

Partnership aims to return shad to Brandywine

By ADAM TAYLOR
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THE FISH LADDER

A fish ladder is a structure – usually a ramp or a series of pools and relatively low steps – that migratory fish can swim through to get around dams and other manmade barriers.

Several thousand shad fry were released into the Brandywine near the Hagley Museum and Library on Tuesday in the latest effort to boost awareness of an ongoing program aimed at repopulating the waterway with the once-plentiful gamefish.

The migratory shad used to come up the river to spawn, but 11 dams blocked their path from the Atlantic Ocean long ago. The Brandywine Conservancy and local, state and federal wildlife officials want to fix that by removing some of the dams, cutting large chunks from others and building ladders, rock ramps or diversion channels around the rest.

A replenished shad population would help the local economy, as anglers love to catch the fish and diners love to eat them, said Robert Lonsdorf, the conservancy's senior planner. The fish would also make wildlife along the banks more plentiful, because shad is food for herons, minks and foxes. Shad also are historically significant, once so plentiful they played important roles in the lives of American Indians and early European settlers. Writer John McPhee has called them America's "founding fish."

Parthena Moisiadis and Louis Connelly, eighth-grade students at Wilmington Friends School, recently wrote a report about how dams on the Brandywine hurt its shad population. They also wrote Wilmington Mayor

James M. Baker, asking him to apply for federal grants to build ladders or ramps at the two city-owned dams. Baker wrote back, telling them the city was looking for money to do just that.

"It's nice to see that we're doing something to work on the dams that have stopped the shad from getting to this part of the river," Moisiadis said. "They still have a place here," Connelly added. "They are still a part of our culture."

A 2005 study concluded that restoring shad to the river is possible if the dams are removed or altered. The study estimates the cost could range from \$1 million to \$3.5 million.

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control owns two of the dams and has received \$250,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to remove them. One of the dams is expected to be gone by the end of the year.

Baker has applied for \$535,000 to build a rock ramp at one of the city-owned dams and a fish ladder at the other. Sherri Evans-Stanton, director of the conservancy's Environmental Management Center, said the city is expected to receive the money soon.

A study to see whether shad could



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Zach Stevenson (left) of the Brandywine Conservancy and Craig Shirey, a DNREC fisheries biologist, release shad fry into the Brandywine on Tuesday.

flourish if dams on the Pennsylvania section of the Brandywine were removed or altered will begin soon, Evans-Stanton said.

The fry released Tuesday are about 2 weeks old, a half-inch long and look more like tadpoles than the silver gamefish they will become. Heading downstream, they will be able to easily navigate the dams on their route down the Brandywine, then into the Christina River, to the Delaware River, into Delaware Bay and then into the Atlantic Ocean.

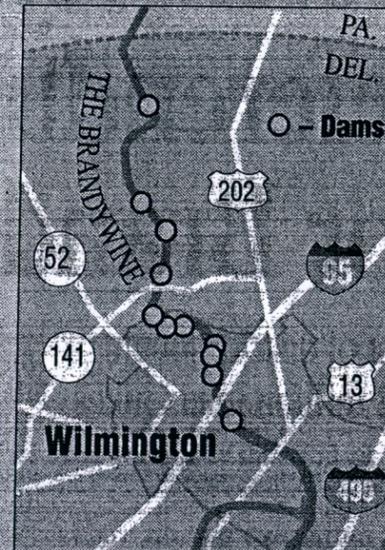
They will spend three to six years in the ocean before returning to the Brandywine to spawn. By then, some of the shad will be 30 inches long and weigh 8 pounds.

Those involved with the dam project hope that the path home will be ready for them by then. As it is now, the shad can't make it upstream past the southernmost dam, at West Street in Wilmington.

The next steps for the project are to find the rest of the money needed from private or government sources. Creat-

Brandywine shad restoration

Wildlife officials want to enable shad to swim up the Brandywine to spawn by removing some of the 11 dams on the creek, cutting portions out of others and altering the rest so that shad could cross them.



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ing partnerships between public agencies and community groups is also critical, Lonsdorf said.

"If we don't do that, it will fail," he said.

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For Your Information
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