



Eelways at Burton's, Betts, and Millsboro Ponds

Project Installation Completed
October 2017

Andrew McGowan at Burton's Pond

An eelway (fish ladder) to allow passage of migrating larval eels was designed and installed at the Burton's Pond dam on Herring Creek. Nonfunctional eelways at Millsboro and Betts Ponds were rehabilitated.

Background

Dams constructed on waterways of the Inland Bays to power historic mills block the passage of migratory fish such as the American Eel, which spends most of its life in freshwater. Migrating out of freshwater environments, adult eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea, an area between the Bahamas and Bermuda, and die after spawning. The fertilized eggs mature into juveniles while drifting with ocean currents up the Atlantic coast. Once the eggs have developed into juveniles, the juvenile eels migrate from the ocean back to coastal estuaries and up into freshwater areas in late winter and early spring. Allowing eels access to former habitat blocked by dams is critical for their conservation.

Project Description

The Center installed or repaired eelways on three dams that previously blocked migration of larval eels from Indian River and Herring Creek to upstream freshwater habitats. The devices are long tubes, lined with netting, that allow young eels to "climb over" the dams and swim to tributaries on the other side.

Objective

The passages constructed at these three sites are intended to help young eels pass over dams and reach the upstream habitats they need to mature. If functioning as designed, they will open an estimated 85 miles of freshwater streams that were previously unavailable to migrating eels in the Inland Bays watershed.

Project Contact

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Partner

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Division of Fish and Wildlife

Contractor

RK&K Engineering

Budget and Funding Partners

The total cost of the project was \$16,308. This included design, permitting, and construction (materials and labor).

Funding: US Environmental Protection Agency

Project Timeline

Eelway designs were completed in July 2017. Construction was completed in October 2017. The eelways will be monitored regularly to ensure that they are functioning.



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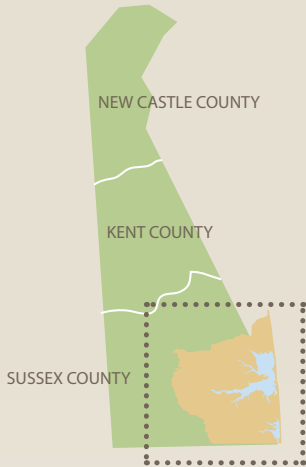
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"Delaware has one of the most important juvenile nurseries for American eels along the Atlantic coast of the United States."

— JORDAN ZIMMERMAN, DNREC
FISHERIES BIOLOGIST

INLAND BAYS WATERSHED



CCMP Focus Area

This project fulfills objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) for the Delaware Inland Bays:

Focus Area: Managing Living Resources and their Habitat

Objective: Provide access for native migratory fish to upstream areas for use as spawning and/or nursery sites.

Monitoring conducted by DNREC shows that the Indian River attracts higher numbers of juvenile eels than any other monitoring location routinely sampled in the Mid-Atlantic. On average, nearly 300,000 are collected at the Millsboro Pond dam each season.

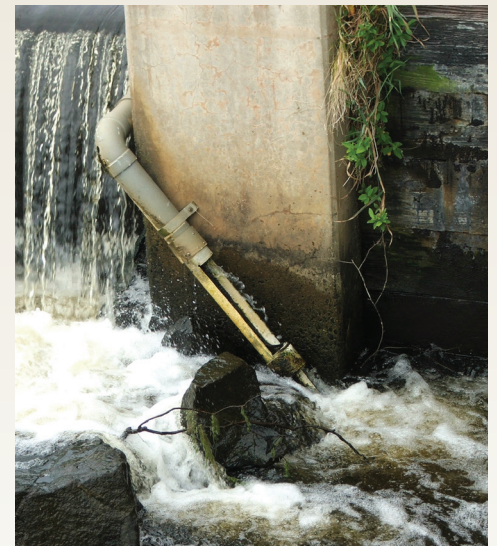
American Eels are a valuable food source for birds and other fish, and they serve as hosts in the reproductive cycle of certain freshwater mussel species. Eels also are fished commercially for bait and human consumption.



'Eel mops' help to monitor baby eels in several creeks where dams may be preventing migration. Once caught, the eels are counted and released.



Glass eels (a stage of the American Eel lifecycle) found at the base of the Burton's Pond dam.



Millsboro Dam eel ladder



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The Delaware Center for the Inland Bays is a non-profit organization established in 1994 to promote the wise use and enhancement of the Inland Bays and its watershed. With its many partners, the CIB conducts public outreach and education, develops and implements restoration projects, encourages scientific inquiry and sponsors research. To learn how you can get on board with the bays go to inlandbays.org.