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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries



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Fish Tails

"[Fish Tails](#)" refers to articles that are submitted by field staff that do not appear as a feature in the current edition of Fish Lines. These articles provide examples of the diverse work that the Service's Midwest Fisheries Program and partners perform on behalf of our aquatic resources and for the benefit of the American public.

Field Notes

"[Field Notes](#)" is an online searchable database that showcases hundreds of employee-written summaries of field activities and accomplishments of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from across the nation.

Last updated: March 27, 2014



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

Veterans Derby 2014

BY BRUCE HALLMAN, NEOSHO NFH



Wrapped in ponchos and bundled in winter coats for the 2014 Veterans Fishing Derby at Neosho NFH. Credit: USFWS

Despite a dismal, gloomy start of the day, as staff members were positioning tables, chairs, banners, and other equipment for the upcoming event, they started to trickle in. Even before the official start of registration at 8:00 am, the veterans began to arrive, being ushered to their parking spot by a Friends Group crew. At the registration table, we recorded names, hometown and state, service branch and number of service years. The participants had to produce some proof they were a veteran or active member of the military, and some even showed their original IDs from many decades past. So many of them sported hats and shirts that proudly displayed their tour of duty and branch, and they proudly accepted a t-shirt in commemoration of this "Rainbows for Veterans" event. A nearby printing company created the very pleasing shirt design, and everyone was happy to get theirs for a souvenir.

This was our third annual fishing event for the veterans. Originally the brainstorm of a local turkey hunting and outdoorsman group, now the whole community has fully embraced the event as our own. Every pond was surrounded by small

American flags, and five large branch flags (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard) were displayed from a prominent overhang. Inside the visitor center, our local State Representative and Friends member Bill Reiboldt, arranged for a



Flags wave in the chilly breeze representing the branches of Service. Credit: USFWS

powerful Fallen Soldier exhibition to be on display. Popcorn and refreshments were nicely arranged in the room as well, but the big hit was the fresh hot coffee that percolated all day long. With temperatures that never rose above the 30's, plenty of cups of the warm beverage helped to thaw so many chilled visitors.

When the hour to begin arrived, a crowd formed around the overhang of the center, trying to avoid any sprinkles, to listen to a beautifully harmonized rendition of the National Anthem by a local women's trio. The color guard from the Neosho High School ROTC proudly presented the flags and marched them to their places. Everyone gathered had hands on hearts and hats off – a somber and special way to kick things off.

From that point, the fishing was on! Poles and bait provided, almost 150 vets spent the next few hours coaxing their limit of four trout onto their stringer – both worms and corn proved quite effective. Volunteers were on hand with nets to help land the fish and pliers for hook removal. Once they completed their fishing objective, it was on to another location – the cleaning station. More volunteers cleaned and bagged the trout in ice so that all were ready for their supper's best recipe.

A gentleman was fishing alongside the pond, sitting in a wheelchair. His partner told me that he was 92 years old! His hat said WWII Veteran. He wasn't deterred by the



This Veteran was eager to show off his catch!
Credit:USFWS

weather at all! Another vet told me of his great appreciation for this event. More and more veterans are being recognized and appreciated for their service, but he told me it hasn't always been like this. And some have suggested having a banquet or similar affair to help honor those living and passed that have served, but he said in no uncertain terms that THIS was the PERFECT way to honor them – such a wonderful way to receive the community's support for their sacrifice. As he finished telling me how he enjoyed helping his neighbors catch their fish after he had his limit, he was wiping a tear from his eye. Perfect indeed.

So now the third annual Veterans Derby is behind us. It came at the end of a busy week at the hatchery, but we wouldn't miss it for anything. I'm sure some of the men and women that attended or helped are still basking in the event, and looking forward to next year's fourth. We'll be here, pleased as punch to be serving up a healthy portion of THANK YOU to our military servers.

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

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Lake Sturgeon in the Classroom

BY MARGARET HUTTON, ALPENA FWCO, WATERFORD, MI- SUBSTATION

It is the job of a good teacher to keep students engaged in the classroom and relating the science learned in the classroom to what actually happens in nature. Many students do not live near any of the Great Lakes or, in southeastern Michigan, have access to wilderness areas. One teacher found an ingenious technique to link the lessons learned in the classroom to the processes of the great outdoors that may have been inaccessible to students previously. Waldon Middle School in Lake Orion, Michigan is approximately 40 miles away from Lake Huron, where a large population of lake sturgeon migrate to spawn near Port Huron, Michigan on an annual basis. Before taking Mr. Jon Gray's class, many students knew very little about the ancient giants that reside very close to their home town. But thanks to the resourcefulness and willingness of Mr. Gray to go above and beyond, and the help of partners such as the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Sturgeon for Tomorrow, there are three resident lake sturgeon in the classroom that the students are required to maintain throughout the school year.



Fisheries Biologist, Margaret Hutton, describes how lake sturgeon are captured to a class of 8th grade biology students. Credit: USFWS



Two 8th grade students, along with fisheries biologist Margaret Hutton, introduce the juvenile lake sturgeon that reside in Mr. Jon Gray's biology classroom. Credit: USFWS

To further educate students, Mr. Gray invited fisheries biologist Margaret Hutton from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) – Waterford Substation to present information about lake sturgeon physiology and biology to several of his classes. She also described the different projects and research priorities of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) within the Great Lakes and more specifically near the students' home towns in the waters of southern Lake Huron, St. Clair River, and Detroit River. Some of the projects that really interested the students included the artificial reef construction projects and the lake sturgeon movement study in the St. Clair Detroit River System. For those students interested in a career as a fisheries biologist, Margaret described a typical year for a fisheries biologist, from writing proposals and giving presentations in the winter to catching and tagging sturgeon in the spring and fall.

The students seemed very excited about the lake sturgeon in the classroom program. In some cases, before the class started, groups of students would head to the part of the classroom where the sturgeon were housed to check how the fish were doing. As part of the program, the students learn what sturgeon eat, how big they grow, and what type of habitats sturgeon need to survive (factors such as bottom type, the flow of the river, etc.). While in the classroom, the students feed the fish, change the water and keep the tank clean, along with check the pH and temperature to make sure the fish are feeling right at home. This is a wonderful way for students to understand different biological and chemical processes that occur naturally while exposing them to resources that are no farther than their own backyard.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

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The Passing of a Legend

BY JAMES ANDERSON, SULLIVAN CREEK NFH

It is with a heavy heart that Sullivan Creek National Fish Hatchery (NFH) announces the passing of Bertha the Lake Trout, age 26 years, of raceway 5B.

Bertha's legendary story begins back in the fall of 1987 during a wild egg collection for future lake trout brood on Seneca Lake. Seneca Lake is located in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. From there Bertha and the rest of her siblings were transferred to Allegheny NFH. Bertha and half of her siblings spent two and a half years at Allegheny before being trucked to Pendills NFH in the summer of 1990. Bertha's group spent four years at Pendills Creek before being transferred to Sullivan Creek NFH in the summer of 1994. It is here, at Sullivan Creek, where Bertha would make her home and achieve her legendary status.

During Bertha's fourteen year spawning career, which began in the fall of 1992 at Pendills Creek NFH and ended in the fall of 2005 at Sullivan Creek NFH, she won numerous awards which include, "most prolific spawner of the year" and "fish most likely to get spawned last." The last three to four years of her spawning career it would take three to four personal to spawn Bertha due to her enormous size. During this time Bertha had reached a length of thirty three inches and a weight of twenty eight pounds and produced an average of four quarts of eggs to her sibling's average of two quarts of eggs. Over her fourteen year spawning career she produced at least 120,000 plus green eggs and 100,000 plus eyed eggs, which were shipped to Jordan River NFH, Iron River NFH, Pendills Creek NFH and Michigan Department of Natural Resources Marquette State Fish Hatchery. After the eggs arrived at the various facilities, they were hatched out and raised up to yearling size and then stocked into Lake Huron and Lake Michigan.

After the 2005 spawning season many of Bertha's siblings were retired to various inland lakes, but Bertha was placed in a "pet pen" where she was then used to help educate visitors on lake trout. Bertha was joined in the pet pen with other enormous lake trout over the past few years, most notably "Big" Hoss. With a brood stock facility there can be great variations in the size of fish from different year classes of brood. Many visitors would look at the fish and say, "those are some big fish" they would then be shown Bertha and say, "that is a monster of a fish!" Bertha became a favorite of returning visitors always asking, "Do you still have the big fish?" and would want to go see her right away. Even in retirement, Bertha would get spawned every fall, but her eggs were not kept. After this fall, Bertha just never recovered from being spawned, and slowly diminished into a shadow of her once glorious self.

Over the years a few brood fish have rivaled the size and robustness of Bertha, but not many have left such a lasting impression.



Big Fish: Lake trout brood stock at Sullivan Creek NFH. Credit: USFWS



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

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Asian Carp in the Upper Mississippi River

BY KYLE MOSEL, LA CROSSE FWCO



It takes two to hold up this bighead carp. Credit: USFWS

and has completed hundreds of these surgeries, was an outstanding mentor who taught me proper anesthesia and surgical techniques. The MDC now has fifteen bighead and ten silver carp with acoustic transmitters in Pool 20 which will be monitored to determine the proportion and rate at which they emigrate upstream. This trip provided us with new techniques and skills that were used the rest of the year.

During the 2013 sampling season, my crew implanted acoustic transmitters in a total of 27 Asian carp that ranged in size from 712 mm to 1170 mm (total length) and included twelve silver carp in Pool 17, five silver carp and five bighead carp in Pool 19, and five bighead carp in Pool 20. The movements of these fish were subsequently monitored using an array of acoustic receivers (VR2Ws) that were deployed at fixed sites over a 580 river-mile reach that extended from near Davenport (IA) downstream to Caruthersville, Missouri. Nearly 3,000 fish detections were logged in Pools 17 and 18. Meanwhile, acoustic data analysis is continuing for sites located further downstream. Roving telemetry was also conducted by mounting acoustic receivers on commodity barges to detect fish as towboats pushed cargoes up and down the Mississippi River, allowing us to track fish without deploying a crew. Fish were also located manually to determine habitat and physiochemical usage. By year's end, no fish were observed moving upstream, but some (22%) of the fish tagged and released in Pool 17 were observed moving downstream to Pool 18. This year we plan to implant 123 more fish with transmitters to increase our sample size. We will also work further upstream with the Minnesota DNR to deploy additional receivers. This will expand the number of receivers in the array to 150, spanning 970 river miles, and include locations on several tributaries of the UMR that will extend as far as upstream as St. Croix Falls, Wisconsin on the St. Croix River. The telemetry study will conclude by 2017 when transmitter battery-life is due to expire.



V16 acoustic transmitter Credit: USFWS

Professionally speaking, the past year was sensational for me given the opportunity to lead a La Crosse FWCO project to monitor Asian carp in the Upper Mississippi River (UMR). Our ongoing objectives are to assess the environmental history, movement, habitat selection, reproductive success and population dynamics (e.g., age structure, growth rates) of Asian carp in the UMR.

We began our work in May by assisting the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) collect Asian carp in Pool 20 near Keokuk, Iowa (IA). Some have asked, "Why Pool 20?" Well, Lock and Dam 19 currently serves as a major bottleneck (i.e., presumed passable only through the lock chamber) for fish passage on the UMR which has slowed the invasion of Asian carp upstream. I was really excited for this trip because Pool 20 contains a high density of Asian carp, and we were surgically implanting acoustic transmitters into bighead and silver carp to monitor their movements. Sara Tripp, who works for the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)



VR2W (Acoustic receiver)
Credit: USFWS

For the fish that didn't receive transmitters, each fish was euthanized and an age estimation structure (Otolith) was removed. Otoliths (ear bones) were collected from 14 bighead and 67 silver carp captured in Pools 7, 17, and 19 during 2013 to address age structure, growth, mortality, and environmental history concerns. We also assisted the MDC collect otoliths from several hundred Asian carp in Pool 20. All otoliths will be sectioned, mounted, and examined independently to estimate the age of each fish. With the age information we will be able to estimate age structure, growth, and mortality and will use this information for future population models. Otolith samples will also be sent to Southern Illinois University (Carbondale, Illinois) and the University of Massachusetts (Boston, Massachusetts) for trace element and isotope analysis to assess environmental history. Data from these chemical analyses will be used to identify the river basin of origin (e.g., UMR, middle Mississippi River, and Illinois River) as well as the rivers (and perhaps the pools)

occupied by each fish throughout its life. This information should indicate where adults have successfully spawned and where larval/juvenile fish disperse after hatching. Additional otoliths will be collected in 2014 to increase the sample size in pools above Lock and Dam 19.

Successful spawning events were previously documented in Pools 18 and 19. We are therefore trying to determine whether successful spawning may be occurring further upstream. Monitoring for juvenile Asian carp was conducted at several possible nursery sites in Pool 16 and 17 during 2013. A total of 1,194 fish representing 34 species were collected during 24 mini-fyke net-sets that cumulatively totaled 447 hours of fishing effort. Asian carp were not observed in any of the catches. However, gravid (mature) adults were collected at two sites in Pool 17 with gill nets. Reproduction monitoring will continue in 2014 and 2015 to determine if successful spawning events are occurring upstream of Pool 18.

This project is by far the most thrilling research project I have led and I look forward to how much we can learn from this. These fish can move great distances and are detrimental to native species. If we understand movement patterns of these species, then we may have a chance at impeding or slowing the spread of Asian carp upstream. We will conduct a full year of sampling in 2014 and should be able to hit the water running this year...once the ice melts!



Inserting transmitter during surgery
Credit: USFWS

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

Director Visits Neosho NFH

BY BRUCE HALLMAN, NEOSHO NFH



(Left to right) US Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe, Neosho NFH Manager Dave Hendrix and US Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius. Credit USFWS-Bruce Hallman

Thanks to the suggestion of Midwest Region Director Tom Melius, the Neosho National Fish Hatchery (NFH) had the honor of welcoming Dan Ashe, the National Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to greet and meet, and see what we're all about. Arriving right as the noon bell rang, Mr. Ashe was greeted immediately upon entering the visitor center by about 40 people – guests, volunteers and staff members. On hand were representatives from US Senators Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt, as well as Congressman Billy Long and the Mayor of Neosho, Richard Davidson and his wife. Always one with a smile, handshake and a hug, hatchery Manager David Hendrix officially announced our two guests to the crowd, and invited everyone to mingle and introduce themselves.

As exciting as it was to welcome our distinguished visitors, another powerful presence was in the air. Thanks to the generous support from our fabulous Friends group, the smell of barbecued brisket began to dominate the room, and thankfully it was time for lunch to begin. After an invocation by Mr. Hendrix, everyone helped themselves to the tasty food, catered by a local market,

and enjoyed the atmosphere of fellowship. A magnificently decorated cake, donated by the local Walmart, capped off the meal in style.

After appetites were satisfied and conversations died down, those that remained were encouraged to introduce themselves and say a word or two. Despite having no prepared speech, the Director then addressed the group with some important points. He was quick to point out the power of partnerships, both with the US Fish & Wildlife Service as a whole, and also on the local level here at the hatchery. Pointing out the wonderful hosting help the Friends Group provided, Mr. Ashe emphasized that the jobs we all do are made more efficient and more effective by uniting causes with other organizations. Present at the meeting, and definitely the beneficiary of such partnering was Superintendent of the nearby National Park Service site, Jim Heaney.



Director Dan Ashe (left) and Manager Dave Hendrix during the tour of the Neosho NFH and Visitor Center. Credit USFWS-Bruce Hallman

In a display showing the work on our current visitor center, Mr. Ashe reiterated its headline that the hatchery, and indeed the whole Service, is “not about the past, but about the future.” He stressed the importance of bringing up the next generations of conservationists and encouraging their input and contributions to make our country's fine resources in even better condition. He also brought up the current Farm Bill and how it is highlighting the importance of water quality and the restoration of our aquatic resources – both topics that directly influence this, the oldest operating federal hatchery still serving the country.



From Under the Dome-Director Ashe enjoys his view of the aquarium at the Neosho NFH Visitor Center. Credit USFWS-Bruce Hallman

To conclude the visit, a walking tour of the grounds ensued. We stopped by the endangered mussel room, the pallid sturgeon brood and young buildings, the trout ponds and saw our newest plans for raising endangered Topeka shiners. Director Dan Ashe left after his 3-hour visit in good spirits. He called the Neosho NFH a real “jewel” in Missouri and for the USFWS, and considered it to be a “core asset” with its beautiful setting, community support, growing endangered species recovery work and reimbursable rainbow trout program. We're thankful to Regional Director Melius for helping bring him here to see what everyone around here knows to be a true attraction for the area.



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Fish Tails

Articles submitted by field staff that do not appear as a feature within Fish Lines. These articles provide examples of the diverse work that is performed on behalf of aquatic resources.

The Friends of Pool 9 Help Prepare Mussel Cages for another Year

BY NATHAN ECKERT, GENOA NFH

A cool clear day in between snow storms was the backdrop for volunteer mussel cage repair day at Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) this year. Our mussel cages generally spend 18 months in the water rearing their precious cargo and after that time they are nearly always in need of repair. The process begins with the removal of the old plywood from the cage base and the old wire from the cage top. These are held on by rivets which can easily be drilled out. After the old material is removed any damage to the cage frame can be repaired in-house by Jeff Lockington, our staff welding expert. The restored cages can then be prepared for the next season by adding plywood to the bases and new screening to the tops. On February 19th, eleven members of the [Friends of Pool 9](#) came to the aide of the mussel program at Genoa NFH. They worked hard all day and were able to completely repair 25 cage tops and 45 cage bases. This represented nearly all the cage repair work scheduled for this winter. The volunteers were thanked for their efforts with a free lunch provided by the Genoa NFH staff. The cages that were repaired will hit the river this spring and there is no doubt that in 2016 the Friends of Pool 9 will be back to clean them off and put them back together again.

Cabin Fever Reliever

BY MARK STEINGRAEBER, LA CROSSE FWCO

The La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO), Genoa NFH, and La Crosse Fish Health Center-Whitney Genetics Laboratory hosted more than 1,000 cabin-fever victims who visited the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) display during the 37th annual La Crosse Boat, Sports, Travel, & RV Show held February 6th-9th at the La Crosse Center. Representatives from these offices were present throughout the four-day event to greet visitors who sought relief from the Polar Vortex and information on a variety of local/regional Service fishery programs and activities. An inviting arrangement of posters, maps, photos, brochures, watch cards, and aquaria containing fish and mussels were prominently displayed near a main entrance to the exhibition hall. Key topics of conversation included lake sturgeon, invasive species, native mussels, fish passage, habitat restoration, and personal actions to improve water quality. The opportunity to personally exchange natural resource information with the large, diverse audience that attends this annual mid-winter event makes Service participation here a valuable outreach tool for all area offices.

Fish Biologist Presents Research at Fish and Wildlife Conference in Kansas City, Missouri

BY ANDREW BRIGGS, ALPENA FWCO, WATERFORD, MI-SUB STATION

Service fish biologist Andrew Briggs attended the 74th Annual Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. The conference took place January 26 - 29 and had over 900 attendees representing many agencies, groups, and academic institutions. The theme of this year's Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference was "Modern Conservation: Celebrating Legacy, Discovery and Innovation."

While attending the conference, Andrew presented both an oral and poster presentation highlighting work being done by the Alpena FWCO. His oral presentation was titled "Bathothermal Habitat Use of Lake Sturgeon in the Open Waters of Lake Huron" and discussed the depths and temperatures occupied by lake sturgeon during multiple seasons. This study offers important insight into lake sturgeon habitat use, particularly during non-spawning periods. Andrew's poster presentation was titled "Survey of Fish Communities Upstream and Downstream of a Dam Prior to Rock-Ramp Installation." This poster highlighted the differences in fish communities upstream and downstream of a dam and discussed the potential impacts of replacing the dam with a rock-ramp. As is the case with most Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conferences, the topics presented were very diverse. Species discussed included amphibians, birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, and plants and presentations focused on various aspects, including conservation, control, ecology, management, restoration, techniques and technology, and outreach. With such a large array of topics, attendees were given the opportunity to broaden their horizons and incorporate ideas from multiple disciplines. The conference also provided the opportunity to network with other scientists and build relationships for future collaboration while learning about the work being done throughout the Midwest region.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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Midwest Region Fisheries Divisions

National Fish Hatcheries

The Region's National Fish Hatcheries (NFH) focus on native species recovery and restoration. Primary species include: lake trout, endangered pallid sturgeon, and endangered, threatened, and native mussels. Other major programs include coaster brook trout and lake sturgeon restoration, fulfilling tribal trust responsibilities for native aquatic species, and cost reimbursed rainbow trout production for recreational fishing. Hatcheries also provide technical assistance to other agencies, provide fish and eggs for research, and develop and maintain brood stocks of various species and strains.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices (FWCO) conduct assessments of fish populations to guide management decisions, play a key role in targeting and implementing native fish and habitat restoration programs; perform key monitoring and control activities related to aquatic invasive species; survey and evaluate aquatic habitats to identify restoration/rehabilitation opportunities; work with private land owners, states, local governments and watershed organizations to complete aquatic habitat restoration projects under the Service's National Fish Passage Program, National Fish Habitat Partnerships, Partners for Fish and Wildlife and the Great Lakes Coastal Programs; provide coordination and technical assistance toward the management of interjurisdictional fisheries; maintain and operate several key interagency fisheries databases; provide technical expertise to other Service programs addressing contaminants, endangered species, federal project review and hydro-power operation and relicensing; evaluate and manage fisheries on Service lands; and, provide technical support to 38 Native American tribal governments and treaty authorities.



Sea Lamprey Biological Stations

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the United States Agent for sea lamprey control, with two Biological Stations assessing and managing sea lamprey populations throughout the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission administers the Sea Lamprey Management Program, with funding provided through the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Fish Health Center

The Fish Health Center provides specialized fish health evaluation and diagnostic services to federal, state and tribal hatcheries in the region; conducts extensive monitoring and evaluation of wild fish health; examines and certifies the health of captive hatchery stocks; and, performs a wide range of special services helping to coordinate fishery program offices and partner organizations. The Whitney Genetics Lab serves as a leading edge genetics laboratory and conducts environmental DNA (eDNA) sample processing for early detection of invasive species.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

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