, even larger catches could now be made safely in the Hudson.

The present heavy runs in the Hudson, which began in 1936, are attributed to the fact that fishing intensity was reduced by economic conditions, giving the runs a chance to build up. Soon after 1900, shad had become so scarce in the Hudson that most fishermen had to go out of business. In 1889 the catch was 4,000,000 pounds; in 1916, 40,000. With little fishing being done, natural recovery of abundance followed.

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The plan now proposed for the Chesapeake is an effort to stop the present decline before fishermen are forced out of business as they were in the Hudson, and to bring about a similar recovery of abundance by a moderate and controlled reduction of the fishing rate.

Chesapeake Bay fishermen once made annual catches of 17,000,000 pounds of shad. The fish are now so scarce that the yield is only about 3,000,000 pounds. The decline in Maryland waters has been particularly severe: fishermen take only half a million pounds, compared with 7,000,000 in 1890.

Chief cause of the decline in the Chesapeake is believed to be heavy fishing. In recent years, Bay fishermen have been netting as many as 90 percent of all the shad coming in from the ocean, biologists have found. This leaves only 10 percent of the runs to spawn, and the annual replacement of the young fish has been inadequate.

Last year, because many fishermen had gone to war, about 70 percent of the runs were taken, but experts of the Fish and Wildlife Service believe this percentage is still too high to permit complete recovery of abundance.

The State of Maryland assumed control of fishing intensity in its waters two years ago, when the legislature passed a law requiring all fishermen to be licensed. As licenses lapse through non-renewal, the Tidewater Fisheries Commission is thus given the opportunity to retire the license, reducing the amount of fishing done. When the shad population increases sufficiently, the Commission is authorized to issue additional licenses.

Maryland fishermen have generally favored the licensing plan because under this system their fishing rights acquire greater value and their incomes rise as the fish become more abundant. Without licensing, an increase in the number of fish brings a corresponding increase in the number of fishermen, so that individual profits are no greater.

Under the program recommended to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, which consists of representatives from 12 coastal states, a plan similar to the Maryland law would be put into effect in Virginia, so that the entire Chesapeake Bay would have uniform regulations for the restoration of the shad fisheries.

Representatives of other coastal states where shad have become scarce are also considering the application of a similar program in their own waters.

North Carolina, which furnishes most of the shad to reach northern markets early in the spring, has seen its catches drop from nearly 9,000,000 pounds in 1897 to 800,000 in 1940. In South Carolina only 50,000 pounds are now taken, compared with 600,000 in the 1890's. Georgia's shad catches amount to only about 150,000 pounds; Florida's to 344,000.

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