Since their introductions at opposite ends of the Great Lakes, are their populations expanding?

While much attention has focused on the role of foreign shipping as a source of new invasive species, there are two closely related North American herring species (actually they are “shads”) that have been introduced beyond their native range into the Great Lakes by canals. Skipjack herring, *Alosa chrysochloris*, and blueback herring, *Alosa aestivalis*, arrived to the Great Lakes at opposite ends in the late 1980s to early 1990s. Both species are “sea run” fish. Like their more familiar invasive relative the alewife, *Alosa pseudoharengus*, Skipjack and Blueback Herring can readily adapt to a complete freshwater lifestyle. Alewives were first observed in Lake Ontario during the 1870s and later spread into the remaining Great Lakes.
How to identify these similar invasive species

Blueback Herring (Alosa aestivalis) (invasive)

Eye diameter less than/equal to snout length
Dark spot present behind head
Blue-gray, silvery color
No teeth

Alevine (Alosa pseudoharengus) (invasive)

Eye diameter greater than snout length
Dull, dark spot present behind head
Greenish-gray, silvery colored
No teeth

Skipjack Herring (Alosa chrysochloris)

Well known for their migratory behavior, Skipjack herring are native to the Ohio, Missouri and Mississippi and other large rivers. Skipjack herring prefer clear, deep, fast flowing waters of streams and rivers, where they school in the current over sand and gravel bottom areas.

Skipjacks likely entered the Great Lakes from the Mississippi River system via the Chicago Diversion Canal that connected the Mississippi River to Lake Michigan. Unlike other herrings, skipjacks switch over from plankton to insects and eventually to small fish. They are often seen chasing small fish near the surface in a skipping motion, hence the name. Skipjacks can reach 3-6" during their first year and average 12"-16" in length as adults but have been caught up to 21" (over 3 lbs).