



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

**TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW Time (6:45)**

**NEOSHO NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH DAVID HENDRIX)**

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

**P R O C E E D I N G S**

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and I'm on the phone today with David Hendrix, hatchery manager of Neosho National Fish Hatchery in Missouri. David, are you there?

MR. HENDRIX: I am. Good morning.

MS. LEON: Well, David, I have you on the phone today because I'm told there's a lot going on at Neosho and with that said we've got to start somewhere. Tell us about your work with the Ozark cavefish, a threatened species.

David: That's exactly right. The Ozark cavefish is threatened on the federal level and is classified as endangered on the state level in the state of Missouri. In 1989, we discovered the Ozark cavefish in one of our springs that supplied water to the hatchery. It was the Hearrell Spring supply. Once discovering this little fish, they identified it as the endangered Ozark cavefish.

Right now, we're not propagating this little fish, but we work to educate our public about the importance of the little fish and the role that it plays out in our environment. And we are honored to be involved with the cavefish work.

MS. LEON: All right. David, for all of our listeners who are not able to make it out to the hatchery, why is this species important?

MR. HENDRIX: I tell you, this little fish – what it looks like is a pinkish whitish little fish, almost translucent. You can almost look right through this little fish. It only gets up to about 2-2.25 inches in size. So, it doesn't get very big. But that little fish is known as a water quality indicator. Back in the cellar days, when we used to take water from the wells, they discovered this little fish in their buckets.

They looked upon it as a good luck charm, because this fish is only found in high quality water. So, they felt that any time they found this little fish in their well water that meant the water was of high quality. Still to this day, we look upon the endangered Ozark cavefish as a water quality indicator.

MS. LEON: Well, it sounds like you're doing a lot of great things for the cavefish, but I understand the bigger business of Neosho lies in pallid sturgeon. Can you tell us about your work with this fish?

MR. HENDRIX: That's exactly right, the endangered pallid sturgeon. We started working with pallid sturgeon about eight years ago. Hatcheries are used as wonderful management tools, and so when nature's thrown out of balance, we have to work to put nature back in balance. In this case, it would be with the endangered pallid sturgeon.

So, we're working right now to help save this fish. They're on the verge of being wiped out in certain areas. Our job is to help build the population back up the way it should be out in nature and get it to a level where this particular population is self-sustaining. Right now we've produced over 10,000 this year alone of endangered pallid sturgeon. We get them up to about 12-13 inches in size and we stock them in the lower Missouri River.

So, we are really engaged and really involved in trying to help in the recovery process of the endangered pallid sturgeons. They've been around for a long time, so we want to make sure that these fish are around for many generations to come.

MS. LEON: Are you monitoring these fish that you release into the Missouri River each year? Are they surviving?

MR. HENDRIX: Yes ma'am. We could just raise them and put them out in the river, but we use a checking system where we can do a follow-up. What we do before the fish leaves the hatchery is we tag these fish. We mark them with pit tags which are a little metal tag that tells you exactly where the fish will stop and what parentage these fish came from, all that good stuff that, so we'll be able to keep track and see how well they do.

It's not just good enough to just put quality fish back into the river. We have to be able to do follow-up to see how well these fish are surviving to be able to confirm what we're doing is working.

MS. LEON: Well, it sounds like you've got your hands full between the Ozark cavefish and the pallid sturgeon, but this isn't stopping you from gearing up for some serious freshwater mussel work this next year. Can you tell us what all Neosho will be doing to support the restoration of native freshwater mussels?

MR. HENDRIX: Yes ma'am. We're excited about getting more engaged and more involved in mussel propagation. Right now, we have been working with Missouri State University over in Springfield, Missouri, and the University over there is doing a lot of mussel recovery work.

What we've been doing up until this point is providing host fish. Of course, mussels, part of their life cycle is that they go through this parasitic stage where they attack the gills of a host fish. So, what we have been doing up until this point is we've been providing host fish for the mussel recovery work being done over at Missouri State University.

But this coming year, we'll be able to transition into propagation of mussels to doing pretty much what Missouri State University is doing over in Springfield, Missouri, but doing it at the hatchery. So, we're very, very excited about that transitioning and getting more involved.

MS. LEON: Neosho National Fish Hatchery was established in 1888 which makes it the oldest operating federal fish hatchery. Is there a lot of public support coming from the community that this hatchery has been a part of for so long?

MR. HENDRIX: Oh, yes ma'am. It's just unbelievable support. The community here has been supporting this hatchery for many, many years. Of course, the hatchery is located right in the heart of the city of Neosho. There have been times where the hatchery's been threatened to be closed and the people have come forth and said they want the hatchery here in the state of Missouri and here in the city of Neosho.

So, it's just unbelievable. We have a wonderful, wonderful friends group that has been around since 2002. So, there's a wonderful, wonderful support system. We have had wonderful support from our legislatures and all of the colleges and schools throughout the area. It is just unbelievable. So, we are very, very excited about being located where we are and being involved in so many things at the service need. And that's what the hatchery's job is all about. We work with endangered species that are on the verge of being wiped out. It's our job to help save those species.

We are also excited about doing rainbow trout. We produce over 100,000 pounds of rainbow trout annually. This is something that generates over \$10-11 million back into the state's economy. So, our communities and the state and surrounding area are so excited about that. The hatchery is very diverse and is able to do a number of things and not only to serve our community but also be able to meet the demands and needs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. So, it makes it very, very special.

And to add on top of that being the oldest federal fish hatchery still in operation to date is just awesome. Of course, right now to get the people even more excited, we are in the process of constructing this beautiful visitor center. It's going to allow, what I like to call, an educational center. That's what it's going to be about: Educating our public about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and about the things Neosho is doing and why we're doing it and how it benefits them. So, this center is going to be a wonderful tool that will allow us to serve not only local community but our nation.

MS. LEON: Well, thank you, David, for your time today. It was a real pleasure having you on.

MR. HENDRIX: It was my honor, Sarah. It was wonderful talking with you this morning.

MS. LEON: For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Sara Leon. Thanks for listening.