

# Fish and Fisheries

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Susquehanna River was greatly misused. Erosion and pollution caused by poor agricultural practices and intensive logging of the watershed, dumping of sewage and industrial waste, and acid drainage from coal mining harmed the river and its wildlife.

Today, however, the Susquehanna River is an abundant and productive fishery. Federal and state water protection regulations, in concert with increased public awareness and cleaner industrial practices, have improved water quality. Now the river is prime habitat for smallmouth and largemouth bass, walleye, American shad, channel catfish, and muskellunge.

Shad, unlike the bass, are native to the river, but their numbers have fluctuated. Several hundred years ago, great numbers of shad regularly traveled over 600 miles from the sea, up the Chesapeake, and eventually to the Susquehanna's tributaries and head-waters to spawn. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mill and canal dams and hydroelectric facilities blocked migration routes, and industrial development degraded water quality. This, along with over-fishing, virtually eliminated the shad.

In the 1970s and 1980s, state and federal fishery agencies and environmental groups joined forces to clean up the river. The first major fish lift for shad was constructed at Conowingo Dam in 1991. All dams now have fish lifts, and the population of shad, alewife and blueback herring in the river is increasing.

"Todd" Curtis Smith and brother dipping for shad in the Susquehanna between the McCall's Ferry Power Company Dam (present day Holtwood Dam) and concrete construction bridge, June 1, 1909.

Courtesy York County Heritage Trust



Fishing for shad, Susquehanna Flats, MD, circa 1900.

Courtesy Richard St. Pierre, USGS



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Lancaster - York Heritage Region  
Susquehanna River Water Trail

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