

PPL Reports Record Shad Migration; Public Invited to Tour Holtwood Dam to See Migrating Fish

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PPL's Holtwood Environmental Preserve is reporting a record-breaking migration of American shad in the lower Susquehanna River, perhaps the largest run in a century.

(Photo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/19981015/PHTH025>)

Since their annual upstream migration began in late April, more than 82,500 shad have passed over modern shad lifts at the Holtwood dam in southern Lancaster County, surpassing all previous records, said Mark Arbogast, land management superintendent at PPL Holtwood.

PPL opened its Holtwood fish lifts in 1997 after two years of construction and 20 years of planning within a public-private shad restoration partnership. The Holtwood lifts, the largest of their kind in the United States, provide safe passage into spawning areas for American shad and other migratory fish such as blueback herring and striped bass.

"The shad population, which had been depleted for many years, is increasing as a result of these modern lifts. PPL is proud to be part of the historic shad restoration program on the lower Susquehanna River," Arbogast said. "We look forward to the day when the Susquehanna River basin reopens to recreational fishing and anglers can once again experience the thrill of casting for bountiful spring harvests of shad."

The shad's success story in the lower Susquehanna River will be part of President George W. Bush's agenda when he speaks at the Safe Harbor Hydroelectric Plant in nearby Conestoga, Pa., on Friday (5/18). PPL and Constellation Energy Group of Baltimore, Md., own the facility, which has a modern shad lift similar to the ones at Holtwood.

There are four hydroelectric dams with fish lifts between the Chesapeake Bay and Harrisburg, Pa. -- Conowingo, Safe Harbor, York Haven and Holtwood. The lifts extend the area accessible to the shad by about 200 miles on the Susquehanna River.

"State and federal resource agencies and the hydroelectric project operators are extremely pleased with the fish passage results this year," said Richard St. Pierre, Susquehanna River fisheries coordinator for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The count at Holtwood dam has been particularly impressive."

The public will have a unique opportunity to get a close-up look the migrating shad on Saturday, May 19. PPL will present guided tours of the shad lifts at Holtwood dam every 30 minutes from 1 to 4 p.m. Visitors will be able to see the silvery fish and learn about their habitat and life cycle from PPL naturalists.

Call 717-284-2278 to register for an open time slot.

Children must be 10 or older. The tour is not handicapped-accessible. No cameras are allowed, and visitors must wear closed-toe shoes.

Modern fish lifts work like elevators, safely carrying the shad over the dam and channeling them into the river, where they continue their upstream migration to historic spawning areas in the Susquehanna River watershed. Before the lifts, shad were caught in Maryland and transported by truck beyond the dams on the Susquehanna River.

The spring spawning run of American shad in the Susquehanna River is the largest in about 100 years, St. Pierre said.

He said the exceptional shad run is most likely related to the successful stocking program and a good survival

rate among the shad larvae released from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's Van Dyke Hatchery on the Juniata River.

Favorable river conditions at Holtwood are also enhancing the shad's attraction into the lifts, St. Pierre added.

Fish lift operations began at Holtwood on April 27, and record daily counts of more than 5,000 shad occurred through May 11.

The all-time season high of 34,700 fish in 1999 was surpassed on May 7, after only 11 days of operation, St. Pierre noted. By May 14, more than 82,500 shad migrated past Holtwood. The migration seasons typically ends in June.

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