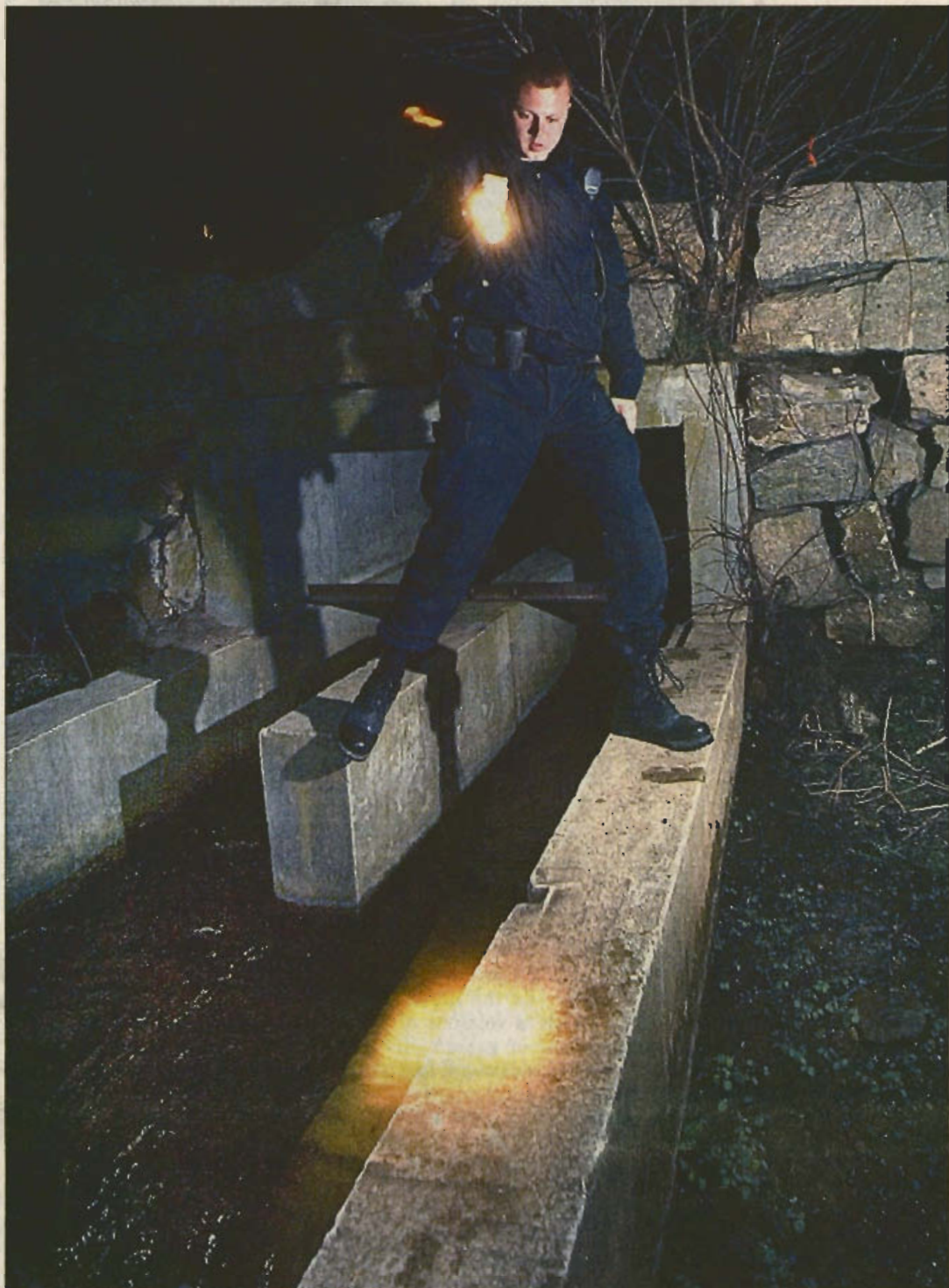


A RUN FOR THEIR LIVES



RON SCHLOERB photos/Cape Cod Times

Falmouth Herring Warden Chuck Martinsen looks for signs of potential poachers at a Coonamessett River herring run.

CLOSED

FOR THE
TAKING OF
HERRING
AND
ALEWIFE

**Fines for
violating
the
herring
ban
range
from \$50
to \$1,000.**

State, Cape towns enforce first year of moratorium on taking river herring

By HILARY RUSS
STAFF WRITER

FALMOUTH - Who knows how long the bass was waiting. Alone in the dark, the 4-pounder had angled itself into position, ready to ambush herring on their annual spring run into Coonamessett Pond.

When Falmouth Herring Warden Chuck Martinsen shined his flashlight in the shallow water, the bass moved off slowly, glancing back over its left fin as if resentful. No matter. Not a single herring was running here on this late April night.

For Martinsen, when

herring make it past the final ladder in the Coonamessett run, it's something of a fish milestone. "That's the goal of everything we do, to get them to this point," Martinsen said.

State and town environmental officers like Martinsen have stepped up their hunt for herring poachers this spring, the first season of a

Please see **HERRING 1A-7**

A herring gull enjoys a meal at Stony Brook in Brewster as the fish make their way to Lower Mill Pond.

File photo: **KEVIN MINGORA**
/Cape Cod Times



CCTIMES

4/27/06

Herring: Officers look for poachers

continued from A-1

three-year state ban on harvesting, possessing or selling river herring.

The state approved the moratorium in November after several years of a steadily declining stock of alewives and blueback herring, collectively known as river herring.

"We were seeing these trends of decline," said Phil Brady, the fishery scientist in charge of river herring for the state Division of Marine Fisheries.

"So we felt that to be proactive and try to influence what we could, we would go ahead and do the closure before the situation could deteriorate much more."

Fewer herring mean less food for osprey, seals, fox, otters and the big bass that rely on them for sustenance.

"Most people look at (herring) as bait," Martinsen said. "But they serve a much larger role in the ecosystem than that."

Herring may be a keystone aquatic species but it is also a prized bait fish.

Striped bass love herring so much that fishermen call them "striper candy." Herring is certainly edible but most anglers use the fish to lure bigger, tastier fare to their hooks, according to local officials and experts. Before the ban, Brady said, herring sold for \$1 or \$2 per fish.

Massachusetts Environmental Police have not arrested any herring poachers so far this year, spokeswoman Vanessa Gulati said. But as striped bass season approaches, environmental officials expect to



RON SCHLOERB/Cape Cod Times

Volunteer Charlie Thifault of Marstons Mills counts the herring running through the Mill Pond run at the corner of routes 149 and 28. He counted for 10 minutes each hour.

start making arrests.

Fines for violating the herring ban range from \$50 to \$1,000, said Gulati, but officers can also seize equipment, including boats and cars, and violators can face jail time.

Under state law, anyone caught taking fish without permission can be fined \$50 per fish.

It isn't yet clear how the ban will affect the rights of Mashpee Wampanoag to collect herring. Talks are pending between the state and the tribe, which is trying to determine what its position will be, according to a spokesman.

The ban is enforced by a combination of state and town officials like Martinsen.



Go online for a slide show of sights and sounds at Cape herring runs www.capecodonline.com

On the day he saw the striper, Martinsen got to work at 6 a.m. after a tip about potential poachers. They had fled by the time he arrived.

Sixteen hours later, he was still on the job, driving his Ford F250 from run to run with a police scanner crackling in background.

A towering man with a baby face and a blond buzz cut, Martinsen, 28, sprints after potential poachers with the energy of a kid hunting peepers. Over three hours, Martinsen encountered only one herring and no poachers.

Maybe it was the clear sky or the low tide, but Falmouth's nine active runs were quiet that night.

Martinsen thinks most Cape Codders are supportive of the ban. Volunteer groups across the Cape help count herring, and sometimes fishermen help out, too.

Tom Stevens, 50, of Falmouth, fishing that same night, said he recently discovered and destroyed a poacher's dam on Falmouth's south shore.

"It's too bad that it was that way," he said as he cast out a line hoping to hook a striper. "It just impedes the run."

Staff writer Sean Gonsalves contributed to this report. Hilary Russ can be reached at hruss@capecodonline.com.