

**Profile of a Fisheries Biologist:
Albert Spells, USFWS fisheries biologist, Virginia Fisheries Coordinator Office,
First American Shad Schools-In-Schools Program**

Albert Spells, Virginia Fisheries Coordinator, Charles City, Virginia, was one of the pioneers of the Shad-in-Schools Program. In 1996, Mr. Spells drove thousands of juvenile American shad packed in little bags filled with pure oxygen from the Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery in Virginia to four schools in the Washington, D.C. area. Students continued raising these shad in their classroom in tanks designed by Mr. Spells and his staff. Two weeks later, the students gathered at the shores of the Potomac River to release their fry into the waterway.

During this time, Mr. Spells was the Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery supervisor. A position he held until 2004. It was the first hatchery in the United States to raise American shad. Through his vision and leadership, the USFWS began resorting American shad to the Chesapeake Bay river basin. Getting the local schools involved helped to highlight this program.

In his current position as the Project leader for the Virginia Fisheries Coordinator Office, Mr. Spells works with partners to provide fish passages for migratory fish in waterways throughout Virginia. He is helping to open up the river systems for the ancestors of the fish he and the first students released. Mr. Spells has been involved in eight dam removals and has worked to provide numerous [fish passages on rivers in Virginia](#) that flow into the Chesapeake Bay. When he is not working on fish passage, he is working with working with partners to assess the rare [Atlantic sturgeon](#) population in the Chesapeake Bay. Or, he is helping to protect and restore habitats that affect aquatic systems. Mr. Spells enjoys reaching out to the public to inform and educate others on our natural aquatic wonders. He is a true steward of the aquatic ecosystem.

A television show first inspired Mr. Spells to pursue a career helping aquatic species. "I got into the fisheries arena because of Jacques Cousteau, and a TV show called *Wild Kingdom*," Mr. Spells said. "When I was a boy there were no shows such as Blue Planet, nor were there channels

--more--

2/2/2

such as National Geographic," he said. " But there was Jacque Cousteau, and I would dream of experiencing the kinds of things that he demonstrated during those telecasts and would proceed to read about the animals depicted in the shows, " he added.

On a return visit to his childhood stream where he used to fish and explore with his brother, Mr. Spells and his brother, Cornell, were not happy with what they found "When I was little, a stream I called "Little Stream" flowed from a millpond near my house," he said.. "Little Stream was not much of a fish area, but it was our fishing hole which hardly ever disappointed us," he said. "One day when I was on spring break from South Carolina State College, my brother and I went to go fishing and when we arrived, we found that our stream was ruined because of litter on its banks and in the water," Mr. Spells said. "It was at that moment that I knew I wanted to work in the aquatic ecology arena," he said.



Albert Spells examines hatching jars for American shad at the Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery.

--more--

3/3/3

Thirty years later, Mr. Spells is happy with his career decision. "What I find most satisfying about my work is believing that I am making a small difference helping to conserve our aquatic resources for future generations to enjoy," Mr. Spells said. "I also get satisfaction from helping at least a small segment of our society to learn about our aquatic resources, and hopefully, help them develop a conservation ethic and an appreciation for what we have been blessed with ecologically in this country," he added.

Through Mr. Spells vision and those of the other Shad in the program pioneers the American shad in the schools program has grown to more than 100 schools in four states, including the most recent schools in North Carolina.

Final: March 2, 2010