

Private John Allen *National Fish Hatchery*



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Ricky Campbell, Hatchery Manager
Private John Allen
National Fish Hatchery
P.O. Box 7317
111 Elizabeth Street
Tupelo, MS 38802
Phone: 662/842 1341
Fax: 662/842 3215
E-mail:
FW4FRPrivateJohnAllen@fws.gov

Photos (top to bottom) *Hatchery sign.*

Phase II striped bass awaiting transport to Appalachian River Basin, Florida.

Paddlefish brood stock collection. Weighing and tagging a 40 pound female.

Annual fishing rodeo for seven- to twelve-year olds.

Hatchery Facts

- Established: 1901.
 - The hatchery was originally named the Tupelo National Fish Hatchery.
 - The hatchery receives its water from three wells located on station grounds that are fed by a natural spring.
 - Current programs involve the restoration of interjurisdictional fishes (paddlefish, sturgeon and alligator gar); recovery of endangered and threatened species; restoration of Gulf Coast Striped Bass populations; restoration of gulf coast walleye in the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway to achieve self-sustaining populations and fishery management and stocking recreational fish on national wildlife refuges.
 - The hatchery consists of 25 acres, 14 earthen ponds and one lined pond, a hatching/rearing building, administrative offices, and maintenance buildings.
 - Only Federal fish hatchery in the state of Mississippi. Because of the hatchery's excellent water supply that maintains a 63 degree temperature year round, this hatchery has the ability of spawning and rearing such species as paddlefish, sturgeon, walleye, and striped bass.
 - Annual budget: FY 06 \$335,329.
- Three person staff.
 - 25-30 volunteers and summer employees.

Hatchery Objectives

- Continue restoring depleted populations of Gulf Coast Striped Bass.
- Develop spawning and rearing techniques for alligator gar. Assist in the reintroduction of this species to several areas in the Southeast United States.
- Provide fish for recreational fishing programs on national wildlife refuges and tribal lands.
- Continue in assisting with educational outreach programs that promote the Service mission and further national conservation efforts.
- Continue developing culture and evaluation techniques that will assist in restoring depleted populations of Gulf Coast Walleye in the Tombigbee River Basin.
- Continue the development of culture techniques and assist with restoration efforts for paddlefish.
- Develop culture and evaluation techniques for lake sturgeon in the Tennessee River System.

Average Production

- 200,000 Phase I (one-two inch) Gulf Coast Striped Bass; 30,000 Phase II (six-eight inch) Gulf Coast Striped Bass; 40,000 paddlefish; 150,000 walleye; approximately 500,000 largemouth bass and/or bluegill as needed for National Wildlife Refuge programs; 4,000 lake sturgeon.

Public Use Opportunities

- The station is home to the Tupelo Garden Club which uses the historic manager's residence and the hatchery grounds to hold much of the city's social functions.

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- Tupelo is now one of the top five major cities in the state of Mississippi based on population and industry. The hatchery is regarded by the public and visitors as being one of the major tourist attractions in town. The hatchery hosts over 30,000 visitors annually.
- The hatchery also operates an elaborate mobile aquarium manned by station personnel that is constantly in demand by area schools and conservation agencies throughout the summer months. It has been viewed by as many as 5,000 school children in one weekend and as high as 35,000 in one summer. It has served as an outdoor classroom many times while being presented by hatchery personnel.
- Special activities are held during National Fishing Week, Earth Day, and during several local festivals throughout the year.
- The hatchery hosts a Watchable Wildlife viewing area.
- The hatchery is listed as one of the major birdwatching areas by the Audubon Society.

Questions and Answers

How big do alligator gar get and what do they eat?

Alligator gar can reach lengths up to 10 feet long and weigh over 300 pounds. The female brood fish at this station are all in excess of 130 pounds. The joint behind the gar's skull allows it to make nodding head movements much like an alligator. This allows the fish to eat large prey such as small mammals and large fish up to five pounds. Adult alligator gar can eat a whole beef heart at a time, but they need times of fasting. The largest gar taken by an angler weighed 279 pounds and was nearly 10 feet long.

Do we sell fish?

Although once a primary role of the National Fish Hatchery System, the farm pond program is no longer a responsibility of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1989, the farm pond program was officially ended, and hatchery production was shifted more to threatened/endangered species and the restoration of fisheries population in public waters. A list is available at the hatchery of local and statewide fish farmers that can provide fish for private ponds.

What kind of fish do we raise?

Pvt. John Allen National Fish Hatchery raises nine species of fish. This includes paddlefish, alligator gar, striped bass, walleye, largemouth bass, redear sunfish, bluegill bream, channel catfish, and lake sturgeon. The paddlefish and alligator gar are raised to restore depleted populations in the Lower Mississippi River Basin. The striped bass are raised as part of the Gulf Coast Striped Bass Recovery Plan. The walleye are raised for restoration stocking in the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. The largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, and channel catfish are raised to enhance recreational fishing on national wildlife refuges as needed. The lake sturgeon are raised for restoration purposes on the upper Tennessee River in Tennessee.

How do we capture large brood fish such as paddlefish and alligator gar?

These large fish are captured by using 150 ft. and 300 ft. gill nets. The nets are set free-floating in the water and capture any fish that is unable to swim through the six inch mesh.

The nets are set late in the evening and checked on the hour throughout the night to ensure the safety of these large creatures. They are then transported in specially designed circular tanks.