



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Midwest Region

Fisheries & Aquatic Resources Program

# *fish lines*

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Restoration

Volunteer Spotlight:  
Chris Egbert

The Need to Breathe

Wetland Restoration  
Projects Benefit  
"Fish and Wildlife"





U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries



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Coming Together with a Bang!



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## Fish Tails

"Fish Tails" refers to articles that are entered by field staff in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Field Notes website, but are not published 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. To view these articles, click on the links below. Enjoy!

1. There are no Fish Tails Available at Publication Date

Last updated: February 1, 2013



U.S. Fish &amp; Wildlife Service

# Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

## USFWS & USACE Come Together with a Bang!

BY DONOVAN HENRY, CARTERVILLE FWCO



Brad Rogers and Donovan Henry of the Carterville FWCO collecting DIDSON footage.  
Credit: USFWS Matt Mangan

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has recently been conducting a project in the Middle Mississippi River (MMR) that is of regional and national concern, and has been a common news topic across the nation. The title of the project is "Explosive Removal of Rock Pinnacles and Outcroppings Considered to be Navigation Obstructions during Low-Flow Periods on the Middle Mississippi River." Oddly enough, the title of the project isn't nearly half as long as the backstory.

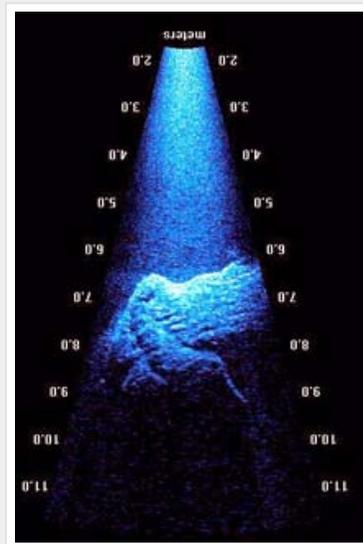
USACE is authorized to operate and maintain a safe and dependable navigation channel in the MMR, with the authorized channel dimensions set at a minimum of nine feet deep and 300 feet wide, with additional width in bends as required. In 1988, an extremely low-water year, there were a number of rock pinnacles and rock shelves that were deemed a potential hazard to commercial navigation traffic on the MMR. These rock hazards were largely eliminated in 1988-1999 using explosives to remove or lower the elevation of the rock pinnacles

and outcroppings. After the 1988-1999 blasting, validation of the removal of the potential hazards to navigation traffic was conducted using an I-beam attached to two cables. The I-beam was used to sweep the removal areas after the rock pinnacles were lowered or demolished by blasting. These validation methods would be considered primitive by today's standards. With the potential for another extremely low-water period looming in late 2006, new state-of-the-art hydrographic multi-beam surveys were conducted and a number of rock pinnacles and rock outcroppings, which were missed by the rock removal efforts in 1988-1999, were detected. USACE felt these remnants that were missed during the previous blasting effort posed a potential hazard to commercial boat traffic (safety hazard), a threat to close the navigation system (economic impact), and a threat to the environment (hazardous spill) if there were a towboat grounding, during these low water periods.

In December of 2012, rock removal was again resumed in the vicinity of Thebes, Illinois. This area of the Mississippi River known as Thebes Gap contains unique geologic formations of rock, boulder, and bedrock, and is recognized as important habitat for several fishes. To minimize potential impacts to the fish community of Thebes Gap, and to the Federally endangered Pallid Sturgeon, USACE coordinated rock removal techniques, timing, and monitoring with USFWS Ecological Services (ES) in the Marion, Illinois Sub-Office. Removal was to be conducted using a combination of blasting, grinding, and excavation techniques, and limited to time periods that would likely not affect migration or spawning of Pallid Sturgeon. Much of the rock was removed with mechanical techniques, using long reaching excavators, rock hammers, and rock grinders. Blasting was typically utilized on large rock formations or in some cases rock features too hard for the mechanical methods to budge.

To determine the actual impact to the fish community in the blasting areas, a final monitoring plan was developed in the field with USACE, Carterville FWCO, Marion ES, and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC). Ultimately, it was decided that Carterville FWCO would employ pre- and post-blast surveys in and around the rock pinnacles and outcroppings identified for removal with a Dual Frequency Identification Sonar (DIDSON) unit.

In addition, DIDSON surveys of adjacent off-channel habitats were conducted for direct comparison of fish use and abundance during this mid-winter period. MDC deployed conical catch nets downstream of the blast sites, with nets being suspended at the surface and mid-water depths, as well as on the river bottom. In addition, Carterville FWCO, MDC, and USACE all provided spotter boats to search for moribund or stunned fishes floating downstream of the rock removal sites immediately after blasting was employed. In addition to our physical monitoring efforts, USACE is determining potential impacts of blast pressures on fish in the vicinity of blast sites using pressure transducers. Underwater pressures of multiple



DIDSON footage of a rock pinnacle.  
Credit: USFWS Brad Rogers

blasts are being measured and used to calculate potential fish mortality radii using existing models.



MDC setting nets downstream of blasting barge. Note the deployed buoy. Credit: USFWS Matt Mangan

The near-video-quality imaging provided by the DIDSON in the turbulent and turbid Mississippi River waters was valuable in identifying the rock formations and fish abundance, as well as relating some fish behavior to the rock features. Upon preliminary review, fish use of the rock features that were removed was very minimal. The removal areas were largely in or on the edge of the navigation channel where velocities were high. The combination of swift flows and the cold winter water temperatures likely made these areas less appealing to the fish community. This was further illustrated by the DIDSON footage taken in the adjacent off-channel habitats. Fishes were teaming in many of these slack water areas, with large schools orienting to the same type of rock features as were observed in the main channel, where fishes were absent.

This was good news for the fish, because once Carterville FWCO finished collecting footage at the blast sites, the

drilling/blasting barge was moved over the rock pinnacles and preparation began to remove or lower the formation. Bore holes were drilled and the drill holes loaded with explosives.

While the blast site was being prepared MDC hurriedly deployed the conical nets in an array downstream from the site. The Coast Guard boats set up a perimeter around the blast site, and the spotter boats moved into position downstream of the barge. A lone buoy would be dropped off the side of the barge indicating that the blast charge was in place, and a five minute warning was given over the marine band radio, along with three blasts of the tow boat's horn. Then we wait. What seemed like an eternity later, a 90 second warning was given, and everyone eagerly watched the blast site. From our position outside the Coast Guard perimeter, you could hear an audible "crack", then a "ping" would echo through the aluminum boat hull, and the water spout would appear. Depending on the depth of the blasting, the water spouts varied in size from a small splash to 10 to 20 feet across, and several feet high.

Spotter boats would begin scanning the area downstream of the blast. Sometimes the spotters worked in concentric circles when few boats were available, or they would maintain a line across the river when there were numerous boats filled with eager biologists. After a long thorough search, the conical nets were retrieved.

On two particular days, we monitored seven blasts with various combinations of spotter boats, DIDSON, and conical nets. In all, three fish were captured - one moribund silver carp captured by spotter boats (appeared to be injured by a propeller strike, not a blast), one dead gizzard shad captured by conical net, and one lively channel cat captured by conical net.

Overall, the monitoring crew felt the impacts were minimized by conducting the blasting during midwinter months. In addition, the noisy methods required to prepare the blast sites would likely also contribute to moving fish out of the blasting area. Once USACE has completed the removal of the remnant rock pinnacles and rock outcroppings, the navigation channel should be able to remain open, even during drought years when river levels are approaching record lows. Hydrographic multi-beam surveys are being conducted in the removal areas after blasting and excavation to ensure that minimum navigation channel dimensions will be met at low flows. Hopefully, the blasting barges will never have to return to the MMR, and the only explosions the fish will hear are a few river rats celebrating the 4th of July.



## Midwest Conservation Partners Band Together to Further Aquatic Species Restoration

BY DOUG ALOISI, GENOA NFH

Biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Fisheries and Refuge Programs met with a representative from Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Guttenberg office to discuss using existing land and water resources on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge to further aquatic species conservation.

Years before, the USFWS operated the Guttenberg National Fish Hatchery on the site, and its ponds still exist, albeit now part of Upper Mississippi Refuge. The hatchery system was reduced in size in the latter part of the past century, and the Guttenberg hatchery buildings and aquaria were given to the state. The pond system of the hatchery was absorbed into the Refuge, however. The existing ponds were used as a moist soil unit to benefit migratory waterfowl. But with river water supply lines and existing water control structures in place FWS and DNR personnel saw a potential to use these ponds to help in the recovery of one of the Upper Mississippi River Region's most endangered fauna, the freshwater mussel.



Guttenberg Pond Unit. Credit: USFWS

Future plans for the unit may include the offsite rearing of freshwater drum to propagate as host fish. Many species of mussels require a specific host fish species to complete their life cycles, and the freshwater drum is a very popular species to several rare and imperiled mussel species. The ponds may also play a valuable role in providing a good location to set mussel propagation cages. Cages house host fish that are infested with larval mussels that live on their gills. Juvenile mussels then drop off inside the cages and continue to develop. Cage locations are the most successful in areas that have low zebra mussel densities and high food content in the water, with protection from predation provided by the cages. At first blush it appears that the Guttenberg ponds have all three of these vital statistics going for them. Further logistical planning is necessary before spring to ensure water flows and pond depth can be optimized for the Unit's new role in the restoration and recovery of one of the Upper Mississippi River's most unique fauna, the freshwater mussel.



## Volunteer Spotlight: Chris Egbert

BY COLBY WRASSE AND CHRIS EGBERT, COLUMBIA FWCO



Chris Egbert volunteers for the Columbia FWCO assisting with field work on the Missouri River. Credit: Courtesy of Chris Egbert

I feel small standing next to Chris, and not just because his 6'4" frame towers over me. No, I feel small because the height of the man's character casts such a tall shadow. Chris Egbert has been our volunteer extraordinaire over the past few years, logging hundreds of hours assisting with our pallid sturgeon monitoring and broodstock collection efforts. Whenever we need an extra hand, Chris is always there. His motto has always been, "Whenever you need me," and he really means it.

Public service seems to be in his DNA, as he has spent a lifetime serving his country, state and city. As a young man, Chris served in the U.S. Navy, completing two tours in the Vietnam War Zone. He chose law enforcement as his career, retiring at the rank of Captain from the Columbia Police Department in 1993, and then retiring from Missouri State Government in 2008 after a career with the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Corrections.

Now retired, Chris isn't spending his golden years watching daytime television. In addition to volunteering for our office, he also volunteers with Big Muddy National Wildlife Refuge and the Raptor Rehabilitation Project at the University of Missouri's School of Veterinary Medicine. When he's not volunteering, you are likely to find Chris roaming the streams and woods of Missouri, catching trout or hunting squirrels. Or he might be in his workshop turning slabs of wood and common gourds into works of art. Or maybe you will find him doting on his granddaughter Ella, or treating his wife Kay to dinner and a show. But you will not find him sitting idly by twiddling his thumbs watching the time pass. Though retired, he keeps plenty busy.

Now a seasoned volunteer, Chris is like a member of our field crew. His youthful looks and boundless energy belie his calendar age, as he's able to perform fieldwork that tests a 20 year-old's strength and stamina. Chris is always ready with a lively story and a good joke to keep the day interesting, and even though we often ask him to volunteer on cold, windy, rainy days, he is always ready to come back for more. I would say that I wished we had more volunteers like Chris, but it is not possible, because, he's truly one of a kind.

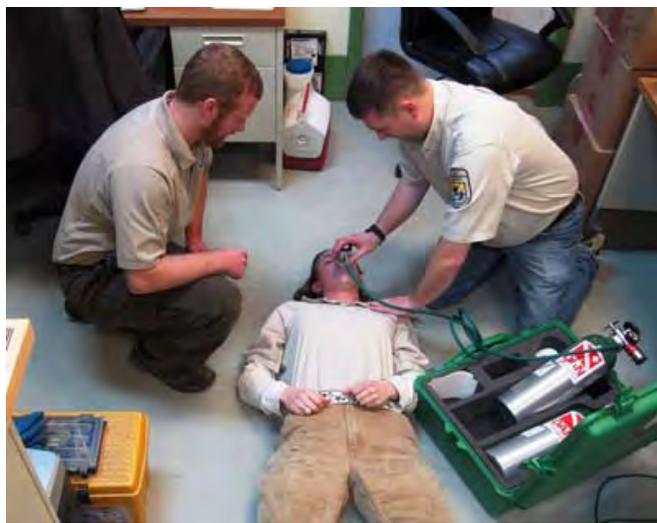


Wyatt Doyle, Colby Wrasse and Chris Egbert with one of the many pallid sturgeon Chris has helped us collect. Credit: USFWS Columbia FWCO



## The Need to Breathe: Alpena FWCO Builds a Research Dive Team

BY MARGRET HUTTON, ALPENA FWCO – WATERFORD MICHIGAN SUB STATION



Steve Hensler (right) administers oxygen and comforts Margaret Hutton (middle) while Justin Chiotti (left) assists in a mock drill to practice their first aid and oxygen administration skills. Credit: USFWS Eric Stadig

Staff from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO), Waterford Substation, attended an oxygen administration first aid course as a step towards completing the requirements for SCUBA (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) certification for the Department of the Interior. The course was taught at the Huron SCUBA dive shop in Ann Arbor, Michigan and focused on the ability to assist and administer oxygen to a distressed diver.

Diving can be very rewarding but it can also be dangerous if done incorrectly. Primary injuries that occur to SCUBA divers are decompression illnesses, which include decompression sickness (DCS), or the bends, and arterial gas embolism (AGE). Both illnesses can be serious and require further medical treatment. By administering oxygen as soon as signs and symptoms are recognized, the diver has an increased chance of making a full recovery.

Many divers in the Great Lakes visit the waters that connect Lake Huron and Lake Erie, which include the St. Clair and Detroit Rivers, and Lake St. Clair. The draw for SCUBA divers includes multiple

shipwrecks in the area, along with the native wildlife that utilize these structures for shelter.

Service employees from the Waterford Substation during the spring, summer, and fall months are commonly within these areas, sampling for threatened, commercial, and sports fish species. Due to the amount of people exploiting this area, the new training will allow us to provide assistance to any distressed diver as the situation arises.

The oxygen administration first aid course fulfills one of the requirements to become a diver for the Department of the Interior. Once fully certified, employees from the Waterford Substation will be able to assist other offices within Region 3 when SCUBA assistance is needed.

Once a SCUBA team is assembled, we will be able to better assess the effectiveness of Service projects in rivers and lakes, especially within the St. Clair/Detroit River System. Such projects include assessing the artificial spawning reefs placed near Belle Isle and Fighting Island in the Detroit River and the in the Middle Channel of the St. Clair River. The reefs provide necessary spawning habitat for threatened species, such as the lake sturgeon and northern madtom, along with important commercial and sports fish, such as lake whitefish and walleye. Made of limestone and fieldstone, the reefs should have interstitial spaces to protect the eggs. As a future dive team, the Waterford Substation will be able to confirm that sediment from upstream is not filling in these necessary spaces on the spawning reefs.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

### Wetland Restoration Projects Benefit "Fish and Wildlife" in Ashland County Wisconsin

BY TED KOEHLER, ASHLAND FWCO

Working through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFWP), wetland restoration projects were completed on the Clark, Lippo, C. Ylitalo, and T. Ylitalo properties. The four wildlife habitat projects are located in Ashland County, Wisconsin, within the Lake Superior Watershed Focus Area for the Midwest Region's PFWP. The project area was further focused this year due to grant funding received by the Bad River Watershed Association to target landowners in the Marengo River watershed to implement conservation practices to slow the flow of sediment into the areas of important trout streams. All four projects were in the Marengo River watershed and consisted of 10 wetland restoration acres as well as 21 acres enhanced for waterfowl and upland bird nesting habitat.

A PFWP Habitat Development Agreement was signed to protect the restored areas for a period of 10 years. These newly restored and protected wetlands will provide ideal resting and nesting conditions for many species of migratory waterfowl and songbirds. Species benefiting from the habitat restoration and protection projects include migratory waterfowl such as wood ducks, mallards and blue-winged teal, as well as other wetland associated migratory birds such as marsh wrens, American bitterns and sandhill cranes.

The restored wetlands will also work to slow the flow of sediment into the Marengo River. Excessive sediment smothers and degrades important fish spawning habitat. Therefore, reducing sediment delivery will benefit the many cold water fish species in the system, including brook trout.

The vast majority of fish and wildlife habitat restorations are accomplished only through the coordination and hard work of many willing partners. Partners on these projects include the landowners, Ashland County Land and Water Conservation Department, Bad River Watershed Association, Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Service's Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.



Wetland restoration in the Marengo River watershed of northern Wisconsin. The wetland plants in the foreground were left undisturbed but the rest of the impacted and degraded basin was restored for wildlife habitat. Credit: USFWS Ted Koehler



## Iron River National Fish Hatchery...Did You Know?

BY CAREY EDWARDS, IRON RIVER NFH

The location of the Iron River National Fish Hatchery (NFH) was chosen on Schacte Creek because of its crystal clear, cold and unwavering flow and its proximity to western Lake Superior, which at the time was in desperate need of lake trout restoration. The hatchery began to take shape in the late 1970's with the acquisition of approximately 800 acres from multiple landowners. Raceways and buildings were added in the early 1980's and the hatchery was off and running with an annual production of a little over one million lake trout. Additional land was purchased to encompass and protect the headwaters, bringing the current acreage up to 1200.

Since the hatchery's inception, the land has of course changed in appearance with buildings, hatchery residences, water intake structures and service roads. A not so well known change is the addition of a three mile trail system that can be accessed anytime of the year. There are two loops; red and blue, with trailheads located in the hatchery parking lot and on Weidenhaar Road. The trails are



Members of the Simpson family pose for a picture before heading out for a hike to the homestead site. Credit: USFWS



Duane relates memories of growing up on a homestead overlooking the springs in the middle of the woods in northern Wisconsin. Credit: USFWS

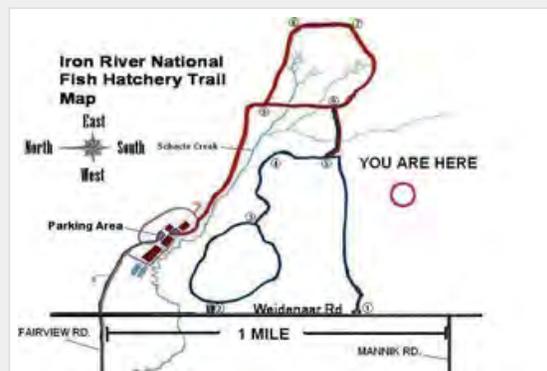
maintained all year long and can be used for just about anything done on foot, including hunting, hiking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing.

As fate would have it, Duane Simpson, a member of one of the families that contributed 360 acres to the original land mass, came to work at the Iron River NFH by way of the Experience Works Program. Duane worked at the facility for seven years performing custodial duties and carpentry work. He told stories about skiing to the bus stop as a kid, in the snow, uphill, both ways and the stories were actually real. Over the years, he shared other memories about growing up on a homestead overlooking the springs in the middle of the woods in northern Wisconsin.

This past fall, Iron River NFH held a trail dedication to honor the Simpson family during the annual open house. Members of the Simpson family were invited to attend a brief ceremony at the

trailhead followed by a guided hike to the remnants of the Simpson homestead located on the red loop. Duane's carpentry skills can be viewed in the way of informational kiosks located at both trailheads.

The hatchery operation itself is a great destination with opportunities to learn about the life cycle of trout, see big fish and see the Fish and Wildlife Service's mission in action. But the hatchery setting is also an attractive destination for families and individuals who seek to enjoy a beautiful landscape. Whether you like to hunt, bird watch, pick mushrooms or cross country ski, the Iron River National Fish Hatchery has something to offer everyone. Welcome to Iron River NFH!



Approximately three miles of trail can be found at the Iron River National Fish Hatchery. credit: USFWS

# Midwest Region Fisheries Divisions

## National Fish Hatcheries

The Region's National Fish Hatcheries primarily focus on native fish restoration/rehabilitation by stocking fish and eggs, such as pallid and lake sturgeon and by developing and maintaining brood stocks of selected fish strains, such as lake trout and brook trout.

Hatcheries also provide technical assistance to other agencies, provide fish and eggs for research, stock rainbow trout in fulfillment of federal mitigation obligations and assist with recovery of native mussels and other native aquatic species.

## Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices conduct assessments of fish populations to guide management decisions, perform key monitoring and control activities related to invasive, aquatic species; survey and evaluate aquatic habitats to identify restoration/rehabilitation opportunities; play a key role in targeting and implementing native fish and habitat restoration programs; work with private land owners, states, local governments and watershed organizations to complete aquatic habitat restoration projects under the Service's 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

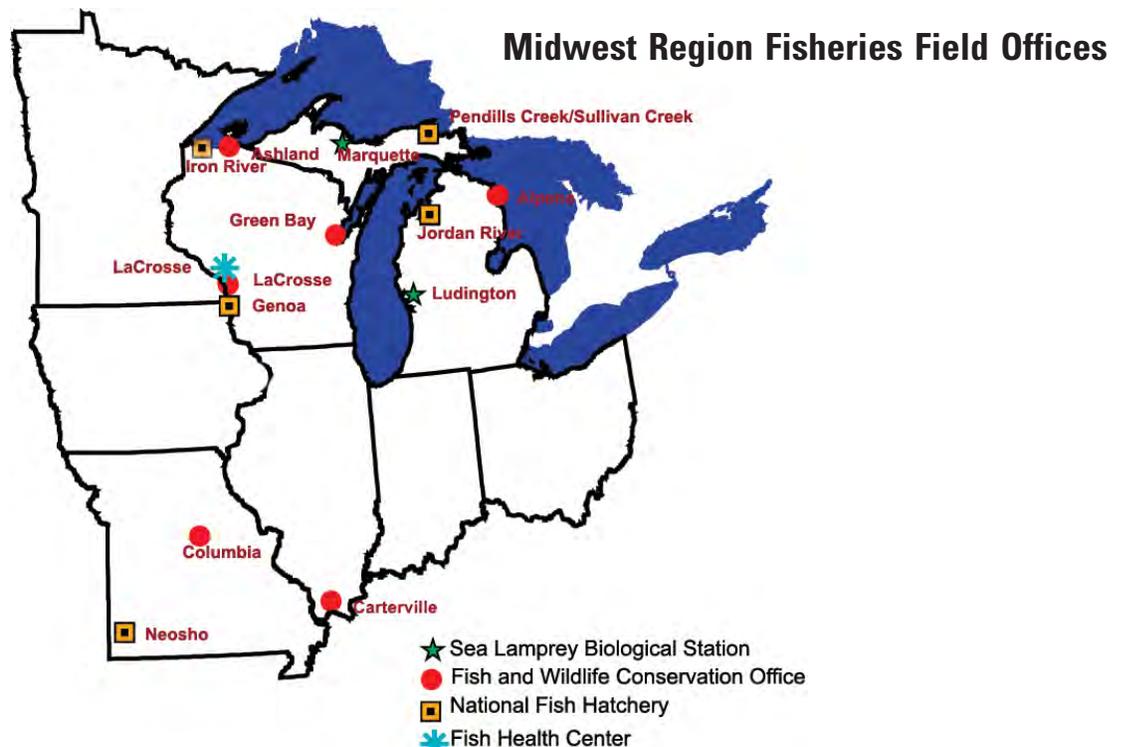
technical expertise to other Service programs addressing contaminants, endangered species, federal project review and hydro-power operation and relicensing; evaluate and manage fisheries on Service lands; and, provide technical support to 38 Native American tribal governments and treaty authorities.

## 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.



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