



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Fish Restoration Exhibit at Gilbert Stuart Birthplace

Date: Friday, April 25, 2008

Location: Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum

DEM is highlighting efforts to restore fish populations through the help of an exhibit at the Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum that demonstrates how River herring and American can get past dams to survive.

River herring are anadromous fish that live in the ocean and migrate upstream to spawn in freshwater. Migration can begin as early as March and extend through May. River herring were valued for food in the 1700s and are used for bait and fish meal today. River herring are also an essential part of Rhode Island's ecosystem, and their protection is important to the natural resources landscape of the state. Their loss has upset the natural balance of nature, and their restoration will help to correct that balance. Because of a decline in numbers of returning fish, the river herring fishery is currently closed.

American eels are catadromous fish that live in fresh water and migrate to the ocean to breed. Migration usually takes place in the fall. American eels are economically very important to the East Coast and rivers where they travel. They are caught by fishermen and sold, eaten, or kept as pets. Eels also help the Atlantic coast ecosystem by eating dead fish, invertebrates and insects.

Since 1966, Rhode Island has undertaken numerous efforts to restore fish populations, including building fish ladders to allow fish access to upstream habitats. DEM currently manages 21 fish runs, which include 9 fishways, throughout the state for river herring, and we are working on five additional proposed runs. The Gilbert Stuart fish ladder is an Alaska steepass which effectively passes fish upstream of the dam so that they can spawn in Gilbert Stuart Pond. An American eel ramp is also located at Gilbert Stuart and is one of the sites where DEM conducts eel surveys.



**The Gilbert Stuart fish ladder is on the right.
The American eel ramp is on the left.**

The Gilbert Stuart House, built in 1662, is the birthplace of the renowned early American portrait painter as well as the site of the first snuff mill (powered by a water wheel) and a grist mill used to grind corn for Johnnycakes.

The river herring and American eel exhibits will be part of the Museum's **Spring Fair** on **Sunday, April 27 from 1 to 4 p.m.** Patrons can also view the migration of river herring through an underwater camera. The Fair also includes tours of the museum and arts and crafts and the mill will be grinding corn.

Interviews:

- Kimberly Sullivan, Aquatic Resource Education Coordinator, DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife – talked about the exhibits featuring River herring and American eels and efforts to restore fish populations
- Peg O'Connor, Executive Director of the Gilbert Stuart Museum provided information about Gilbert Stuart and the Museum and the details of the of the Spring Fair



The Gilbert Stuart Birthplace and Museum is open to the public. For more information, visit www.gilbertstuartmuseum.org or call (401) 294-3001.