SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS AT THE CONOWINGO DAM WEST FISH LIFT FACILITY SPRING 2016

October 2016

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Prepared for

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its operation began in 1972, the West Fish Lift (WFL) has been part of a cooperative effort to restore American Shad (*Alosa sapidissima*) and other migratory fishes to the Susquehanna River. In accordance with the restoration plan, the operational goal had been to monitor fish populations below Conowingo Dam and transport pre-spawned migratory fishes upriver. The operational goal has changed slightly since 2001, to collecting American Shad for spawning trials and egg delivery to Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Van Dyke Hatchery. Generally, the WFL objective is to collect pre-spawn alosines to monitor abundance, species composition, provide specimens for otolith analysis (monitor hatchery contribution of returning stock), and the collection of live, pre-spawn, adult alosines for tank spawning to support restoration stockings of larval alosines throughout the Susquehanna River Basin.

The start of operation for the WFL in 2016 began on April 23, 2016. The first American Shad (4) were collected on April 23. The WFL operated for 11 days in 2016 collecting American Shad for spawning trials and egg collection. The number of lifts in 2016 was 131 and fishing time totaled 58 hours and 12 minutes. A total of 178,576 fish of 25 species along with one hybrid Striped Bass and three hybrid Tiger Muskellunge were collected and identified in the WFL sorting tank. Gizzard Shad (172,625), Shorthead Redhorse (1,719), and White Perch (1,484) dominated the catch, and comprised nearly 100% of the total fish collected. Gizzard Shad alone accounted for 97% of the total fish collected.

The WFL collected 861 American Shad. The first 4 American Shad were collected on April 23. Collection of shad varied with 31% (264) of the shad collected before April 30 and 69% (597) collected from May 1 to May 15. The largest number of American Shad collected at the WFL in 2016 occurred on May 1 (197). American Shad were collected at water temperatures ranging from 60.5°F to 67.6°F at Conowingo Dam's WFL and river flows between 22,100 and 55,800 cfs at Marietta gage station. Of the 861 American Shad collected, a total of 526 male and 249 female American Shad were identified at the WFL in 2016. On the eleven operational days the male to female ratio ranged from 1:0.29 to 1:0.82. The highest number of male American Shad (97) was identified on April 28. The most female American Shad identified were collected on May 1.

The WFL collected 172,625 Gizzard Shad in 2016. Gizzard Shad accounted for 97% of the total fish collected.

A small number of river herring, (20 Alewife and 14 Blueback Herring) were collected during the 2016 season. No Hickory Shad were collected in spring 2016.

During the 2016 season, the WFL collected three (3) American Shad that were previously captured, Floy-tagged, and released downstream of Conowingo dam by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDDNR). This year, the MDDNR caught 436 and Floy-tagged a total of 367 American Shad.

Prior to the start of WFL operations in 2016, routine preseason maintenance activities were conducted, and included testing of the fish collection equipment (barrier screen, crowder doors, crowder, hopper hoist motor, and hopper door along with inspection of associated chain linkage, cables, etc.). These maintenance activities, along with routine maintenance activities performed in season resulted in no loss of fishing time due to mechanical failures during the entire fish collection season. Future operations of the WFL will build on the past forty-four years of operation experience.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Exelon Generation Company, LLC, formerly the Susquehanna Electric Company (SECO), has operated a fish collection facility (West Fish Lift) at its Conowingo Hydroelectric Station since 1972. West Fish Lift (WFL) operations are part of a cooperative private, state, and federal effort to restore American Shad (*Alosa sapidissima*) and other migratory fishes to the Susquehanna River Basin. In accordance with the restoration plan, the operational goal had been to monitor fish populations below Conowingo Dam and transport pre-spawned migratory fishes upriver. The operational goal has changed slightly since 2001, now collecting American Shad for spawning trials and egg delivery to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Van Dyke Hatchery. Generally, the WFL objective is to collect pre-spawn alosines to monitor abundance, species composition, provide specimens for otolith analysis (monitor hatchery contribution of returning stock), and the collection of live, pre-spawn, adult alosines for tank spawning to support restoration stockings of larval alosines throughout the Susquehanna River Basin.

Objectives of 2016 operation were: (1) monitor collection of migratory and resident fishes at the WFL; and (2) conduct American Shad spawning trials for egg collection and delivery to Van Dyke Hatchery.

Since its operation began in 1972, the WFL at Conowingo Dam has been a cornerstone in efforts to restore migratory fishes to the Susquehanna River. The WFL operation provides the only source of Susquehanna River American Shad eggs for stock rebuilding initiatives. Additionally, the WFL provides otolith specimens for tracking hatchery contributions to restoration efforts, and providing fisheries independent data for reporting to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

2.0 CONOWINGO OPERATION

2.1 Project Operation

The Conowingo Hydroelectric Station, built in 1928, is located at river mile 10 on the Susquehanna River (RMC 1992). The powerhouse has a peak generating capacity of 549.5 MW and a hydraulic capacity of approximately 85,000 cfs. Flows in excess of station draft are spilled through two regulating and 50 crest gates. The powerhouse contains seven vertical Francis (numbered 1 through 7) and four Kaplan (numbered 8 through 11) turbines. The seven Francis units have been equipped with aeration systems that permit a unit to draw air into the unit (vented mode) or operate conventionally (unvented mode). The four original Kaplan turbines installed in 1964 were replaced over a period of four years (1992 to 1996), with more efficient mixed-flow Kaplan type turbines.

Minimum flow releases from the station during the spring spawning and fishway operating season follow the schedule outlined in the settlement agreement. Minimum flows of 10,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) or natural river flow (whichever is less), as measured at the United States Geological Survey (USGS) gauge at Marietta, PA were maintained for the period 1 to 30 April. A minimum flow of 7,500 cfs or natural river flow (as previously noted) was maintained for the period 1 to 31 May. A minimum flow of 5,000 cfs or natural river flow (as previously noted) is maintained when fish lift operations occur in June.

2.2 Fish Lift Operation

WFL operations are typically conducted during a 5-week period beginning in mid-April through late May. The start of operation for the WFL in 2016 began on April 23, 2016. The first American Shad (4) were collected on April 23 (Table 1). The WFL operated for 11 days in 2016 collecting American Shad for spawning trials and egg collection. The number of lifts in 2016 was 131 and fishing time totaled 58 hours and 12 minutes (Table 2).

Operation times were planned during optimal fish collection parameters. This year, operational methodologies were influenced by natural river flow, water temperature, and generation. WFL operation was conducted by a staff of four to five personnel: a lift operator, a supervising biologist, and two to three biological technicians.

The mechanical aspects of WFL operation in 2016 were similar to those described in RMC (1983). Fishing time and/or lift frequency was determined by fish abundance, and the time required to process the catch. However, two modifications to normal operation (first implemented in 1985 to maximize collection of American Shad (RMC 1986)) were utilized to reduce the large numbers of Gizzard Shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*) attracted to the lift. First, operation "Fast Fish" (RMC 1986), which reduced the mechanical delays associated with normal operation of the crowder was deployed during periods of heavy fish activity. Second, the weir gate settings were adjusted and operation in the "Fast Fish" mode was continued until the accumulated fish were reduced. Normal WFL operation was resumed after the majority of fish activity was eliminated.

Attraction velocity and flow at the WFL were similar to those maintained since 1982 (RMC 1983). Hydraulic conditions were maintained in the area of the WFL between the crowder and weir gate entrances similar to that reported in RMC 1983. Modifications to weir gates and house service unit settings were made daily and during periods of heavy fish concentration and were similar to those reported in RMC 1986.

The specific entrance(s) used to attract fishes was dictated by the station discharge and which turbine units were operating. For example, when Francis turbine units 1 or 2 were operating, the downstream entrance was the primary entrance used to attract fishes. Under these conditions the attraction flow through the upstream entrance is negated or disrupted. This situation occurred twice during the 2016 WFL season. On May 5 during WFL operation, Unit 2 operated the entire time and Unit 1 all but the last 2 hours. The other day that Unit 2 operated was on May 8 during the last 75 minutes of WFL operation. Depending on river flow, generation, and/or fish densities the downstream entrance was utilized most often throughout the 2016 season to attract fishes.

2.3 Fish Counts

Fish that were lifted and emptied into the sorting tank were identified to species and counted or estimated by a biologist and/or technician. All fishes were released back into the river, except for American Shad used for spawning trials and river herring species.

Periodically throughout the day, fish collection data were recorded on data sheets and entered into a Microsoft Excel worksheet on a personal computer. Data processing and reporting were PC based and accomplished by program scripts, or macros, created within Microsoft Excel software. After the supervising biologist verified the correctness of the raw data, a daily summary of fish passage was produced and distributed electronically to plant and agency personnel. Each day's data were backed up and stored off site. Daily reports and weekly summaries of fish collected were electronically distributed to plant personnel and other cooperators.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Relative Abundance

Fishes were processed as reported previously (RMC 1983). The relative abundance of fishes has fluctuated at the WFL, primarily from species abundance, modifications to the lift and turbine operational changes. The number of fishes collected by the Conowingo Dam WFL is presented in Table 2. A total of 178,576 fish of 25 species along with one hybrid Striped Bass and three hybrid Tiger Muskellunge were collected and identified in the WFL sorting tank. Gizzard Shad (172,625), Shorthead Redhorse (*Moxostoma macrolepidotum)* (1,719), and White Perch (*Morone americana)* (1,484) dominated the catch, and comprised nearly 100% of the total fish collected. Gizzard Shad alone accounted for 97% of the total fish collected. Greatest collection of fishes occurred on the first day of operation (April 23) when 29,305 fish, (nearly 98% Gizzard Shad), were collected.

3.2 American Shad Collection

The WFL collected 861 American Shad (Table 1). The first 4 American Shad were collected on April 23. Collection of shad varied with 31% (264) of the shad collected before April 30 and 69% (597) collected from May 1 to May 15 (Table 1). On 1 of the 11 days of operation (May 5), no American Shad were collected. The largest number of American Shad collected at the WFL in 2016 occurred on May 1 (197).

Life history information (length, weight, sex, spawning condition, scales and otolith samples) was taken from American Shad that were sacrificed, died (lift or holding mortalities), or used in spawning trials. Per 2016 operation guidelines, every twenty-fifth shad collected was sacrificed.

American Shad were collected at water temperatures ranging from 60.5°F to 67.6°F at Conowingo Dam's WFL and river flows between 22,100 and 55,800 cfs at Marietta gage station (Figure 1). The average daily river flow on the day when 197 American Shad were collected was 22,100 cfs. The average daily river flow during the operational season was 35,009 cfs.

The sex ratio of American Shad collected at the WFL is given in Table 3. Of the 861 American Shad collected, a total of 526 males and 249 females were identified at the WFL in 2016. On the eleven operational days the male to female ratio ranged from 1:0.29 to 1:0.82. Overall male to female American Shad ratio was 1:0.47. The highest number of male American Shad (97) was identified on April 28. The most female American Shad identified were collected on May 1.

The catch and effort of American Shad collected at the WFL from 1985 to 2016 is shown in Table 4. Although the total catch has dropped off in recent years, due to fewer operational days, lifts, and fishing hours; the catch, number of lifts per day, and hours of operation in 2016 increased from the two previous years.

Table 5 shows the operations and fish catch at Conowingo Dam WFL from 1985-2016.

A separate American Shad spawning report titled "American Shad Spawning Tests Conducted at Conowingo Dam, Spring 2016" is provided in Appendix A.

3.3 Gizzard Shad Collection

The WFL collected 172,625 Gizzard Shad in 2016 (Tables 1 and 2). Gizzard Shad accounted for 97% of the total fish collected. On 1 of 11 days of operation, Gizzard Shad collections exceeded 25,000 fish. Gizzard Shad collection exceeded 15,000 and 10,000 fish on 8 and 9 days, respectively. Table 1 provides the number of American Shad and Gizzard Shad collected each operational day in 2016. On days when American Shad collections exceeded 100 fish, the American Shad to Gizzard

Shad ratio ranged from 1:25 – 1:156. For the days when American Shad collection is less than 100 fish, the ratio ranged from 1:132 – 1:7,200.

3.4 Alosines

A small number of river herring, (20 Alewife and 14 Blueback Herring) were collected during the 2016 season. No Hickory Shad were collected in spring 2016. Per 2016 operation guidelines, the first 50 of each river herring (Alewife and Blueback Herring) collected were to be sacrificed followed by every twenty-fifth of each species. Length, weight, sex, scale, and otolith samples were taken from all collected river herring.

3.5 Maryland Tag-Recapture

During the 2016 season, the WFL collected American Shad that were previously captured, Floy-tagged and released downstream of Conowingo dam by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDDNR). This year, the MDDNR caught 436 and tagged a total of 367 American Shad.

Per the 2016 operational guidelines, all re-captured MDDNR tagged American Shad from the current year (2016) must be returned to the tailrace below Conowingo Dam. Any MDDNR tagged American Shad collected from previous years (prior to 2016) were to be sacrificed for study. The number of Floy tags observed at the Conowingo WFL in 2016 was 3; 3 orange tags (2016 effort). No MDDNR tagged American Shad from previous years were collected in 2016.

4.0 SUMMARY

WFL operation was initiated on April 23, river water temperature was 63.5°F (17.5°C) and daily river flow was 27,700 cfs at Marietta. The first 4 American Shad were collected on April 23 at a water temperature of 63.5°F. The WFL collected 861 American Shad from April 23 through May 15. The total number of American Shad collected during the 2016 season was the second lowest collection value recorded since 1985 (861 American Shad) when the WFL was operated for trap and transport purposes (Tables 4 and 5). It is also the third consecutive year in which the WFL collected less than 1,000 American Shad.

Prior to the start of WFL operations in 2016, routine preseason maintenance activities were conducted, and included testing of the fish collection equipment (barrier screen, crowder doors, crowder, hopper hoist motor, and hopper door along with inspection of associated chain linkage, cables, etc.). These maintenance activities, along with routine maintenance activities performed in season resulted in no loss of fishing time due to mechanical failures during the entire fish collection season.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Continue to operate the WFL at Conowingo Dam per annual guidelines developed and approved by the Susquehanna River Technical Committee. Lift operation should adhere to the guidelines; however, flexibility must remain with operating personnel to maximize WFL performance and fish collection.

2) Continue to inspect weir gate cables, limit switches, and lift components to enhance season operability, and continue to evaluate effectiveness of fish sorting tank and hopper door.

6.0 LITERATURE CITED

RMC. 1983. Summary of the operation of the Conowingo Dam Lift in spring 1982. Prepared for the Philadelphia Electric Company by RMC Environmental Services, Muddy Run Ecological Laboratory, Drumore, Pennsylvania. 32 pp.

RMC. 1986. Summary of the operation of the Conowingo Dam Lift in spring 1985. Prepared for the Philadelphia Electric Company by RMC Environmental Services, Muddy Run Ecological Laboratory, Drumore, Pennsylvania. 44 pp.

RMC. 1992. Summary of the operations of the Conowingo Dam fish passage facilities in spring 1991. Prepared for Susquehanna Electric Company, Darlington, MD.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1.

Daily summary of fishes collected at the Conowingo Dam West Fish Lift, 23 April - 15 May, 2016.

Date:	23-Apr	24-Apr	28-Apr	29-Apr	1-May	5-May
Day:	Saturday	Sunday	Thursday	Friday	Sunday	Thursday
Number of Lifts:	18	9	12	13	5	12
Time of First Lift:	9:45	9:50	9:40	11:10	11:50	9:30
Time of Last lift:	16:30	15:30	14:40	16:15	13:50	15:47
Operating time (hours):	6:45	5:40	5:00	5:05	2:00	6:17
Average Water Temperature (°F):	63.6	67.55	66.11	64.13	62.9	60.5
American Shad	4	68	130	62	197	0
Blueback Herring	0	0	1	0	0	0
Alewife	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gizzard Shad	28800	9000	17350	15075	5000	18350
Hickory Shad	0	0	0	0	0	0
Striped Bass	1	0	3	3	1	1
Hybrid Striped Bass	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carp	12	2	16	2	2	41
Other species	488	360	477	426	314	209
Total	29,305	9,430	17,977	15,568	5,514	18,601

Date:	7-May	8-May	12-May	13-May	15-May	**Total for**
Day:	Saturday	Sunday	Thursday	Friday	Sunday	**the Year**
Number of Lifts:	14	14	13	13	8	**131**
Time of First Lift:	9:30	10:05	10:10	9:30	11:20	
Time of Last lift:	15:40	16:00	16:10	16:00	14:10	
Operating time (hours):	6:10	5:55	6:00	6:30	2:50	**58:12:00**
Average Water Temperature (°F):	62.8	60.9	61.2	60.8	62.0	**62.9**
American Shad	50	53	59	103	135	**861**
Blueback Herring	0	0	0	13	0	**14**
Alewife	0	0	16	4	0	**20**
Gizzard Shad	16800	16800	18475	16050	10925	**172,625**
Hickory Shad	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Striped Bass	2	0	8	19	3	**41**
Hybrid Striped Bass	0	0	1	0	0	**1**
Carp	9	1	2	1	0	**88**
Other species	765	528	633	419	307	**4,926**
Total	17,626	17,382	19,194	16,609	11,370	**178,576**

Table 2.

Catch of fishes at the Conowingo Dam West Fish Lift, 2016.

Number of Days	**11**
Number of Lifts	**131**
Fishing Time (hours : minutes)	**58:12**
Number of Taxa	**25**
AMERICAN SHAD	861
HICKORY SHAD	0
BLUEBACK HERRING	14
ALEWIFE	20
GIZZARD SHAD	172,625
STRIPED BASS	41
AMERICAN EEL	23
Carp	88
White Perch	1,484
Hybrid Striped Bass*	1
Tiger Muskellunge*	3
Brown Trout	4
Quillback	50
Shorthead Redhorse	1,719
Brown Bullhead	382
Channel Catfish	200
Flathead Catfish	91
Rock Bass	23
Redbreast Sunfish	1
Green Sunfish	3
Pumpkinseed	11
Bluegill	31
Smallmouth Bass	619
Largemouth Bass	7
Yellow Perch	42
Walleye	180
Sea Lamprey	7
Spottail Shiner	46
Total	**178,576**

* Denotes hybrid fish

Table 3.

American Shad sex ratio information, Conowingo Dam West Fish Lift, 2016. No operation on 25-27, and 30 April or 2-4, 6, 9-11, and 14 May 2016.

Date	Sample size	Males	Females	Male:Female Ratio
23-Apr	4	3	1	1: 0.33
24-Apr	68	48	20	1: 0.42
28-Apr	130	97	33	1: 0.34
29-Apr	62	34	28	1: 0.82
1-May	197	94	51	1: 0.54
5-May	0	0	0	N/A
7-May	50	27	23	1: 0.85
8-May	53	37	16	1: 0.43
12-May	59	44	15	1: 0.34
13-May	103	64	39	1: 0.61
15-May	135	78	23	1: 0.29
TOTAL	**861**	**526**	**249**	**1: 0.47**

Table 4.

Catch and effort of American Shad collected at the Conowingo Dam West Fish Lift during primary collection periods,* 1985-2016.

Year	Number Days	Number Lifts	Fishing Hours	Total Catch	Catch Per Day	Catch Per Lift	Catch Per Hour
1985	37	839	328.6	1,518	41	2	4.6
1986	53	737	431.5	5,136	97	7	11.9
1987	49	1,295	506.5	7,659	156	6	15.1
1988	54	1,166	471.7	5,137	95	4	10.9
1989	46	1,034	447.2	8,216	179	8	18.4
1990	62	1,247	541.0	15,958	257	13	29.5
1991	59	1,123	478.5	13,273	225	12	27.7
1992	61	1,517	566.0	10,323	169	7	18.2
1993	41	971	398.0	5,328	130	5	13.4
1994	44	918	414.0	5,595	127	6	13.5
1995	64	1,216	632.2	15,588	244	13	24.7
1996	27	441	245.2	11,458	424	26	46.7
1997	44	611	295.1	12,974	295	21	44.0
1998	26	476	238.6	6,577	253	14	27.6
1999	43	709	312.6	9,658	225	14	30.9
2000	34	424	206.5	9,785	288	23	47.4
2001	41	425	195.1	10,940	267	26	56.1
2002	31	417	147.1	9,347	302	22	63.5
2003	31	637	171.8	9,802	316	27	57.0
2004	14	151	74.3	3,426	245	23	46.1
2005	30	295	165.9	3,896	130	13	23.5
2006	37	394	214.9	3,970	107	10	18.5
2007	29	288	135.3	4,272	147	15	31.6
2008	34	481	174.4	2,627	77	5	15.1
2009	28	282	144.1	6,534	233	23	45.3
2010	27	238	138.2	5,605	208	24	40.6
2011	15	144	85.6	3,074	205	21	35.9
2012	37	404	244.0	1,486	40	4	6.1
2013	24	288	134.1	2,030	85	7	15.1
2014	27	321	173.1	513	19	2	3.0
2015	19	194	100.5	875	46	4	8.7
2016	**11**	**131**	**58.2**	**861**	**78**	**7**	**14.8**

*Only applies to 1985-1995 data. Excludes early and late season catch and effort when less than 10 shad/day were taken.

Table 5.

Operations and fish catch at Conowingo Dam West Fish Lift, 1985 - 2016.

Year	Number of Days	Total Fish (Millions)	Number of Taxa	American Shad	Hickory Shad	Alewife	Blueback Herring
1985	55	2.318	41	1,546	9	377	6,763
1986	59	1.831	43	5,195	45	2,822	6,327
1987	60	2.593	43	7,667	35	357	5,861
1988	60	1.602	49	5,169	64	712	14,570
1989	53	1.066	45	8,311	28	1,902	3,611
1990	72	1.188	44	15,964	77	425	9,658
1991	63	0.533	45	13,330	120	2,649	15,616
1992	64	1.560	46	10,335	376	3,344	27,533
1993	45	0.713	37	5,343	0	572	4,052
1994	47	0.564	46	5,615	1	70	2,603
1995	68	0.995	44	15,588	36	5,405	93,859
1996	28	1.233	39	11,473	0	1	871
1997	44	0.346	39	12,974	118	11	133,257
1998	41	0.575	38	6,577	6	31	5,511
1999	43	0.722	34	9,658	32	1,795	8,546
2000	34	0.458	37	9,785	1	9,189	14,326
2001	41	0.310	38	10,940	36	7,824	16,320
2002	31	0.419	35	9,347	0	141	428
2003	31	0.147	30	9,802	1	16	183
2004	14	0.039	30	3,426	0	0	1
2005	30	0.094	36	3,896	0	0	0
2006	37	0.163	38	3,970	0	2	6
2007	29	0.159	36	4,272	0	7	153
2008	34	0.733	37	2,627	0	2	7
2009	28	0.226	39	6,534	4	20	165
2010	27	0.158	36	5,605	1	1	81
2011	15	0.100	32	3,074	0	0	0
2012	37	0.322	38	1,486	0	0	7
2013	24	0.489	33	2,030	0	0	2
2014	27	0.597	33	513	0	13	233
2015	19	0.242	29	875	0	29	17
2016	**11**	**0.179**	**25**	**861**	**0**	**20**	**14**

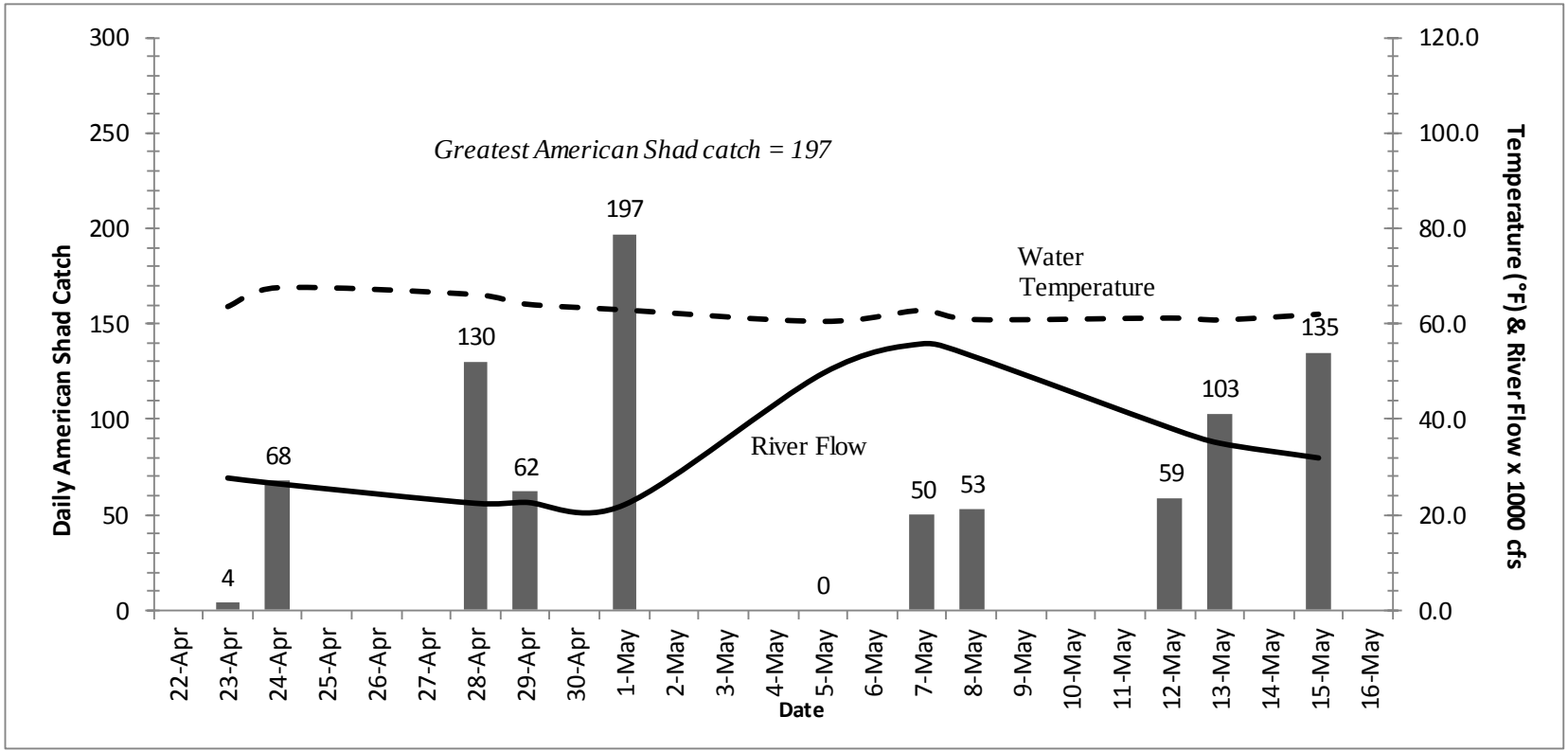

Figure 1 A plot of river flow (x 1000 cfs) as recorded at Marietta and water temperature (°F) recorded at Conowingo Dam versus the daily American Shad catch at the West Fish Lift, spring 2016. The West Lift was not operated on 25-27, and 30 April or 2-4, 6, 9-11, and 14 May 2016.

APPENDIX A
AMERICAN SHAD SPAWNING TESTS CONDUCTED AT CONOWINGO DAM, SPRING 2016