



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# National Fish Hatchery System: Fish Health Centers

## The National Fish Hatchery System

The National Fish Hatchery System (NFHS) is a key contributor to the restoration and recovery of federally-listed and non-listed aquatic species with declining populations. A unique network of highly-skilled scientists work with hundreds of State, tribal, and non-governmental organizations and private citizen partners to deliver conservation of federally-listed and non-listed aquatic species. These conservation efforts include propagation of healthy aquatic species with the correct genetic strain to help re-establish wild populations; applied research, aquatic animal health diagnostics, and assessment; development of models to better focus management activities in the face of climate change; and development of new aquatic animal drugs. The NFHS consists of 72 National Fish Hatcheries (NFHs), one historic hatchery, nine Fish Technology Centers (FTCs), seven Fish Health Centers (FHCs), and the Aquatic Animal Drug Approval Partnership Program (AADAP). The Service's FHCs and FTCs provide the scientific foundation for many recovery and restoration programs. Ready access to science and technology support enables aquatic resource managers to work smarter, focus limited resources on effective management strategies, and achieve the Service's aquatic conservation mission.

## Protecting and Monitoring Aquatic Animal Health

Fish Health Centers were established in 1965 to monitor aquatic animal health within NFHS and provide assistance and advice on aquatic animal health to states, tribes, other Nations, and the aquaculture industry.



*Columnaris disease chinook gill.*

Today, Fish Health Centers continue to provide diagnostic support to the National Fish Hatchery System and the wider fish culture community. Centers partner with other Federal agencies in implementing the National Aquatic Animal Health plan. Centers disseminate information of the health status of wild aquatic animal populations in the United States through the National Wild Fish Health Survey and its publically accessible database.

Like all animals, fish are susceptible to a variety of environmental, nutrition, and infectious disease. If left untreated, these diseases can often lead to death. Infectious diseases, those caused by pathogens—organisms such as parasites, bacteria, or viruses—are of special concern because they can be easily spread to other fish within a hatchery, to another hatchery during fish transfers, or to wild populations if infected fish are released.

## What Fish Health Centers Do

Fish health center personnel apply knowledge of several scientific disciplines including fish biology, microbiology, epidemiology, toxicology, pathology, physiology, histology, and genetics to prevent disease. They must understand the conditions, individual requirements, interactions of wild and cultured fish, and how those factors influence disease and overall aquatic animal health.

Normal activities a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish Health Center include:

- Frequently checking on the general health of fish within hatcheries;
- Screening for disease (viral, bacterial, parasites) dangerous to fish;
- Monitoring selected wild stocks of fish.
- Reducing the Spread of Fish Pathogens in hatcheries and the wild; and
- Treating Infected Fish.

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