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Editorial Staff

Tim Smigielski, Editor
Karla Bartelt, Webmaster

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: May 5, 2016

2016 Regional Director's Awards Ceremony

Fisheries Staff Recognized for Excellence

BY KARLA BARTELT, REGIONAL OFFICE-FISHERIES

Showing appreciation for an employee's hard work and dedication is one of the easiest ways to improve the morale of any workgroup, and the Fisheries program received a big boost during the 2016 Regional Director's Excellence Awards ceremony. Of the ten awards presented across eight categories, six were presented to Fisheries employees, engendering a great deal of comradery and program pride.

Outreach Excellence Award winner, Heidi Keuler, working in the field. Credit: USFWS

The first award presented was the Internal Customer Service Award, which was fittingly renamed the John Stokes Internal Customer Service Award in memoriam of the late John Stokes. The award was presented to Tracy Demeny from the Marquette Biological Station. Tracy's nomination for the award mentions her high standards of professionalism, her outstanding ability to negotiate, her ability to bolster field staff's morale, and her positive influence on our work and workforce, among many other attributes befitting the Internal Customer Services Award recipient and its namesake.

The Outreach Excellence Award was presented to Heidi Keuler from the La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office. Heidi's nomination commends her passion and dedication for outdoor youth education, as well as her interpersonal and partnership skills. She has developed and led numerous outreach activities, the impacts of which would be impossible to capture within this paragraph. Thousands of children have had an opportunity to learn about various outdoor activities due to Heidi's exemplary vision and hard work, and we commend her outreach efforts.

Administrative Officer Tracy Demeny from the Marquette Biological Station received the John Stokes Internal Customer Service Award.

Credit: USFWS

The third award was presented to the staff of the Ludington Biological Station, who recently had two employees exposed to high levels of carbon monoxide in a mobile lab trailer. The staff immediately initiated an accident investigation and quickly determined the source of the carbon monoxide leak. They sealed the leak; established steps to ensure this problem would not recur, and finished the field season without further incident. For their dedication and quick efforts to address this potentially deadly issue, the Ludington station staff was presented the Safety Improvement Award.

The Science Excellence Award was presented to Emy Monroe, Ph.D. of the Whitney Genetics Laboratory. Emy Monroe personifies science excellence through her scientific rigor and work ethic, her original genetics research, and for leading validation efforts for the genetic technology now used to routinely monitor for Bighead and Silver Carp. Her exemplary research will continue to keep the Whitney Genetics Lab on the cutting edge of genetic technology for many years.

Two Workplace Improvement Awards were presented this year, one to Brandon Keesler from Iron River National Fish Hatchery, and the other to Karla Bartelt of the Regional Office Fisheries staff.

The staff of the Ludington Biological Station were awarded the Safety Improvement Award. Project Leader Scott Grunder accepted the award on behalf of the station. Credit: USFWS

Emy Monroe, Ph.D., of the Whitney Genetics Laboratory received the Science Excellence Award. Credit: USFWS

Biological Technician Brandon Keesler from Iron River National Fish Hatchery received one of the two Workplace Improvement Awards. Visual Information Specialist Karla Bartelt of Fisheries received the second. Credit: USFWS

Brandon has completed several important projects over the last three years, and one project in particular is a great example of workplace improvement. Brandon upgraded 150 of the station's 30-year-old, obsolete fluorescent light fixtures to new energy efficient LED technology. Thanks to his efforts, the new fixtures have resulted in a 62% reduction in energy consumption and a brighter, more consistently lit workplace for all.

Conference planning and its ever changing rules and regulations has been a long-standing, time consuming issue over the past several years. Karla Bartelt recognized a need to establish an efficient and effective process to ensure that accurate and timely expense calculations are compiled. Karla's initiative and extensive knowledge of Excel brought this project to fruition, and her idea has transformed how we track and report conferences in Region 3, resulting in significant administrative and managerial time and money savings.

There were over 70 nominations for this year's Regional Excellence Awards, and the managers and coworkers that took the time to recognize those who went above and beyond should also be applauded. These individuals recognized significant achievements and took the time to write and submit detailed and heartfelt nominations.

Appreciation is a powerful motivator that increases employee happiness and strengthens the bond between employees and the mission. We commend all of those that received awards and those that were nominated. Employee recognition is not a "One Day Event," rather it is a catalyst to be utilized every day to inspire and engage employees to continue to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats throughout the year.

Last updated: May 5, 2016

Eagle Telemetry

BY NICHOLAS BROOMFIELD, LA CROSSE FWCO

Over the past three years the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Rock Island Field Office (RIFO) has collaborated with West Virginia University and the U.S. Geological Society to trap and telemeter bald eagles. It is the goal of this project to use modern GPS-GSM telemetry systems to provide information about eagles in the Midwest. To accomplish this goal, we have successfully trapped and telemetered 23 bald eagles to date, and will trap and telemeter approximately 40 additional bald eagles next winter.

The La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) partnered with RIFO during the winter 2015-2016 trapping season. Lacrosse FWCO staff provided beneficial skills and equipment which contributed to the project's success including: sturdy boats, boat operation, bait fish harvesting, and working up the fish from gutting through snare attachment. The combined expertise resulted in the capture of 11 additional bald eagles. While the Service rightfully focuses on interagency partnerships, far too often we don't combine resources between programs within our agency. We hope to continue the FWCO-RIFO partnership into the Asian carp world, the mussel world, and beyond!

West Virginia University and Rock Island Field Office employees display the wing span of a captured eagle. Credit: USFWS

La Crosse FWCO biologist Kyle Mosel holds a captured eagle prior to release. Credit: USFWS, Rock Island FO

Once eagles are telemetered, we will track their movements locally as well as regionally during migration. We will use these data to assess the potential impacts that human activities, particularly wind energy development, may have on increasing eagle populations. The final deliverables will include a project report, as well as extensive maps showing local and regional movements of eagles in the context of wind energy development. Service biologists will collaborate with West Virginia Universityon a peer reviewed scientific article. That is expected to be published in later this year.

This original research will answer questions previously not known to science due to limitations of older telemetry systems. It is the opinion of the authors that this research will serve as a guiding document to wind energy developers and the Service, attempting to avoid and minimize impact to eagles in the Midwest Region

Iron River National Fish Hatchery

Building a Yearling Brook Trout Program

BY CAREY EDWARDS, IRON RIVER NFH

Iron River National Fish Hatchery (NFH) produces coaster brook trout for restoration purposes in tribal tributaries to Lake Superior, specifically Grand Portage and Keweenaw Bay Indian Conservations. Historically, this endeavor involved a lot of hard work and heartbreak with the end product being a two inch spring fingerling stocked in late May.

The last two years have found the staff at Iron River NFH putting their thinking caps on to achieve a higher quality product with less toil. A new rearing area was constructed with round tanks providing the growing environment and personal attention needed for healthy fish. Our domestic well pump was replaced, effectively increasing our well water supply five-fold and providing silt free water at a constant temperature to allow for more accelerated growth and development in the early life stages. These changes paid off and we produced fish for our partners that were double in size. We realized there was potential to produce an even better product: a yearling brook trout complete with wire tag. Now we just needed to convince our partners...

A new well pump was installed that supplies silt free water at a constant temperature allowing for accelerated growth in the early life stages. Credit: USFWS

Circular tanks were installed in a new rearing area to provide a healthy growing environment for brook trout. Credit: USFWS

No convincing needed!! New management plans are being been drafted by our partners calling for a switch to a yearling product. The Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office was instrumental in facilitating this change. Everyone is in agreement that the potential survivability of quality spring yearlings is much greater than spring fingerlings.

The Next Step - Marking the fish with a wire tag and adipose clip. Historically, an oxytetracyclene bath was used to mark bony structures. Facilitating this change was the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office. Tagging brook trout through the mass marking trailers had never been done before and many questions needed to be answered. The main concerns were fish size and tag retention. Even with the accelerated growth, the brook trout were barely large enough to be handled in the trailer. The team figured it out and success was achieved. The coded wire tagged yearling brook trout await stocking within the next month. And tag retention, ended up it was not an issue, with 90 percent or better retaining the tags. Fish size will not be an issue this coming year. A water heater was installed for our brook trout rearing area and our fish are currently double in size yet again.

Will this lead to more opportunities for Iron River NFH? We sure hope so. In fact, an opportunity arose to help the state of Minnesota with their brook trout program. Stay tuned to hear the results of this new partnership.

Lake Trout in the Classroom an "Egg-cellent Adventure"

BY CAREY EDWARDS, IRON RIVER NFH

For the past fourteen years, raising trout and salmon in the classroom has been common place in the Northwood's of Wisconsin. The program started at the Superior Middle School and has since spread to Northwestern, and South Shore Middle schools. What better way would there be to teach students about the life history of trout and salmon then to have them raise fish in the classroom? All it takes is a 30 gallon aquarium, chiller unit and trout or salmon eggs. The equipment is quite costly, but with the help of two local sportsman's group donating the funds for chillers and aquariums, the schools were up and running.

The last ingredient for the program was eggs and Iron River National Fish Hatchery agreed to provide lake trout eggs for the program with the stipulation that the fish would be humanly euthanized at the projects end. (This is due to stringent regulations and permitting in the transportation of fish due to disease concerns.)

Nearly 900 students spread out in three schools, welcomed 500 eggs into the aquarium mid-October.

An aquarium/chiller unit is set up in three area schools to incubate and rear lake trout in the classroom. Credit: USFWS

Lake trout eggs are measured and bottled for the trip to the South Shore High School. Credit: USFWS

They monitored water temperature daily and made sure the conditions were perfect for the developing fish. Excitement abounded when the eggs hatched, followed by surprise and disappointment that the newly hatched fry sought shelter in the gravel. After over 30 days of waiting, the eager students began feeding the fish as they swam-up. Some aquariums have better success than others with anywhere from 12 to 200 fish surviving the duration of the project.

As part of the program, the hatchery agreed to come to the classroom and continue the learning process. Fish biologist Carey Edwards brought the hatchery to life with a power point presentation, emphasizing math's everyday occurrence at the fish hatchery. This helped to strike home how important and frequently math is used in everyday life.

This program is very rewarding for all involved. The school, sportsman's club and hatchery are looking forward to this fall, when the next group of students gets to learn about the life history of lake trout.

Flexible Synergy

What is it like to work for the Sea Lamprey Control Program?

BY MARA KOENIG, REGIONAL OFFICE-EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Synergy is defined as the increased effectiveness that results when two or more people or businesses work together. Flexible synergy is adaptable, fluid and open to change to increase work results. Many progressive organizations are deploying a network of flexible workers from agency temps to independent contractors, consultants and small vendors to get vital work done. Work is accomplished in an easy, economical and secure manner.

Adult Sea Lamprey. Credit: Joanna Gilkeson, USFWS

In the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this style of work is adopted by the Sea Lamprey Control Program. How is flexible synergy a part of the Sea Lamprey Control Program? The program's structure organizes staff into team assignments aligned by function and develops patterns of relationships among the program areas. It encompasses governance, reporting relationships, communication and information systems, measurement and reward systems, as well as control and planning systems.

What is it like to work for the program? Most have the same basic experience, but each individual can have very different perspectives. This is what it is like for four of them.

What is it like for Jessica Barber? For Jessica, who leads the barrier and trapping unit, it's like monitoring the various rungs in a fish ladder to identify opportunities and threats while managing to move the program forward. Overseeing this unit, Jessica strategically thinks how to meet their goals and provide employee empowerment while building and maintaining internal and external relationships.

Sara Ruiter? What is it like for Sara? Well, Sara is climbing the fish ladder. First jump landed her in the seasonal pool as a temporary biological science technician in the barrier and trapping unit. Swimming against the current with over 30 other seasonals, she asserts herself, showing dedication, enthusiasm and learning to love the blood-sucking parasitic invasive fish, sea lamprey.

How about Pete? Pete Hrodey isn't the oldest or the most experienced, but working with sea lamprey has been part of his life since he was an undergraduate student. During the past two years, Pete has been on a detail to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission as the Sea Lamprey Information Systems Coordinator. Yes - a Service employee working for a partner. This unique experience, made possible through an Intergovernmental Personnel Act agreement, stems from the relationship the Service has with the Commission. The Commission, operating through the 1954 Convention on Great Lakes Fisheries, facilitates successful cross-border cooperation between the United States and Canada that ensures the two nations work together to improve and perpetuate the Great Lakes fishery. The Sea Lamprey Control Program is one of many programs the Commission oversees.

And what about Kevin Mann? Kevin is a newer member of the Sea Lamprey Control Program. Prior to his current position, he was a term employee at the Service's Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office tagging lake trout for the Great Lakes Mass Marking program and working on lake sturgeon rehabilitation. In his new position with the barrier and trapping unit, Kevin is gaining valuable insight on the importance of the program for the fishery.

They all work in the same unit, and yet... it's hard for any of them to say what it is like in a single anecdote, in a single story or image. It's hard for them to say what it is like because of the flexible synergy required being a part of the Sea Lamprey Control Program in the Great Lakes.

Jessica balances aquatic habitat connectivity with the mission of the Sea Lamprey Control Program. The work is never-ending, from responding to requests to remove aging barrier structures to building new barriers to inspecting and inventorying them. "Our unit's responsibility is to manage stream barriers, such as dams preventing sea lampreys from migrating and spawning," Jessica stated.
For Sara, moving into calmer water, has cultivated her skills. Sara was permanently hired in spring of 2014 as a fish biologist

with the lampricide control team. However, during Pete's absence, she shifted over to the barrier and trapping unit because of her familiarity with that type of work. "In the last couple of years, the Sea Lamprey Control Program has placed an emphasis on cross training," Sara stated. "Being able to fluently move between the units when needed, allows everyone to think of the bigger picture, where all the pieces of the puzzle fit in order to accomplish objectives of controlling sea lampreys."

A unique opportunity within the Sea Lamprey Control Program is Pete's detail. It benefits the Service by placing an employee with a partner. Pete's broad background and familiarity with sea lamprey operations allows him to gain specialized skills and experience on a broader, international scale. His assignment involves developing data visualization and decision support tools along with representing the Commission on aquatic habitat connectivity initiatives.

As for Kevin, he is adapting to his new tributary within the Midwest Fisheries Program. The Sea Lamprey Control Program's velocity is unnerving, however Kevin is thriving in this fast current. He is eager to start his first field season monitoring sea lamprey traps. Traps are used on tributaries to capture juveniles migrating to the Great Lakes or adults returning to spawn. Working with Jessica and Pete, Kevin balances the need for connectivity with the desire to limit sea lamprey access to adult and larval habitat.

But what is it like? The staff trust each other to complete their assignments with exceptional performance. The Sea Lamprey Control Program offers them freedom to try new ideas and encourages them to learn when something fails. They adapt to change. They embrace challenges.
The current propels the program forward, they find ways to move through the eddies. This movement is characterized by the currents which flow around and through the Service and the Commission. The sense of forward movement and periodic rotation of these currents has created a progressive program.

Again, what is it like? A family. Family teaches you values, trust and creativity. Each member brings their best skills to improve and move upstream with all it's might. They never know where the next fish ladder or fish weir will come, but they allow the landscape and their abilities to guide them through the currents.

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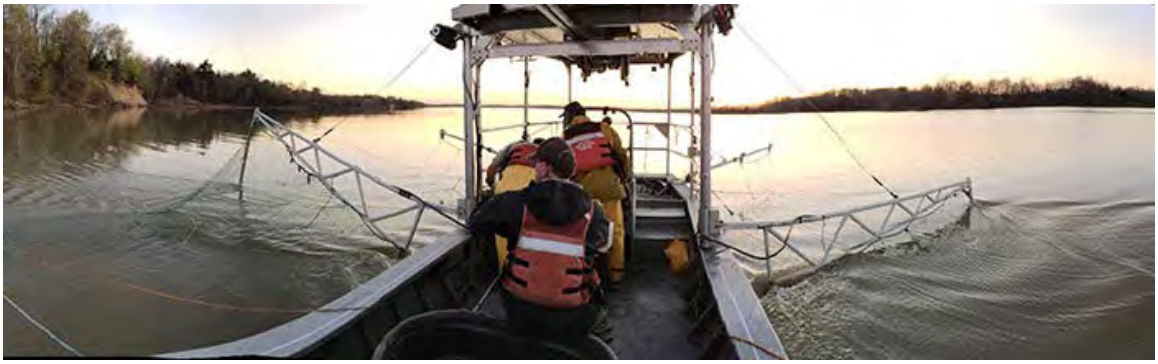
It's What We Do!

BY PATTY HERMAN, COLUMBIA FWCO



Columbia FWCO crews prepare for experimental nighttime electrofishing with the Paupier trawl. Credit: Jason Goeckler, USFWS

Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO), located in Columbia, Missouri, were established in 1991. The office is conveniently located just a few miles from the Missouri River, home of the federally endangered Pallid Sturgeon, a species that Columbia FWCO and our partners are working diligently to recover. Columbia FWCO's work extends well beyond the muddy banks of the Missouri River and includes a diverse array of fisheries work performed across the Midwest Region.

Habitat Assessment and Monitoring Project

Columbia FWCO is in the final stages of the Habitat Assessment and Monitoring Project (HAMP) in partnership with US Army Corps of Engineers. HAMP is a two-year, multi-agency project evaluating the efficacy of existing shallow water habitats (natural and human made) to support early life history stages of the endangered Pallid Sturgeon in the lower Missouri River. Shallow water habitats are hypothesized to be critical to the survival of larval and juvenile native fishes by providing nursery areas for them to escape the fast moving water and to feed and grow. The conclusions drawn from this project will be delivered in Spring 2016 and will facilitate adaptive management strategies for future habitat construction action by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Young-of-year Pallid sturgeon captured as part of Habitat Assessment and Monitoring Program on the Missouri River. Credit: USFWS

Aquatic Invasive Species

Columbia FWCO is part of the massive effort underway to prevent invasive carp from spreading into the Great Lakes. The primary focus for the office is to develop new gears to monitor and capture Bighead and Silver carps, as well as other aquatic invasive species. Columbia FWCO continues to develop and improve the electrified and non-electrified butterfly trawl (Paupier) and the Lampara purse seine that target fast swimming adult carp. Our gear development efforts also include nets and techniques for capturing the young-of-year and juvenile carps. Mamou and scalene trawls have shown great success for sampling these elusive early life history stages of Bighead and Silver carps. As part of the invasive carp monitoring in the Illinois River and Chicago Area Waterway System, a project is planned to study the early life history stages and habitat use of these invasive species. Columbia FWCO is also working with state and federal partners to design and implement novel detection gears and sampling methods to monitor the invasive Round Goby and Northern Snakehead, two species that are poised to invade Missouri.

Fish Habitat Program

National efforts continue in an attempt to mitigate impacts from past anthropogenic activities and prevent further degradation of aquatic habitats. The Columbia FWCO administers funds for projects supported through the National Fish Passage Program and the National Fish Habitat Action Partnership. These programs fund projects that remove or replace structures and barriers which impede natural passage of aquatic organisms and assist landowners in adopting best management practices that add value to property while restoring aquatic habitat. Through these programs, Columbia FWCO works closely with state, county and private partners in Missouri and Iowa providing technical and financial assistance. The focal area for our passage projects has been the historic range of federally threatened Niangua Darter; however, projects have also been funded throughout the range of the federally endangered Topeka Shiner (includes Missouri and Iowa).

Leaves and flower buds of spatterdock (Nuphar luteum) rise from rosettes deep in Barren Fork Creek, Mark Twain National Forest. Credit: Jeff Finley, USFWS

Federal Lands

Columbia FWCO has a long-time commitment to servicing the aquatic needs of Federal Lands, including; U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuges and U.S. military installations. Through these partnerships, we are able to provide baseline assessments and management recommendations for the protection and benefit of freshwater mussel and fish species living in the streams passing through federal lands. Perhaps the most rewarding aspects of our work come through numerous outreach events designed to connect with the public and children to introduce them to the aquatic organisms we work to conserve.

Last updated: May 5, 2016

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.

STEM Students Learn about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

BY ANTHONY RIETH, GREENBAY FWCO

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) seeks to engage students in a variety of activities to enhance learning opportunities, practice critical thinking skills, and increase public speaking and engagement. As part of STEM's mission, a learning day was organized in honor of the popular mathematical Pi Day – 3.14 (March 14). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Technician Anthony Rieth had the opportunity to educate the students as one of the guest speakers.

Approximately 100 3rd to 6th grade children and their parents gathered to learn about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The presentation started out with a general description of the Service and then delved deeper into discussion of the different programs that operate out of the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office. After a brief overview of each program, Anthony discussed Aquatic Invasive Species issues, how the Service monitors for new invaders, and the potential for establishment of Asian Carp. Participants were educated on the biology, morphology, and potential consequences for establishment of four different species of Asian Carp, including Grass Carp, Black Carp, Bighead Carp, and Silver Carp. Participants especially appreciated the video, The Silent Invaders: Asian Carp, that highlights the noticeable jumping behavior of startled Silver Carp. Students were exceptionally engaged during the talk and spent almost a half hour asking questions about Asian Carp life history, other potential invasive fishes, gear and capture strategies, and what work is like as a Science Technician. We look forward to doing outreach at more STEM days in the future!

Trout Unlimited 2016

BY BRANDON KEESLER, IRON RIVER NFH

The Ashland trout unlimited group held an event on April 2nd 2016 to promote their group and raise funds for future projects. The Iron River National Fish Hatchery set up a booth to promote our facility and the work we do.

Here at the hatchery we raise 1.3 million lake trout and over 200,000 brook trout annually. The Lake trout are stocked into Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. The brook trout are stocked into northern Minnesota, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and local waters here in Bayfield County. The mission of Trout Unlimited is "To conserve, protect and restore North America's cold water fisheries and their watershed."

About 100 local residents from the community attended the event to raise money for the local chapter of Trout Unlimited to plant trees for habitat restoration. The Iron River National Fish Hatchery had educational materials present including an aquarium, with live juvenile lake trout and a mature female coaster brook trout, a game to name all the external parts of a fish, and informational brochures explaining the goal of the fish hatchery system, and how the fish hatchery works into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's conservation efforts.

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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.

Whitney Genetics Lab

The Whitney Genetics lab provides environmental DNA (eDNA) surveillance for the early detection of invasive Silver and Bighead carp as part of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee's plans to detect, monitor, and respond to the threat of invasive carp in the Great Lakes. The lab also provides analysis for determining the ploidy of wild-caught Black and Grass carp, two more invasive carp species.

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