

# ATLANTIC MENHADEN AND SEABIRDS

*SPEAK UP FOR THE PREY ATLANTIC BIRDS NEED*



A gull trying to steal menhaden from an Osprey.  
Kristofer Rowe

Atlantic menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*), often called “**the most important fish in the sea,**” are forage fish in the herring family and critical to the health of estuary ecosystems along the Atlantic Seaboard. Menhaden play a key role in the marine food web, especially for many coastal and marine birds including Brown Pelicans, Bald Eagles, Ospreys, Northern Gannets, Common Loons, terns and gulls.

## Historic Changes to Atlantic Menhaden Populations

The Atlantic menhaden fishery is managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), a multi-state agency chartered by Congress. After decades of population decline and unregulated commercial fishing, Atlantic menhaden populations hit a 54-year low. In response, the ASMFC initiated the management of Atlantic menhaden and set protections in 2012 to reduce its catch. Because of this action, **Atlantic menhaden population levels started to rebound.** In 2017, the ASMFC committed to managing this fish for the important role they play in the ecosystem once science was completed.

## ASMFC’s Upcoming Vote - How You Can Get Involved

Now, after completing the ecological reference points, the ASMFC is on the verge of another monumental decision. The ASMFC Menhaden Management Board will review the health of the fishery, and vote to approve new ways to conserve Atlantic menhaden. Audubon and our partners are advocating for ecosystem-based management of Atlantic menhaden that uses the best available science called ecological reference points. The final vote will take place on February 5, and Audubon and our partners need your support to ensure that enough Atlantic menhaden are left in the ocean as prey for birds and other wildlife.

The ASMFC’s Menhaden Board members need to hear from you. **Call and/or email and ask them to adopt ecological reference points by 5pm on February 3.** Please contact Charlotte Runzel (see below) if you plan on weighing in on this monumental decision. Phone scripts and sample emails can be found on the following pages. Your state’s Menhaden Board member can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/2RE7zOg>.

**For more information contact:**

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# MANY AT-RISK SEABIRDS DEPEND ON MENHADEN

## Bald Eagle

In the Chesapeake Bay area, Atlantic menhaden are one of four most important fish species during non-breeding season. Additionally, changes in Atlantic menhaden levels influence Bald Eagle distribution and abundance.

**Priority Bird. Climate Endangered.**

## Osprey

Along the Atlantic Coast, Osprey's primary food source (75-82%) is Atlantic menhaden. During June and July, Osprey diets are 95-100% Atlantic menhaden.

**Climate Endangered.**

## Brown Pelican

Along Atlantic and Gulf coasts, Atlantic menhaden are the predominant prey of Brown Pelicans.

**Priority Bird. Climate Endangered.**

## Black Skimmer

In Florida, Atlantic menhaden were among six species found in Black Skimmer chicks' diets.

**Priority Bird. Climate Endangered.**

## Other important birds that prey on Atlantic menhaden:

Brown Noddy, Least Tern, Manx Shearwater, Great Black-beaked Gulls, Great Egret, Roseate Tern, Snowy Egret, & Sandwich Tern

## Common Loon

Common Loon migration from Lake Ontario to Chesapeake Bay coincides with the influx of Atlantic menhaden, their favored prey.

**Priority Bird. Climate Endangered.**

## Royal Tern

From Virginia to North Carolina, Atlantic menhaden a main species found in Royal Tern chick diets.

**Priority Bird. Climate Endangered.**

## Double-crested Cormorant

In Maine, Double-crested Cormorants depend on menhaden.

**Climate Threatened.**

## Black-crowned Night-Heron

Atlantic menhaden were found in 21% of heron chicks' diets.

**Climate Endangered.**

## Herring Gull

Atlantic menhaden are an important prey for this species, especially during nesting season.

**Climate Endangered.**

## Northern Gannet

Offshore of North Carolina's Outer Banks, thousands of Northern Gannets can be spotted taking advantage of the abundance of Atlantic menhaden.

**Climate Endangered.**



## DEFINITIONS:

**Priority Bird:** species of significant conservation need, for which Audubon's actions, over time, can lead to measurable improvements in status.

**Climate Endangered:** species that are projected to lose more than 50% or more of their current range at the current global warming trajectory by 2050.

**Climate Threatened:** species that are projected to lose more than 50% or more of their current range at the current global warming trajectory by 2080.

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## ATLANTIC MENHADEN AND SEABIRDS

### CALL YOUR ATLANTIC MENHADEN BOARD MEMBER

You can find the phone number of your Atlantic menhaden board member by going to this link: <https://bit.ly/2RE7z0g>.

- Dear **NAME OF MEMBER**, I am calling to ask that you enact ecological reference points for the Atlantic menhaden fishery.
- Atlantic menhaden should be managed more than just a fish being removed from the ocean; they should be managed in a way that takes into account their role in the ecosystem.
- I'm an avid birder, and care about the health of seabirds. 70% of seabird populations have declined since 1970. Seabirds face many threats including climate change, pollution, and overfishing, and they rely on forage fish like menhaden to survive. Taking steps to manage forage fish populations effectively will reduce one threat and help their populations rebound.
- Seabirds aren't the only ones who will benefit – menhaden support a robust ecosystem along the Atlantic seaboard, including whales, dolphins, and larger fish, which are critical to coastal economies.
- Healthy menhaden stocks support healthy ecosystems, which in turn support the Atlantic Coast's tourism economy.
- All along the East Coast there are almost 29 million resident and nonresident wildlife watchers, generating over \$17.7 billion in ecotourism per year.
- By feeding striped bass, whales, ospreys and other coastal birds, these high-energy fish are also fueling recreational and commercial industries, both important economic drivers along the coast. The Atlantic seafood industry supports 341,000 jobs and provides \$46.3 billion in annual sales, while 13.9 million recreational anglers spend \$16.2 million pursuing gamefish, supporting 167,000 jobs.
- Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I hope you make the right decision to protect seabirds and forage fish on the Atlantic Coast



# ATLANTIC MENHADEN AND SEABIRDS

## SAMPLE EMAIL TO MENHADEN BOARD MEMBER

Dear [NAME OF MEMBER],

I am writing to you to ask that you enact ecological reference points for the Atlantic menhaden fishery. Atlantic menhaden should be managed more than just a fish being removed from the ocean; they should be managed in a way that takes into account their role in ecosystem.

As an avid birder, I care about the health of seabirds. Seventy percent of seabird populations have declined since 1970. Seabirds face many threats including climate change, pollution, and overfishing, and they rely on forage fish like menhaden to survive. Taking steps to manage forage fish populations effectively will reduce one threat and help their populations rebound.

The current management system does not take into account the needs of seabirds and other wildlife, which can harms population of birds that depend on Atlantic menhaden for food.

- In the Chesapeake Bay area, Atlantic menhaden are one of the four most important fish species for Bald Eagles.
- Along Atlantic and Gulf coasts, Atlantic menhaden are the predominant prey of Brown Pelicans.
- From Virginia to North Carolina, Atlantic menhaden is predominately found in Royal Tern chick diets.
- Along the Atlantic Coast, Osprey's primary food source (75-82%) is Atlantic menhaden. During June and July, Osprey diets are 95-100% Atlantic menhaden.

Seabirds aren't the only ones who benefit from sound management – menhaden supports whales, dolphins, and larger fish, critical to coastal economies. All along the Atlantic Coast there are 29 million resident and nonresident wildlife watchers who generate over \$17.7 billion in ecotourism per year. By feeding larger fish, menhaden fuel commercial and recreational fishing economies. The Atlantic seafood industry supports 341,000 jobs and provides \$46.3 billion in annual sales, while 13.9 million recreational anglers spend \$16.2 million pursuing gamefish, supporting 167,000 jobs.

I urge you to make the right decision and enact ecosystem reference points to protect the Atlantic Coast's ecosystem.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

\*You can find the email of your Atlantic menhaden board member by going to this link: <https://bit.ly/2RE7z0g>.



# ATLANTIC MENHADEN AND SEABIRDS

## SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA

Along the Atlantic Coast, birds such as Osprey and Bald Eagles rely on little fish like menhaden. @ASMFC must manage our fisheries to account for menhaden's role as prey. #SaveTheSeabirds #LittleFishBigDeal <http://ow.ly/iD4s50y3uil>

By feeding birds, whales, and larger fish, Atlantic menhaden, a small schooling fish, fuels coastal economies. Along the Atlantic Coast, 29 million wildlife watchers generate \$17.7 billion in ecotourism per year. @ASMFC #SaveTheSeabirds #LittleFishBigDeal <http://ow.ly/iD4s50y3uil>

Menhaden are vital to the health of our coastal ecosystems, specifically seabirds like Ospreys and Brown Pelicans. @ASMFC, please account for seabirds when making decisions about how many fish can be caught. #SaveTheSeabirds #LittleFishBigDeal <http://ow.ly/iD4s50y3uil>