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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Encouraged by the complete restoration of the shad runs of the Hudson River and a noticeable improvement in the condition of the Chesapeake Bay snad fisheries, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service next week will begin a study of the shad in the Delaware River, where commercial catches are now less than one percent of the 1890 level.

The study will be the first scientific investigation of the shad ever made in the Delaware, which once produced 15,000,000 pounds annually but now yields from 100,000 to 150,000 pounds. Pollution, which has been especially severe in the lower part of the river where the shad probably spawned in greatest numbers, is regarded as a major cause of the decline.

The States of the Delaware River basin--New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware--have developed a program for the control of pollution in the Delaware which is expected to be put into effect immediately after the war. At the same time, the Fish and Wildlife Service expects to have its recommendations for the restoration of the shad ready to submit to the State Conservation Departments.

Delayed somewhat by the cold spring, the shad are now entering the Delaware Bay in numbers and the first runs may have reached the spawning grounds in the river. The shad, which is one of the choicest food fishes of the Atlantic Coast, comes in from the ocean each spring to deposit its eggs in fresh water, and is accessible to commercial fishermen for only a brief season.

The study being undertaken this year will be directed by Louella Cable, biologist of the Service, and will attempt to answer three basic questions: the location of the principal spawning grounds, the percentage of eggs that hatch and survive the delicate early stages of life, and the percentage of the runs of adult fish that are taken in the commercial fisheries. To answer the third question, a number of shad will be tagged and samples of scales will be collected from the commercial catch. By studying the scales, biologists are able to tell how many times a fish has previously entered the river to spawn, and from this information calculate the intensity of the fishery.

It was reported recently by Service biologists that in 1939 Chesapeake Bay shad fishermen caught 92 percent of all the shad that entered the Bay in the course of the annual spring migration. Last year, with the number of fishermen reduced

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by war conditions, only 77 percent of the fish were caught and a large increase in the number of spawners has already been noticed.

On the Hudson River, present catches of shad are the largest in history, representing a remarkable recovery from a level proportionately as low as that now existing in the Delaware. The recovery is believed to have been brought about by a reduction in the intensity of the fishery through economic causes and legal regulation.