

Chalker Millpond Fishway

Chalker Millpond Fishway allows migratory fish to travel between the ocean and upland freshwater. The Fishway is a result of ongoing efforts by the State of Connecticut, the Town of Old Saybrook, local conservation organizations such as the Old Saybrook Land Trust, and private landowners cooperating to reestablish fish migration routes. Historically, the Oyster River watershed supported a significant migratory fish population. Anadromous fish species live primarily in the ocean and migrate to freshwater streams to spawn. Two examples of anadromous fish are alewife and blue-back herring, which travel thousands of miles from the sea to spawn in the fresh water upper reaches of the Oyster River. Over time, many of these fish passage routes were blocked by the construction of dams and roadway cross-culverts. At Chalker Millpond, the flow of water through the fish ladder allows these spawning fish to pass around the dam and access the millpond and upstream waters.

Other fish species, including the American eel, live in the freshwater reaches of the upland rivers and ponds and use these fish ladders to return to the sea to spawn. Fish species that follow this reverse spawning migration are referred to as catadromous. Reestablishing these spawning routes contributes to maintaining healthy Atlantic and freshwater fish populations. The millpond also provides habitat for a variety of species of aquatic life, birds and small mammals. Pairs of nesting waterfowl raise their young in the pond. Painted turtles and amphibians can sometimes be viewed from the shore.



Access to historical spawning habitat allows the alewife and blueback herring populations to grow. Animals such as the osprey and river otter rely on these fish for food.

THE ANADROMOUS LIFE CYCLE of Alewife & Blueback Herring

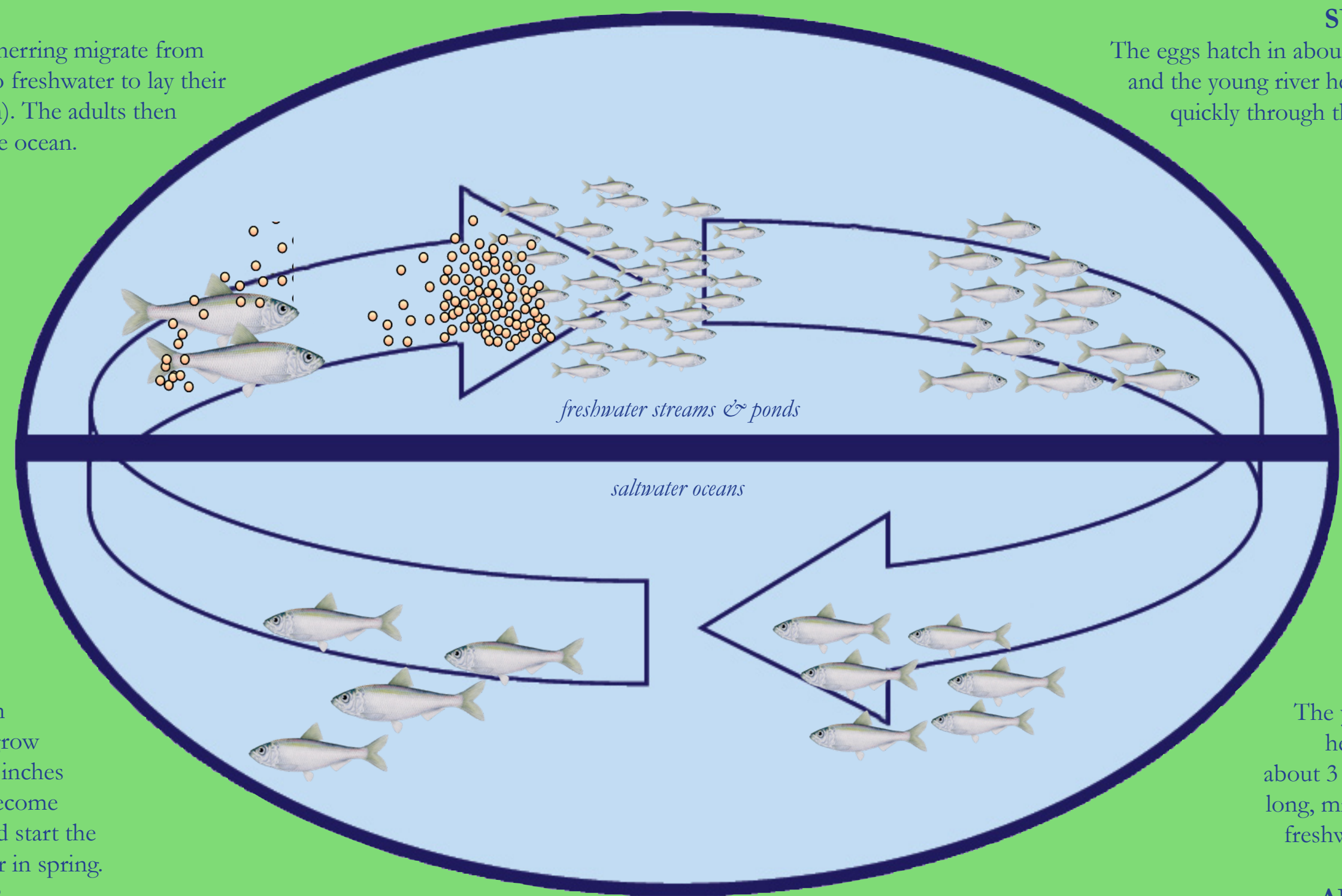
Many fish species live in the ocean but migrate to fresh water to spawn; these species are referred to as “anadromous” (Greek: *ana* means up; *dromos* means running).

SPRING

Adult river herring migrate from the ocean to freshwater to lay their eggs (spawn). The adults then return to the ocean.

SUMMER

The eggs hatch in about one week, and the young river herring grow quickly through the summer.



The young river herring will spend up to four years in the ocean, grow to about 12 inches in length, become an adult, and start the process over in spring.
WINTER

The young river herring, now about 3 to 4 inches long, migrate from freshwater to the ocean.
AUTUMN

Illustration Credit: Connecticut DEP

NATURAL HERITAGE TOUR

Town of Old Saybrook



A self-guided tour of open spaces throughout Old Saybrook, Connecticut

The Natural Heritage Tour is brought to you by the Old Saybrook Conservation Commission, the Old Saybrook Parks & Recreation Commission, and The Rockfall Foundation.

Northwest Highlands & Oyster River

The Northwest Highlands is one of seven significant resource areas within Old Saybrook; these areas are discussed in more detail in the Plan of Conservation & Open Space, Town of Old Saybrook, April 2004. The report identifies some of Old Saybrook’s natural areas, open spaces and often-unrecognized assets.

The most rugged area of our town, the Northwest Highlands contains our highest elevations—rocky summits, many with interspersed vernal pools. Pequot Swamp is a vegetated marsh surrounded by ledge and upland. This area of town contains red maple and cedar swamps. The Northwest Highlands also includes the headwaters of the Oyster River—connecting cold springs, intermittent streams and narrow, winding brooks that drain to Long Island Sound. This watershed is home to migratory fish species, including alewife and blueback herring, that travel thousands of miles from where they spend their life at sea to spawn in the upper reaches of the Oyster River. The Oyster River contains a complete suite of healthy tidal marshes, from salt to freshwater, that support a great diversity of wildlife, including birds, fish and shellfish.

