

La Crosse FRO Accomplishment Highlights Report

Endangered Species:

Using Scuba Diving to Assist the Winged Mapleleaf Propagation Project 11/14/2003

On November 14, 2003, Nick Rowse, a diver from the Twin Cities Field Office and Scott Yess, a diver with the La Crosse Fishery Resources Office, assisted in placing more than 9,000 transformed juvenile winged mapleleaf mussels into seven underwater cages in the St. Croix River at River Mile 35 just upstream of Marine on St. Croix, Minn. This project is a joint effort among the Service, the National Park Service, the Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources and the University of Minnesota.

Nick Rowse

Endangered Species:

Laboratory Study Jump-Starts Winged Mapleleaf Recovery Efforts 01/06/2004



A total of about 11,000 living juvenile winged mapleleaf mussels were recovered from the blue catfish and about 9,000 juveniles were recovered from the channel catfish during laboratory fish host tests conducted in fall 2003. Divers placed most of the juveniles produced by the blue catfish into cages that were submerged at sites near existing mussel beds in the St. Croix

River. These efforts have "jump-started" winged mapleleaf recovery efforts in the Mississippi River basin. The overwhelming test results achieved in 2003 by colleagues from 3 DOI agencies and the University of Minnesota conclusively indicate that both blue catfish and channel catfish are suitable hosts for glochidia of the endangered winged mapleleaf mussel. These findings may soon be



U.S. Geological Survey Laboratory used during La Crosse FRO research

applied to artificially propagate winged mapleleaf juveniles for augmentation of existing populations and for reintroduction at Mississippi River basin sites within the species' historic range where populations have long been absent, and may thus help to recover this species from the brink of extinction.



Host fish gills being examined for glochidia

The winged mapleleaf mussel is a federally listed endangered species that has received considerable management attention in recent years. Once found throughout many Midwestern rivers, only two known populations exist, one of which is in a 10-mile stretch of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway that borders Minnesota and Wisconsin. This population is at risk from zebra mussel infestation, the effects of variable water releases at an upstream hydro power dam, and an incomplete knowledge of its life history. Among the recognized factors that are limiting the recovery of this mussel is the lack of data regarding which species of fish can serve as hosts for its parasitic glochidia (mussel larvae). Since 1997, a team of

biologists working at the University of Minnesota (UMN) has conducted research to identify potential host fish for this endangered mussel. Beginning in 2001, Department of the Interior colleagues working in western Wisconsin at the Fish and Wildlife Service's La Crosse Fishery Resources Office and Genoa National Fish Hatchery, the National Park Service's St. Croix National Scenic Riverway in St. Croix Falls, and the Geological Survey's Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center (UMESC) in La Crosse joined other team members in cooperative annual efforts to expand and accelerate the laboratory host fish identification program by making use of the well-equipped aquatic research facilities available at the UMESC.



Channel catfish

Prior to 2003, more than 60 species of fish comprising 14 taxonomic families had been investigated as potential host fish for winged mapleleaf glochidia. These early efforts achieved very limited success with only certain

catfish species (Family Ictaluridae) because the long-term tests were often beset by problems (e.g., fish mortality) that yielded inconclusive results. These tests were also limited by the ability of divers to find sufficient numbers of gravid female winged mapleleaf in the fall to provide the necessary glochidia for testing. In the summer of 2003 however, an interagency dive team stockpiled adult winged mapleleaf in the St. Croix River into small aggregations that were placed near one another to increase chances for successful reproduction. Divers returned early in the fall and collected several gravid females that later released large numbers of viable glochidia for testing. These glochidia were used to infest the gills of four Ictalurid species (blue catfish, channel catfish, flathead catfish, and slender madtom) in similar



Mark Steingraeber (La Crosse Fishery Resources Office) spent many hours peering through microscopes to identify and count more than 20,000 living winged mapleleaf juveniles during fish host identification tests in fall 2003.

temperature-controlled tests that were initiated in early October at both the UMESC (19°C) and the UMN (22°C). Approximately 8 to 12 weeks after the fish were infested, a total of about 11,000 living juvenile winged mapleleaf mussels were recovered from the

blue catfish and about 9,000 juveniles were recovered from the channel catfish.

In mid-November, dive team members placed most of the juveniles produced by the blue catfish into cages that were submerged at sites near existing mussel beds in the St. Croix River. The survival rate of these mussels will be checked periodically. The remaining juveniles are being used experimentally in laboratory tests at the UMESC to determine the over-winter survival rate at two different temperatures. The overwhelming test results achieved in 2003 conclusively indicate that both blue catfish and channel catfish are suitable hosts for glochidia of the endangered winged mapleleaf mussel. These findings may soon be applied to artificially propagate winged mapleleaf juveniles for augmentation of existing populations and for reintroduction at Mississippi River basin sites within the species' historic range where populations have long been absent, and may thus help to recover this species from the brink of extinction.

Mark Steingraeber

Endangered Species:

Students Shadow Mussel Recovery Efforts

01/06/2004

Two La Crosse-area high school science students interested in biology careers had the unique opportunity to



“shadow” Mark Steingraeber, a fishery biologist for the Service's La Crosse Fishery Resources Office, and Michelle Bartsch, a general biologist for the U.S. Geological Survey, as these Interior Department colleagues led successful interagency cooperative efforts to identify host fish species for the endangered winged mapleleaf mussel at the Survey's Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin during fall 2003. It is hoped that real-world, hands-on job exploration experiences like these with Interior Department biologists will encourage Jeff, Annie, and other young science students to continue their pursuit of careers as professional biologists.

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Crosse, Wisconsin during fall 2003. Jeff Brown, a sophomore at La Crosse Central High School, was on hand at the start of the fish host test and helped infest four different species of fish with microscopic glochidia (larvae) from the endangered mussel. Several weeks later, Galesville-Ettrick-Trempealeau High School junior Annie Greylak accompanied the biologists for a day and learned how to recover mussel glochidia that successfully transformed into juveniles, as well as to distinguish live from dead individuals using a dissection microscope and cross-polarized light. It



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Mark Steingraeber

Outreach:

Icy Day for Ice Fishing on the Upper Mississippi

01/17/2004



This was an educational opportunity for forty-one youth to experience ice fishing and learn about winter fishing and ice safety. Several parents expressed their gratitude and learned about the FWS and their Friends Group.

The first annual Ice Fishing Day sponsored by the Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services and the USFWS fishery program offices in southwest Wisconsin (Genoa NFH, La Crosse Fish Health Center and La Crosse FRO) was almost cancelled due to ice. But, hey don't you need ice for ice fishing? Yes! However, we had extra ice covering everything, including the roads. Fortunately everyone drove carefully and the event was a huge success! Several area scout troops were contacted and over 40 youth attended this special event. Prior to fishing, Dave

Wedan, Doug Aloisi and Heidi Keuler educated the young anglers about fishing techniques and ice safety. Fishing gear was provided for the kids who did not bring their own tackle and bait was also provided. With tackle and bait in hand, the scouts hit the ice running, well, not running but they fished hard. At first fishing was a little slow, but after some moving around several sunfish were caught. After nearly two hours of fishing the group was treated to a lunch provided by the Friends Group. Once most the hot dogs and chips were consumed, we drew names for prizes and handed out grab bags with all types of ice fishing goodies. Every scout left with a full stomach, fishing supplies and some knowledge of fishing on hard water. The Fishery crew would also like to thank Tony Batya, Brian Pember and Brian Stemper (UMRWFR - Winona Dist.) for their assistance with this event. It was a great way to spend a winter day.



Scott Yess

Tribal Assistance:

Vegetation Report Completed for Prairie Island Reservation

02/02/2004



This aquatic vegetation study will help to determine the possibility of establishing wild rice beds to improve the fishery and wildlife habitat, and to re-establish a cultural tradition of gathering rice, on the Prairie Island Reservation in Minnesota.

Heidi Keuler and Scott Yess from the La Crosse Fishery Resource Office (FRO) completed a report for the Prairie Island Dakota Community on the aquatic vegetation study that occurred during the summer of 2003. Sixty-six sites were sampled for aquatic vegetation diversity and density, substrate type, and water depth on approximately 800-850 acres of water. This study will help Prairie Island Dakota Community determine the possibility of the establishment of wild rice beds in Sturgeon and North lakes on the Prairie Island Reservation.

Heidi Keuler

Outreach:

Volunteer Banquet is a Moment in History

02/06/2004

The banquet is a great event which recognizes the efforts of our great volunteers and Friends. It's our way to show our appreciation to a fantastic group of dedicated people fighting for the resource.

The Annual Volunteer Banquet was held for the La Crosse Fishery Resources Office and the La Crosse District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge on February 6th 2004. Attendance was very good despite the snow and icy roads. This years theme was history and everyone enjoyed the down home pig roast and root beer floats. Ken Visger presented a history of the Upper Miss which was followed by several unique and often times humorous short stories told by Ken and Terry Visger.



In fiscal year 2003, fishery volunteers contributed over 800 hours to the La Crosse FRO; assisting in lake sturgeon and paddlefish netting, endangered mussel propagation, exotic species monitoring, lake sturgeon tagging, fish collections for the wild fish health survey and several general fishery surveys. Over 30 individuals contributed to this volunteer effort and La Crosse FRO would like to recognize Don Schroeder (Onalaska, WI) as the volunteer who contributed the most hours in 2003 with a total of 217 hours. Don assists on almost every type of project our office is involved in. He is a huge asset to our program; and not only is he experienced with field work, but he has fantastic shop skills and was instrumental in construction of our new native mussel display. Don is also a two-time Volunteer of the Year and this year reached the 1,000 hour club for volunteer service with La Crosse FRO.



Jeff Dahl and Scott Yess

La Crosse FRO also would like to recognize Jeff Dahl (La Crosse, WI), our 2003 Volunteer of the Year. Jeff is the youngest volunteer (16) to contribute 70 hours in a single year. With great enthusiasm and energy Jeff assisted on native mussel projects, lake sturgeon netting and several fishery surveys. His father (Tom Dahl) works for FWS as a Wetlands Specialist. Other special awards went to Arnie Swartz (La Crosse, WI) who was the first President of our Friends Group. Arnie was instrumental in getting the Friends group off the ground and running and did a great job recruiting several new members. Ruth Nissen also received special recognition for contributing over 100 hours of volunteer service in just three years.

Scott Yess

Boat Safety:

FY 2004 (MOCC) Motorboat Operator Certification Course Schedule **02/10/2004**



According to (241 FW1, Watercraft Safety), all employees that operate a motorboat in their duty are required to take a MOCC course and to update their certificate with refresher courses.

On February 10, 2004, the Region 3 Watercraft Safety Course Schedule (FY 2004) was developed and sent to the Regional Management Team and all the Regional Project Leaders. Attachments included course descriptions, scheduling, as well as registration information and procedures. This year's offerings include the basic MOCC (mandatory for all regional motorized watercraft operators), airboat, open-water (Great Lakes), and five-year refresher course information. Project leaders and supervisors were reminded that they are responsible for insuring watercraft operators have received adequate training to safely operate their watercraft within the water and environmental conditions they are assigned. (241 FW1, Watercraft Safety)



For more information, e-mail or call Dave Wedan, the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator at dave_wedan@fws.gov, or 608-783-8435.

Dave Wedan

Diversity Outreach:

Flying Fish Brought Crowds in Flocks at La Crosse Sports Show **02/12/2004**



Over 3,000 visitors viewed the USFWS's booth consisting of displays from the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH), La Crosse Fish Health Center (FHC), La Crosse Fishery Resource Office (FRO), La Crosse District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, and the newly formed Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services (FUMFS). With this superb outreach opportunity, thousands of people learned about the USFWS's partnership programs, projects, and all the benefits the public receives from federal natural resource management.

Flying fish brought diverse crowds in flocks to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's booth at the 27th Annual La Crosse Boat, Sports and Travel Show February 12-15, 2004. Over 3,000 visitors viewed the USFWS's booth consisting of displays from the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH), La Crosse Fish Health Center (FHC), La Crosse Fishery Resource Office (FRO), La Crosse District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, and the newly formed Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services (FUMFS). Fish mounts hung from the ceiling appearing to "fly" above the heads of the onlookers and a computer monitor was set up showing the "flying" (jumping) exotic silver carp.

Children of all ages were drawn to live juvenile lake sturgeon, walleye, bluegill, perch and several other species displayed in an aquarium, as well as animal pelts and mounted ducks on a stick. A brand new freshwater mussel display was exhibited that included specimens of the endangered Higgins' eye and winged mapleleaf mussels. The Refuge's Friends' Group sponsored a photo contest in which visitors could vote for entries from photographers from the La Crosse area. Issues discussed by La Crosse area citizens included: the Mississippi River draw-down, aquatic nuisance species control such as information about Asian carp, freshwater mussel propagation, bird and mammal viewing opportunities, waterfowl issues, native fish restoration and several other topics. Several members of FUMFS volunteered their time to speak with the public about issues of concern and about being a member of the Friends Group.



A great big thanks goes to the La Crosse National Weather Service for donating half of their exhibition area to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Offices. With this superb outreach opportunity, thousands of people learned about the USFWS's partnership programs, projects, and all the benefits the public receives from federal natural resource management.

Heidi Keuler

Interjurisdictional Fisheries:

Lake Winnebago Sturgeon Spearing Long-Term Health Sampling **02/14/2004**



USFWS Employees Dave Wedan and Corey Puzach collecting fish health samples from a sturgeon

The Lake Winnebago-Wolf River system probably holds the largest remaining lake sturgeon population in the world. With continued monitoring, research, and management cooperation by the Wisconsin DNR, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Tribes, and partners such as the “Sturgeon for Tomorrow” group, the future for this ancient fish, here since the dinosaurs, looks positive indeed.

In conjunction with the opening of Wisconsin's 2004 lake sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago, Dave Wedan from La Crosse Fishery Resource Office (FRO), Corey Puzach from La Crosse Fish Health Center (FHC), and UW-La Crosse Graduate Student/ Fish Health Volunteer Scott Hansen, collected tissue, kidney, spleen, and blood samples from 60 lake sturgeon. The sturgeon ranged in weight from 11.5 – 117 pounds. The La Crosse FHC is continuing long-term sturgeon diagnostic monitoring, and has done so for the past five years. The completed four years of tests have shown no sign of any disease or virus present in the Lake Winnebago-Wolf River System lake sturgeon, and their overall health is very good.

The La Crosse USFWS crew worked closely with a State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) fisheries crew at one of a number of state sturgeon spearing registration stations located around the big lake. The spearing harvest is closely monitored and regulated by DNR biologists. When the “safe-harvest” level of adult female and male sturgeon is reached, notice is given that the annual spearing season will end after the next day of spearing. Because of ideal water clarity and ice conditions, the “safe-harvest” was reached the first day of spearing, limiting the 2004 season to only 2 days.



David Piechowski from Red Granite, Wisconsin, speared this 189 lb, 90 in Lake Sturgeon on Lake Winnebago on February 14, 2004

The highlight of the first day's lake sturgeon harvest this year was the registration of many large fish (60-100 pounds), including a fish weighing in at 189 pounds and 80 inches in length. According to Ron Bruch, DNR fishery supervisor, this sturgeon was aged at 53 years, and was the largest sturgeon harvested from Lake Winnebago in 73 years of record-keeping. Bruch also said the spearing harvest this year totaled 1,854. The Lake Winnebago-Wolf River system probably holds the largest remaining lake sturgeon population in the world. With continued monitoring, research, and management cooperation by the Wisconsin DNR, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Tribes, and partners such as the "Sturgeon for Tomorrow" group, the future for this ancient fish, here since the dinosaurs, looks positive indeed.

Dave Wedan

Outreach:

La Crosse FRO Helps Winona District UMFWR with Annual Ice Fishing Clinic **02/21/04**



Approximately 45 kids between the ages of 6-13, participated in ice fishing, fish identification and minor regulations activity, and a safety ice pick building activity. This public outreach event was a great way for the USFWS to give something back to the community in which they work in and for the public to learn about natural resources benefits gained from the service.

La Crosse FRO staff and volunteers worked at the Annual Ice Fishing Clinic on February 21, 2004 sponsored by the Winona District of the Upper Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The event took place on Lake Winona in front of the Lake Park Lodge in Winona, Minnesota from 10AM-2PM.

Approximately 40 kids between the ages of 6-13, participated in ice fishing, fish identification and minor regulations activity, and a safety ice pick building activity. Children first learned how to safely ice fish and the benefits of certain types of warm clothing. Children then were split into groups with a group leader and went ice fishing for about an hour before heading in for a lunch. While inside the Lake Park Lodge, children were

able to “ice fish” through a table for about 15 different species of cutout fish images. With these “fish” children were able to identify them, measure them, and decided if the fish could be legally kept. Gummy worms were given as prizes for participating in the activity. Children were also able to construct safety ice picks with the help of an adult. These ice picks were made with two wood handles, a nail protruding out of each handle, and a cord connecting the picks. These picks could be used to pull someone out of a hole of ice if they accidentally fell through. After lunch the kids headed back outside to fish for another hour or two. Children had the opportunity to try fishing in and outside of several different kinds of ice fishing shanties. Although the fishing was slow, the day was a success with several of the children catching some nice bluegills and black crappies. At the end of the day prizes such as ice fishing poles and fishing tackle were raffled off. Every participant went home happy because everyone received something to take home such as a photo of themselves, sunglasses, key chains, etc. This public outreach event was a great way for the USFWS to give something back to the community in which they work in and for the public to learn about natural resources benefits gained from the service.



L.E. Officer Rob Hirschboeck teaches young anglers about identification and regulations

Heidi Keuler

Endangered Species:

La Crosse FRO Helps Build Cages with Genoa NFH

02/17/04 – 02/18/04



Mussel cages built and used last year

This enormous partnership of about 20-25 people from Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, La Crosse FRO, Genoa NFH, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, created 80 mussel cages in only 2 days.

La Crosse Fishery Resource Office (FRO) and five of their volunteers worked about 16 hours on Higgins’ eye mussel cages at Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) February 17-18, 2004. This enormous partnership of about 20-25 people from Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, La Crosse FRO, Genoa NFH, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created 80 mussel cages in only 2 days with lots of preparation welding and sawing by Jeff Lockington and Dan Kumlin of Genoa NFH. Mussel cages consist of metal caging pop riveted to welded steel frames. The mussel cages will be used this year to hold largemouth bass until juvenile Higgins’ eye mussels drop off of their gills to increase future Higgins’ eye pearlymussel populations.

Heidi Keuler