



Fish Lines

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Tales of Two Treasure Hunts

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Tales of Two Treasure Hunts



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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: January 9, 2014

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

Tales of Two Treasure Hunts

BY MARK STEINGRAEBER, LA CROSSE FWCO



Buried treasure ... freshwater mussels! Credit: USFWS

the river discharge nearly 50% overnight. We soon found this additional increase in water would require an exponential increase in our efforts that day. For example, we placed a greater than normal emphasis on keeping our heads above water to be sure our cross-channel treks remained an aerobic form of exercise.

Once having safely reached the opposite shore, we donned our masks and snorkels and began to search for mussels in shallow water near the bank. When this proved unsuccessful, we expanded the search area into deeper waters. Despite brilliant sunshine, bottom visibility in the arms-length deep, tea-colored water was poor and maintaining position was all but impossible in the swift current. The mussels were simply located beyond routine snorkeling depth.

Faced with the prospect of coming up empty handed, one by one we began to discard our snorkels, take large breaths of air, and repeatedly dive to the river bottom in a series of dim-lit, tactile adventures spent groping the sand for mussels as the current carried us body-surfing downstream.

Although more physically demanding, this collection method proved to be effective under the challenging conditions. A total of 13 gravid (pregnant) mussels (11 sheepsnose, two black sandshell) were brought to the Genoa National Fish Hatchery that day for propagation activities and 16 hickorynut mussels were taken for other research projects.

Two weeks later on July 25th, we received another request from Nathan for help; this time things would be different. River stage dropped by two feet and discharge was half what it had been. Crossing the river was no longer the physical chore it had been and snorkeling conditions were ideal.

A total of 19 species were found in little more than one hour. These included the creeper, pink heelsplitter, white heelsplitter, pimpleback, monkeyface, three horned wartyback, pistolgrip, fatmucket, plain pocketbook, giant floater, wabash pigtoe, black sandshell, elktoe, deerto, fawnsfoot, fragile papershell, and threeridge. More than 60 hickorynut were recovered for research purposes and a fraction of the 26 gravid sheepsnose were transported to Genoa National Fish Hatchery for propagation of this federal-listed endangered species.

What a difference a little less water can make!

The request for help from Nathan Eckert, mussel biologist at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH), came to the La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in Onalaska, Wisconsin later than usual this year.

Above normal rainfall in June kept water levels in many regional rivers bank-full, well into July. Levels now were dropping and the seasonal opportunity we eagerly awaited was here: spending a hot summer day in the cool Chippewa River to snorkel in search of hidden biological treasure ... freshwater mussels!

But on July 12th, as we prepared to wade across the braided river to mussel beds on the opposite side of the channel, something seemed to be missing from similar efforts here in past years.

Q: Where's that old sandbar?

A: Under a foot and a half of water!

Demand for electricity caused the hydropower dam miles upstream to release more water, increasing



July 12th: Heads UP! Credit: USFWS



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

Artificial Reefs a Success in the Huron-Erie Corridor!

BY ANDREW BRIGGS, ALPENA FWCO- WATERFORD, MICHIGAN- SUBSTATION

A large scale habitat restoration effort is currently underway in the Huron-Erie Corridor in an effort to delist the St. Clair and Detroit River Areas of Concern. One of the Beneficial Use Impairments being addressed is the Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat. Dredging within the corridor to facilitate commercial ship traffic has led to a drastic loss of rocky habitat. This rocky habitat is of great importance to many native species within the Great Lakes, particularly for spawning.

Artificial spawning reefs are being constructed in the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers to increase the amount of suitable spawning habitat available to native fish species. Reefs have already been constructed near Belle Isle (2004) and Fighting Island (2008) in the Detroit River and in the Middle Channel (2012) of the St. Clair River. Several more reefs are scheduled for construction in the fall of 2013 near Fort Wayne on the Detroit River and near Algonac and Harts Light on the St. Clair River. These reefs are constructed of loosely piled rock about two feet thick and are one to two acres in size. The species of particular concern include lake sturgeon, northern madtom, walleye, and lake whitefish, which are threatened and/or economically important fish species that utilize rocky substrate for spawning.

Monitoring efforts evaluating the current restoration sites have shown the constructed reefs to be a success. Prior to construction of artificial reefs near Belle Isle, only 2 fish species were captured at this site. Following construction, 20 species were captured with 14 of these being native species in spawning-ready condition or recently hatched from eggs. At the reefs constructed near Fighting Island, the US Geological Survey documented lake sturgeon spawning in 2009, 2010, and 2012 and collected lake sturgeon larvae, indicating the first evidence of successful lake sturgeon reproduction in the Detroit River. Reefs constructed in the Middle Channel of the St. Clair River have also been a success, with lake sturgeon spawning being documented each of the last two years.

This spring and summer, US Fish and Wildlife Service fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford Substation conducted gill net surveys at current and proposed reef sites on the Detroit and St. Clair Rivers. Sampling was conducted over 13 weeks with 74 nets being set. A total of 16 species were captured over the sampling period. Data collected from gill net surveys will be compared prior to and after reef construction to evaluate the fish community response to these restoration efforts.

Monitoring these spawning reefs is important to the continued conservation of both aquatic species and aquatic habitat. The adult fish community sampling being conducted by the Alpena FWCO is just one aspect of the biological response being evaluated by project partners and a long-term monitoring program is currently being developed to assess system wide changes in these rivers.

For more information on these projects please visit the [Huron-Erie Corridor Initiative website](#).



Fish biologist James Boase pulls in a gill net on the Detroit River. Credit: USFWS



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

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Great Lakes Tag and Recovery Lab Begins 2013 Lake Trout Tagging

BY ALLEN LANE GREEN BAY FWCO

The tagging of lake trout destined for the Great Lakes by the Great Lakes Fish Tag and Recovery Lab began July 8th at the Marquette State hatchery and will continue until mid-October at four federal hatcheries in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

About 5 million lake trout will be tagged and clipped by computer-operated automated tagging trailers that can process over 7,000 fish per hour. The automated tagging trailer places a code-wire tag in the snout of millions of lake trout and clips the adipose fin each year. These tiny tags have a code number that identifies a particular group of fish that represent a stocking location, a particular strain, or a specific hatchery.

Data from tagged fish recovered from assessment and creel surveys are analyzed so that biologists can get a measure of the effectiveness of the stocking and restoration programs.



Lake Trout Tagging Trailer Credit: Allen Lane, USFWS

The 2013 tagging season started in mid-march and 2.5 million Chinook salmon were tagged at seven state hatcheries in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana.

Hatchery	Dates at hatchery	Total fish to be tagged
Marquette State Fish Hatchery (Michigan DNR)	July 8-13 2013	216,000
Allegheny National Fish Hatchery (FWS Region 5)	July 29-Aug 9 2013	549,000
Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery (FWS Region 3)	August 20-29 2013	1,113,000
Jordan River National Fish Hatchery (FWS Region 3)	August 20-29 2013 September 4-12 2013 September 17-22 2013	2,100,000
Iron River National Fish Hatchery (FWS Region 3)	September 23-26 2013 October 1-10 2013 October 15-24 2013	1,550,000

2013 Lake Trout Tagging Schedule. Credit: Allen Lane, USFWS



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2013 Lake Trout Tagging Schedule. Credit: Allen Lane, USFWS



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

The “Spotlight” is on Lake Sturgeon at Green Bay FWCO

BY KEVIN MANN, GREEN BAY FWCO



Young-of-year lake sturgeon captured during a nighttime spotlight survey on the Oconto River, WI. Credit: Kevin Mann, USFWS

In early August, biologists from the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service's Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) began their annual nighttime spotlight surveys in search of young-of-year (YOY) lake sturgeon. Surveys are conducted in rivers with spawning populations of lake sturgeon which empty into Green Bay, specifically the Peshtigo and Oconto Rivers. Each survey is performed by driving a boat upstream at night and scanning the river bottom with both spotlights and underwater lights to locate young lake sturgeon. Once located, attempts are made to capture each fish using dip nets. Captured fish are tagged and information such as lengths, weights, and capture locations are recorded before releasing fish back into the river.

Over the last three years, Green Bay FWCO biologist Kevin Mann has surveyed both the Peshtigo and Oconto Rivers with the help from many other Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office employees and countless numbers of volunteers.

Most recently, on the evening of August 8th, 2013, Dr. Patrick Forsythe from the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay Aquatic Ecology and Fisheries Laboratory volunteered for a survey on the lower Oconto River. On this particular night, we were successful in locating and capturing three fish. Dr. Forsythe has a background working with lake sturgeon and was a great addition to the survey as he netting all three fish.

Working with Dr. Forsythe and other volunteers has been of mutual benefit for Green Bay FWCO and the university. University students are able to gain insight to the duties and responsibilities of the Fish and Wildlife Service, while gaining valuable field experiences. In turn, Green Bay FWCO has access to a large quantity of willing and eager volunteers from the university to help complete our responsibilities.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

The Service's environmental DNA Processing Facility Whitney Genetics Laboratory

BY EMY MONROE, WHITNEY GENETICS LAB

As a result of Asian carps being identified as a serious threat to the ecological and economic water resources of the United States, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), along with federal and state partners, is participating in a comprehensive plan to monitor and manage feral populations of Asian carps.

One of the newest tools in aquatic invasive species monitoring is the use of environmental DNA (eDNA) to survey for the presence or absence of target species. eDNA is shed by an organism into its environment, and using this DNA to detect rare fish is more efficient than traditional electroshocking or netting of fish. Developed at the University of Notre Dame, the eDNA method for Asian carps was first used for regular eDNA monitoring of the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) and was carried out by the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), the Service, and the State of Illinois from 2010-2012.



Fishery biologist Maren Tuttle-Lau filters water samples in the lab.
Credit: Becky Lasee, USFWS

The Grand Opening of the Whitney Genetics Lab in April of 2013 marked the successful culmination of two years of planning, building, and staffing of the facility under the guidance of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, the Service's Midwest Region leadership and the La Crosse Fish Health Center's Project Leader, Becky Lasee (recently retired). Funding for the lab was provided by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

The 5300-square foot addition houses three multi-purpose labs, ten offices, and six state-of-the art DNA labs that create separate areas for each step in the DNA workflow to minimize contamination risk. Six new hires started during summer and fall of 2012 and the new building was occupied in November 2012. After a few weeks of moving in supplies, instruments, and equipment, the lab staff commenced training at the bench the first week of the New Year.



Fishery biologist Jennifer Bailey sets up an amplification plate, where a process, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) makes hundreds of copies

In order to successfully assume responsibility for processing eDNA samples, the Service and the ACOE prepared a transition plan that would test and validate the new staff and facility. Transition was successfully completed in June, official monitoring samples were processed the first week of July, and results were posted for public consumption August 15, 2013.

Over the next few months, the lab will process samples from 25 different field sites, mostly from the Great Lakes or CAWS, but also from the Upper Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. These cases will consist of nearly 2800 samples, which translate into several thousand DNA extractions, tens of thousands of polymerase chain reactions, and hundreds of gels processed by electrophoresis in the lab.

The lab has also collaborated with biologists at the US Geological Survey (USGS) and the ACOE to validate new methods and markers to improve eDNA methods. These projects have resulted in updates to the Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP), the standard operating procedures for eDNA sample collection and processing the lab follows. Two major updates to the QAPP include the addition of centrifugation as an option for processing water samples which will save time for field crews and reduce the risk of cross-contamination in the field. Another major update is the switch to a different DNA extraction kit, which not only resulted in a 75% cost savings for the lab, but also reduced processing time.

Through collaborations with others within and outside of the Service, the staff of the WGL is excited to contribute to the successful implementation of the Asian carp

of target DNA from the water samples.
Credit: Nick Grueneis, USFWS

continued research of the ACOE and USGS to improve eDNA as a detection tool.

monitoring and control plan. The lab would not have any samples to analyze without the cooperation with Service staff at the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices of the Midwest Region who collect and process water samples, and we also depend on the continued research of the ACOE and USGS to improve eDNA as a detection tool.

The Whitney Genetics Lab was named in memory of John M. Whitney, who served as a Fisheries Biologist at the La Crosse Fish Health Center for 21 years.

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

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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.

Pendills Creek NFH Starts a New Fish Cycle with 2013 Year Classes

BY CRYSTAL LEGAULT ANDERSON, PENDILLS CREEK NFH

Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery (NFH) raises lake trout for the restoration of the Great Lakes. Each year hundreds of thousands of lake trout are transferred from Jordan River NFH to Pendills Creek NFH for grow-out. Pendills Creek has a very small tank room to start fish, and produced only 220,000 of its own baby fish. Jordan River raised and transferred just over 960,000 baby Lakers to Pendills this May and June.

It takes a lot of loads of fish to transfer all the little fish over the Mackinac Bridge from Jordan River NFH (in Elmira, Michigan) to Pendills Creek NFH (in Brimley, Michigan).

Total lake trout fry on station at Pendills Creek for grow-out into fall fingerlings and spring yearlings is just over 1.8 million fish. The new batch of lake trout will stay at Pendills Creek NFH until October 2013 for fall fingerlings, and May 2014 when they are yearlings, before being stocked into the Great Lakes.

Motorboat Operator Certification Course M/V Spencer F. Baird Safety Module Held in Cheboygan, MI

BY ADAM KOWALSKI, ALPENA FWCO

Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC) instructors Adam Kowalski with Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO), Dave Wedan, (LaCrosse FWCO), Scott Koproski (Alpena FWCO), Dave Bohn (M/V Baird), Rob Dickson (M/V Baird), Keith Duffton (M/V Baird) Keith Colborn (M/V Baird) put on a three day M/V Spencer F. Baird Safety Module in Cheboygan, Michigan (MI) from July 23rd to 25th, 2013. The M/V Baird Module is designed to provide safety information to all Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) employees who will be working on the Spencer F. Baird.

The following is a list of topics covered during the course: vessel orientation, life raft deployment, in-water survival, person overboard techniques, where to find waves and weather information, required and recommended equipment aboard the M/V Baird, how to use vessel communications, emergency procedures, anchor/fog watch, cargo handling, docking, undocking, and line handling procedures, emergency egress, fire suppression, and gear setting concerns.

There was a diverse student body with two people from Iron River NFH, one from Pendills Creek NFH, two from Green Bay FWCO, and one from Alpena FWCO. This was a successful course with all six students completing the training. Students reported that they learned a great deal and felt that this course gave them the information they need in case of an emergency. Students left feeling confident they could deploy a life raft and make the proper life-saving decisions for themselves and everyone on board.

Reaching New Heights

BY RANDY OBERMILLER, PENDILLS CREEK NFH

Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery (NFH) recently purchased an aerial lift work platform.

The aerial lift has a telescopic boom with a working height of 40' and has a horizontal reach of over 18' to efficiently get to heights which were normally out of the reach of the hatchery's longest ladders.

In the past, Pendills Creek NFH had to hire a local electrical company with a boom truck to change light bulbs in the raceway building, replace the rope on the flag pole mast, and other tasks with were out of the reach and unsafe for hatchery personnel.

The hatchery plans to use the new lift to perform other jobs such as trimming trees. The new aerial lift will now allow hatchery personnel to do those tasks.

The aerial lift is trailer mounted with dual pneumatic wheels which allows it to be easily towed behind a pickup. Since the lift is mobile, it will also be utilized at both Sullivan Creek NFH and Jordan River NFH.

Hatchery personnel will be trained in the safe use of the new equipment. Personnel operating the lift will be required to wear a body harness or restraining belt with a lanyard attached to the boom to prevent being ejected from the basket.

Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery, founded in 1951 is located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula near Brimley, Michigan on Lake Superior. The facility rears yearly lake trout to be released into the Great Lakes as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Program. Hatchery production includes just over 1,000,000 fish released into Lake Michigan each spring.

Community Support Program Provides Workplace Training at Iron River National Fish Hatchery

BY SHAWN SANDERS, IRON RIVER NFH

Lucas Nohl came to Iron River as part of a program to provide community service and job experience to persons with disabilities. The program is administered through Pathway Inc. of Washburn, Wisconsin.

Lucas is assisted by Sue Maki and Sue Roglinske, who act as his support and coaches for the job experience. Lucas helps out every Wednesday for a couple of hours and shows eagerness to work, no matter the job. So far, Lucas has been busy weed-eating and washing windows for Iron River NFH. We thank Lucas for diligently working each week and the employee/volunteers of Pathway Inc., for the service they provide to the community.

Last updated: August 29, 2013



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

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.



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