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December 2010

NATCHITOCHES NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY

Natchitoches News

Manager's Corner

By: Karen Kilpatrick

December was a slow month in some senses and a busy month in others. The majority of the staff was using well earned annual leave and enjoying the holidays with their families. Production fish were harvested in November so the only culture going on was with 200 alligator snapping turtles that we are overwintering for the State of Oklahoma.

The main event for December, for me, was that it symbolized the end of an era for the hatchery. December 31, 2010, marked the end of the hatchery's official participation in the restoration of the pallid sturgeon. Work with the sturgeon began in 1994 and involved two staff members serving on the national recovery team, hatchery staff initiating and chairing the Pallid Sturgeon Lower Basin Workgroup, and many years of culture and management contributions. The closure of the sturgeon era here, however, is eclipsed by the excitement of working with species that are more suited for the hatchery's physical plant and staff expertise. Moving forward is always hard but change is inevitable and as the hatchery changes directions away from the paddlefish, striped bass, and pallid sturgeon toward alligator gar, alligator snapping turtles, and the Louisiana pearlshell mussel I feel confident that the Service, the American people, and the resources will all benefit greatly.

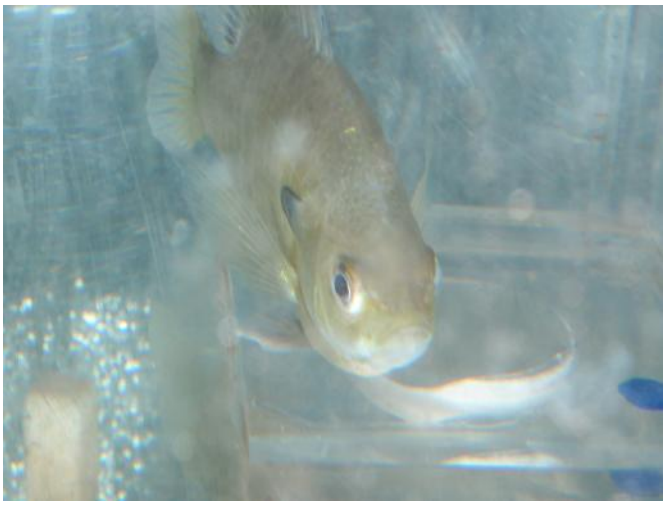
Assistant Hatchery Manager Jan Dean holds a pallid sturgeon

One of the 200 Alligator Snapping Turtles overwintering at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery

Mussel Propagation Begins At Natchitoches NFH

By Tony Brady

The staff at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery (NNFH) began their first attempt to propagate freshwater mussels in December 2010. Two little spectaclecase *Villosa lienosa* females were collected in Black Creek located in Grant Parish, LA. The females were examined by hatchery staff and determined to be carrying the larval form of mussels called glochidia. These glochidia, in order to complete their lifecycle, must attach to the gills or fins of fish where they undergo a metamorphosis that will allow them to live independently in the stream substrate. At the hatchery the glochidia were collected from these two mussels and exposed to the gills of five Bluegill. The Bluegill were placed in NNFH's new mussel propagation system which consists of a total of 32 aquaria that are supplied with heated water allowing the hatchery to produce mussels in the winter time. The fish will remain in the aquarium system for three to four weeks when the glochidia will complete their metamorphosis and drop from the gills. The results of this propagation effort will be reported on in the next issue of Natchitoches News.



Mussel Aquaria designed to hold host fish and collect the newly metamorphosed mussels as they drop off the fish.

You may wonder why NNFH decided to begin mussel propagation in December and with the little spectaclecase? The answer is simple, the staff needed to test their system out prior to beginning propagation trials with the threatened Louisiana Pearlshell Mussel (LPM). The little spectaclecase mussels were collected in a creek known to be home to one of the best LPM beds known and is a mussel species that can be found gravid (with glochidia) throughout the winter. Another reason the little spectaclecase made a good surrogate for the LPM is that the hatchery had the Bluegill available for the inoculation. The mussels produced from this effort will then be used to test different culture variables to aid in the future culture of the LPM.

STEP Student Prepares For The Future at Natchitoches NFH

By Tony Brady

The Student Temporary Employee Program (STEP) is a program implemented by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to develop future biologists by hiring college students to work while gaining valuable experience across an array of Service related activities. Currently at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery (NNFH), Wesley Maddox is filling the role of STEP student. Wesley is a Senior at Northwestern State University working on his Bachelors of Science in Biology with a minor in Wildlife Management. Wesley began working at NNFH in June of 2010 where he has assisted in all areas of fish culture, care, harvest and mussel research. One of Wesley's many duties has been caring for and feeding the fish in NNFH's public aquarium as well as interacting with the visitors that come and enjoy the fish on display. This past December, Wesley and NNFH's Maintenance Mechanic Wade Scarbrough had the opportunity to gain some refuge experience by assisting with a youth deer hunt at Bayou Cocodrie National Wildlife Refuge (BCNWR) located in eastern Louisiana. Two hunts took place over a four day period that allowed 39 kids to have the chance to bag a deer while enjoying the great outdoors. Wesley and Wade acted as guides for young hunters during each of the youth hunts, providing instruction on ethical taking of game as well as proper retrieval and care of downed deer. Not only is Wesley a stellar biologist, but he's also good deer guide…the first kid he assisted shot a 9 point buck towards the end of their last day of hunting. After the final hunt Wesley said *"It was great for me as a STEP student to get the opportunity to meet other service employees and the volunteers that made these hunts possible and available to the youths. I would also like to thank BCNWR … for their great hospitality during the hunts*." Wesley is scheduled to be on staff at NNFH until December 2011 when he graduates.

Welsey Maddox cleans aquarium tank at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery

F.I.S.H. – Colorful Friends!

By: Karen Kilpatrick

A splash of blue, a bit of green, a touch of yellow…and a coyote? This is a fish hatchery! What does a coyote have to do with that? Everything! F.I.S.H. - Friends in Support of the Hatchery has obtained an $11.2K grant from the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission to develop a hatchery education program linking the hatchery and the Caddo Indian Nation. Caddos once occupied the hatchery land and over 100 Caddo remains were uncovered, looted, and destroyed during hatchery construction in the early 1930's. The grant money funds the brain child of Northwestern State University's Master's student Randall Hart whose thesis *Sharing Caddo Culture: Heritage Education Activities for the USFWS Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery* was released in August 2010. The grant allows for the publication of coloring books and teachers manuals for grades K-5. It also funds traveling trunks, teacher workshops, and graphics funds for the six activity stations that are the heart of the program. So where does the coyote fit in? The fifth grade coloring book is "Coyote Imitates His Host" and provides a valuable lesson about just being who you are because there are already more than enough others! During the month of December Hatchery Manager Karen Kilpatrick met with printing companies to begin the process of getting the coloring books and teachers manuals formatted and ready for publication. For more information on the Caddo Education Program, contact Hatchery Manager Karen Kilpatrick at 318.352.5324.

Natchitoches NFH Participates in Landscape Conservation Cooperative

By: Jan Dean

The development of Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) partnerships is a focal point for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. LCC partnerships are a means to collaboratively address the conservation challenges facing our Nation's fish, wildlife and cultural resources. They are fundamental units of planning and science capacity to help us carry out the functional elements of Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC). Strategic Habitat Conservation is a framework for setting biological goals for priority species populations and for making strategic decisions about our work. It is an iterative process that encourages us to constantly assess and improve our actions. Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery (NNFH), along with the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture (LMVJV), is striving to be on the cutting edge of the Gulf Coastal Plains and Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GCPO LCC). This December two scoping meetings were hosted by Dr. Tirpak, the Science Coordinator for the GCPO LCC at the LMVJV office in Vicksburg, MS. The first meeting focused on Alligator Gar and was attended by Jan Dean (NNFH), Lee Holt (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission), Ricky Campbell (Private John Allen NFH), Glenn Constant (Baton Rouge Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office), Nick Wirwa (St. Catherine's Creek National Wildlife Refuge), and Yvonne Allen (US Army Corp of Engineers). Alligator gar have been identified as an important species for the GCPO LCC, and Natchitoches NFH is becoming more involved in the conservation effort for this top predator. Natchitoches NFH has reared, tagged and released young alligator gar hatched by the staff at the Private John Allen NFH. When asked why the hatchery is raising Alligator Gar, NNFH Assistant Manager Jan Dean replied "Alligator gar have a long history; we want them to live well for a long time more." Now the GCPO LCC's efforts are extending to investigating their habitat needs, and we hope to assist with development of more efficient capture techniques. The second meeting was attended by host Dr. Tirpak, Tony Brady (NNFH) and Steve Shively (US Forest Service). The focus of this meeting was the federally threatened Louisiana Pearlshell Mussel (LPM) that is currently found in only two Louisiana parishes. The goal of the LPM meeting was to discuss how using the SHC approach could aid in many different aspects of recovery of the LPM. As these groups progress in the goals set forth at the respective meeting, future results will be found in upcoming newsletters. The web site for the GCPO LCC is www.gcpolcc.ning.com.

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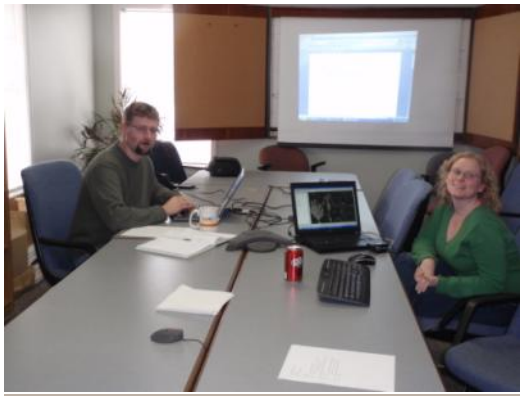

Dr. John Tirpak and Amy Keister at the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture continue to provide assistance as the hatchery staff wades in to LCC and SHC.