



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Midwest Region

Fisheries Program

fish lines



**Students Involved in
Habitat Project**

Needle in a Haystack

Captain Todd Kinn

**Another Year of
Spawning Completed**

**Enhanced Sampling of
Young Asian Carp**





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

Conserving America's Fisheries



Dec 16, 2015
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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: December 16, 2015



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

Genoa National Fish Hatchery Students Involved in Habitat Project

BY SCOTT COVINGTON, REGIONAL OFFICE- EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ON DETAIL

What better way for budding biologists to get their hands dirty than digging in the dirt? This past year, students at Southern Bluffs Elementary School helped Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) Staff with a long-term habitat restoration project.

Genoa NFH is a 155-acre facility established in 1932. Since its founding, the mission has broadened from a fish culture station into a state of the art facility that raises lake sturgeon and coaster brook trout, as well as endangered mussel species including the Higgins eye pearl mussel and the winged mapleleaf mussel. Genoa NFH recently began raising an endangered insect – the Hine's emerald dragonfly.

Continuing this effort to broaden the hatchery's operation, staff tapped into the Service's Connecting People with Nature initiative, reviewing ideas to get children involved in projects on the ground. Several ideas were discussed, but staff agreed that involving students in a yearlong study would provide the students with repeat experiences in nature augment their current science curriculum and benefit the hatchery.



One of the wetland meadows that students are working to restore.
Credit: Scott Covington, USFWS

Staff identified specific habitat blocks within a former 30-acre wetland pasture on the hatchery grounds in need of improving, so students could attack the problem systematically, acre by acre. Jennifer Bailey, now of the Service's La Crosse Fish Health Center, began the Outdoor Classroom project with a simple idea – involve local students in an outdoor classroom by having them assist with a four-season restoration project spanning the length of the school year – and simultaneously, help improve habitat conditions on the hatchery grounds.

Initially, students were introduced to vegetative quadrat plots – a method that quantifies all species within the boundaries of a quadrat, typically one meter square. Students learn to identify grasses, forbs and shrubs through this method, and also learn how to record data on the density of each species.

Once students confirmed what species were present and the density of those species, they determined a method to address problems they noted. For example, when students found the meadow covered in an exotic plant, they planned how to reduce the exotic's numbers.

One method used involved collecting seeds from native plants on the hatchery grounds. Students plucked milkweed seeds from pods and planted the seeds across the hatchery to improve habitat for pollinators, especially important for the Monarch butterfly. As part of their "experiment", they directly sowed seeds in the ground as well as raised them in a greenhouse setting – to compare the rates of seed growth in the wild and an artificial setting.

Students also helped by planting native species directly amongst the invaders with the expectation that our natives will outcompete – outgrow – their foreign rivals. One of those rivals that are found on the hatchery grounds is reed canary grass. This species is very invasive – it can take over entire wetland meadows by forming a blanket of grass that has little value for wildlife because so few species eat it, doesn't provide cover for small mammals or waterfowl, and when it flowers, produces a lot of pollen, which aggravate hay fever and allergies.

The project will continue on into the winter and spring as children note how the plants go dormant, covered with snow, and then respond next spring as the first shoots turn green. They will continue with the quadrat plots to determine the effectiveness of their project. So far, the students have three acres of habitat restored – leaving enough for the next class of biologists to begin work.

Hatchery manager Doug Aloisi had this to say about the project, "The hatchery has recently worked with Prairie Moon Seed Company to purchase native prairie seeds and planted roughly six acres of native seeds to support the habitat restoration. This

active restoration project, which students can take ownership of and be an active participant in, will help them to see the benefits of becoming the next generation of conservation stewards that value wild things and places and strive to conserve them. The project will also dovetail nicely with the new Great River Road Interpretive Center, which will focus on the value on the natural resources of the Upper Mississippi River Basin and how to conserve them for future generations.”

Learn more about Genoa NFH at: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/genoa/>

Last updated: December 16, 2015



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Genoa NFH and Partners

Looking for the “Needle in a Haystack” of Mussel Conservation

BY DOUG ALOISI, GENOA NFH



Young and old Spectacle Case mussel. Credit: USFWS

"transforms" the mussel species from larval stage to juvenile mussel. Many mussel species have a specific host that will only successfully transform their specific mussel larvae. Of course these studies take resources, time and money to complete.

An opportunity to achieve all three of these requirements arose this past year.

Nathan Eckert, mussel biologist at Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) received a prestigious Rachel Carson Science Award from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The award came with funding to commit to practicing good science that would further the recipients work. Nathan is matching his award with Science Support Proposal Funding, a cooperative grant process involving solving unmet research needs in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). This will make both grants go that much further in order to attempt to finally close the door on what host the mussel uses. Once this can be determined, mussel propagation efforts can be initiated in order to ensure that this unique species can be brought back from the brink of extinction. These host fish trials will be completed cooperatively with the USGS's Upper Midwest Environmental Science Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The lab also played an important role in furthering endangered mussel conservation with the USFWS, when the host fish species was discovered for the Winged Mapleleaf Mussel in the early 2000's. We are hoping to build upon this successful partnership again this year in hopes to finally crack the secrets of the Spectacle Case mussel.

The Spectacle Case mussel is one of the Upper Mississippi River Basin's most endangered mussels. The mussel is so endangered, in fact that it was placed on the Federal Endangered Species List in 2012. This was due to its precipitous decline in numbers and its decline over its historic range. The Spectacle Case mussel also likes to hold its secrets close to the vest, with no known host aquatic species being found after extensive studies by some of the most highly regarded malacologists. Most mussel species spend time living off a fish or aquatic animal, in order to complete their life cycle. This is during their larval stage when they are not fully developed enough for exogenous feeding, and must live on the host animal. The larvae attach to the aquatic animals gills or skin, feeding off of the animal's blood and body fluid. Mussel biologists can take advantage of this life stage to further mussel populations by bringing hosts and mussels together in an artificial environment to increase the probability that larval mussels (or glochidia) are transferred successfully to the host. But to do this, they must know which animal successfully



Spectacle Case mussels after a recent mussel survey. Credit: USFWS



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

Conserving America's Fisheries

Captain Todd Kinn: Vessel Captain's Contributions to Another Successful Field Season

BY RYAN WEHSE, GREEN BAY FWCO

Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation office (FWCO) biologists and technicians are often recognized for their work in assessing native species and sampling for the next "invader" that could disrupt Great Lakes fisheries, however the quality of these efforts in 2015 would not have been possible without the contributions from vessel captain Todd Kinn. Todd joined the Green Bay FWCO in 2012 and serves as the captain of our 45 foot research vessel for the Native Species program fisheries assessments. Captain Kinn also constructs and repairs the trawls, gill nets, and fyke nets used by virtually all of the Green Bay FWCO projects.

As captain, Todd has the responsibility of ensuring the safety of the crew and vessel in the harsh environments encountered on Lake Michigan's open waters. Todd's training includes Ice Rescue, a 100 Ton Masters Captains License, and he has 28 years of captain experience throughout waters in Alaska, the Great Lakes basin, and the Mississippi River system. The overall success of the Native Species program in 2015 has been highly dependent on the vessel operation, maintenance, and safety assurance of Todd Kinn.



Captain Todd Kinn driving the vessel and operating the gill net lifter during a juvenile lake sturgeon survey. Credit: USFWS



Captain Todd Kinn holding a common carp caught in a Green Bay bottom trawling survey. Credit: USFWS

The Green Bay FWCO is also heavily dependent on Todd's 28 years of commercial and recreational charter fishing experience. Todd constructs and repairs nearly all of the nets used by Green Bay FWCO projects, including gill nets, and repair of trawl nets, and fyke nets. In total the Native Species, Lake Sturgeon and Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) programs at Green Bay set roughly 170,000 feet of gill net in 2015. That effort required Todd's skills to construct and repair several thousand feet of monofilament and nylon twines ranging between one quarter inch stretched mesh for small minnows to ten inch stretched mesh for the mighty lake sturgeon. Captain Todd Kinn's contributions to the Green Bay Office may not be highly publicized but his behind the scenes work was crucial to the success of Green Bay FWCO field surveys. Thanks Captain!



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

Conserving America's Fisheries

Iron River National Fish Hatchery Another Year of Spawning Completed

BY CAREY EDWARDS, IRON RIVER NFH

Iron River National Fish Hatchery (NFH) spawns approximately four thousand lake trout and coaster brook trout each year. Eggs collected from these fish are used for restoration purposes in the upper Great Lakes by Iron River NFH and other entities in and out of the region.

The spawning season began the first week in September with the Klondike Reef strain of lake trout. More than 2.4 million eggs were collected during a labor intensive two week period that included injecting each female with a tailored dose of LhRha, a naturally occurring hormone used to induce maturation of gametes. The Seneca Lake strain of lake trout, making their debut this year, followed shortly after and rounded out the total amount of lake trout eggs collected to 3.4 million. Brook trout eggs were collected mid-November from the Tobin Harbor strain of coaster brook trout. Females were also injected with a tailored dose of LhRha, which successfully aided in condensing their normal spawning season of six to eight weeks down to two. Staff from the 1854 Treaty Authority were instrumental in the accomplishment of this task.

Approximate number of brook trout eggs collected in two spawn takes is 2.1 million.

Lake trout eggs are already eyed-up and in jars at the hatchery or shipped off to other entities waiting to hatch. Our brook trout eggs are developing in incubators. Stay tuned for egg-citing developments in our brook trout early-life rearing program.



Seneca Lake lake trout are sorted and spawned for the first time. Credit: USFWS



All hands on deck! A rare moment when all staff is together to pose for a picture during brook trout spawning. Over 800 fish were spawned on this day! Credit: USFWS



Eggs are collected from Klondike Reef lake trout using air injection. Credit: USFWS



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Conserving America's Fisheries

Enhanced Sampling of Young Asian Carp in the Illinois River

KYLE FRONTE AND JIMMIE GARTH, CARTERVILLE FWCO - WILMINGTON SUBSTATION



Service technicians Kyle Fronte and Jimmie Garth electrofishing in the Illinois Waterway. Credit: Jeremiah Davis, USFWS

Since 2012, the Carterville Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) has monitored the distribution of juvenile Asian carp in the Illinois River in order to better make decisions related to actions that keep Asian carp out of the Great Lakes. These efforts allow biologists and managers to better understand where the fish are, where they come from, and where they have the potential to move to. A combination of increased sampling efforts between the Columbia FWCO and the new Carterville FWCO Wilmington Substation has resulted in an intensified presence in Peoria, Starved Rock, Marseilles, and Dresden Island pools of the Illinois River during the 2015 field season.

Armed with new gear types and a renewed energy for the start of the field season, crews set out in April to document possible recruitment from the 2014 year class and young of the year fish from 2015. Juvenile silver carp were immediately captured using mini fyke-nets in the Peoria Pool. Peoria Pool has an abundance of shallow backwater habitats and mud flats making it optimal habitat for juvenile fish.

Starved Rock, the next pool upriver, has a large population of adult Asian carp; however no juvenile Asian carp had ever been captured. Large amounts of rain fall and flooding in June added to the already difficult challenge of capturing these younger fish. Due to these extreme conditions, our best passive gear types, mini fyke-nets and gill nets were ineffective in capturing juvenile Asian carp. To offset sampling difficulties with these conditions, we began sampling using our active gear, electrofishing. The Columbia FWCO increased their efforts using their paupier boat, the *Magna Carpa*, a jon boat with large electrified wings. In a matter of days our electrofishing crews and the *Magna Carpa* captured hundreds of juvenile silver carp. This information was extremely valuable to biologists and managers as the population front had been extended.



Juvenile Asian carp captured in the Illinois Waterway. Credit: Trevor Cyphers, USFWS



The Magna Carpa the Columbia FWCO – Paupier Boat. Credit: USFWS, Columbia FWCO

With small Asian carp now known to exist in two lower pools, it was imperative to move further upstream to determine if recruitment was occurring in Marseilles and Dresden Island pools. In addition to possible recruitment, distribution and abundance also needed to be determined. With the field season slowly coming to an end, Wilmington crews concentrated their final efforts in the Marseilles and Dresden Island pools. On the last scheduled day of sampling, two juvenile silver carp were captured by a field crew electrofishing in Marseilles Pool. This discovery, as you can imagine, extended the sampling season by several weeks. Data analysis is currently on going as is our field season.

Data collected during the 2015 field season has shown an increased demand for enhanced sampling efforts to determine the best management practices to reduce the threats that both juvenile and adult silver and bighead carp pose to the Great Lakes.

Last updated: December 16, 2015

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

Conserving America's Fisheries

Travels to China Delegation Shares Knowledge on Sturgeon Conservation

BY ANGELA BARAN, GENOA NFH, BEKA McCANN, LA CROSSE FHC, DAVE HENDRIX, NEOSHO NFH

In early November a delegation of six fish biologists from across the U.S. traveled to China to take part in an information exchange between the two countries concerning sturgeon conservation and propagation. The delegation was



Each concrete circular tank can hold up to 80 full grown sturgeon. Credit: Angela Baran, USFWS

comprised of biologists with varying backgrounds, yet all working with sturgeon at their stations. From the Midwest Region 3, Beka McCann from the La Crosse Fish Health Center (FHC), Dave Hendrix from Neosho National Fish Hatchery (NFH) and Angela Baran from Genoa NFH were selected for the group.



Sturgeon in netpens. Credit: Angela Baran, USFWS

the sturgeon along the Yangtze River, visiting hatcheries, nature reserves and two dams as well as the commercial production facilities of Kaluga Queen.

The Ministry of Agriculture (Ministry) has set up two critical Nature Reserves for the Chinese sturgeon, the Yangtze River Estuary Nature Reserve and the Hubei Sturgeon Reserve. The estuary serves as critical habitat used by fingerling lake sturgeon as they migrate out to sea and for the spawning adults who may stage there for one – two years before travelling up the river to the spawning site. The adults will also return to the estuary to feed, regain their strength and re-acclimate to saltwater after spawning before they go back out to sea. Construction of the Gezhouba Dam on the Yangtze River near Yichang shortened the spawning route of the Chinese sturgeon by eliminating any possible passage upriver. The Hubei Sturgeon Reserve was established in 1996 to preserve the critical spawning habitat now used by the sturgeon just below the dam. There are conflicts between protection of the species and development of the city. Protection of the site is now forcing developers to design and build in more sturgeon friendly ways. For example, no construction structures are allowed in the river, so bridges must span the entire width of the river and while work is being done, lights and noise must not disturb the sturgeon. In addition to protection efforts, a hatchery in Jingzhou City was established in 2012 to propagate juvenile sturgeon for stocking efforts.

To reduce the impact on native species and still support the demand for caviar and sturgeon, the Ministry has allowed commercial aquaculture to obtain gametes from wild fish several years ago to begin a brood line for captive rearing. The company is now using the second captive generation for production; no wild fish have been used in over 15 years. In exchange, the company provides juvenile fish for several other

China has eight species of sturgeon, three of which are now listed species. The Chinese sturgeon was listed as a protected species in 1994 and the country has been working to prevent extinction and restore it through habitat conservation, propagation and stocking, fishing regulations and commercial production to eliminate the need for harvest. There are less than 1000 Chinese sturgeon left due to the same stressors experienced in U.S. sturgeon populations; loss of habitat due to pollution or construction of dams and over fishing (or getting caught as bycatch in nets), recovery of the species is slow due to the life history of sturgeon: mature after 15-20 years and only spawning every three to five years.

The Chinese sturgeon spawns only in the Yangtze River and has lost a large portion of their spawning route due to the construction of two dams as well as the loss of their staging grounds in the Yangtze River Estuary. The delegation trip followed the route of

aquaculture companies and releases fish back into the wild for restoration efforts as well. The Kaluga Queen company uses both intensive (hatchery buildings) and extensive (net pens in lakes) to raise sturgeon for caviar, meat and leather. To minimize the possible environmental impact from the net pen culture in Qiandao Lake, the company employs a dual pen system and has created a cleaning system. The sturgeon are reared in the top pen with another species in a secondary pen to capture any waste feed. They have devised a collection system under the pens for the fish waste that can be siphoned out, filtered and then the water returned to the lake.

The Chinese biologists were interested in our approaches to propagation and techniques used in the recovery of endangered pallid sturgeon in the United States. Our first conversations were about the importance of teamwork in working with our management facilities, fish health centers, technology centers, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state partners in making the recovery effort a successful one. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) biologists emphasized the importance of putting out a quality product and at the same time making sure that there is adequate habitat and spawning grounds in the river for the pallids to thrive and reproduce with the goal of becoming self-sustaining at some point. We also explained how we work with our U.S. Geological Survey Research Center in the staging of eggs from our broodstock to predict spawning times and utilizing hormones to accelerate the spawning process plus cryoing (rapidly freezing) extra sperm for future use. There was much interest in our hatching techniques, use of (hatching jars), percent hatch-out and survival; diets utilized for rearing (brine shrimp cyst; adult brine shrimp; bloodworms); tagging (pit tags, elastomer and scute removal) and stocking. We stressed the importance of "Not Re-inventing the Wheel", but, instead, to "Improve the Wheel". And sharing and networking with other professionals in the field, like China, will help us to achieve that goal.



Commercial sturgeon hatchery with gravity flow water supply. Credit: Angela Baran, USFWS

Fish health is a common concern for both the Chinese and American biologists. According to the Chinese biologists, the main disease issue for the Chinese sturgeon is a common environmental bacterial pathogen called Non-tubercular Mycobacteria. This pathogen causes cutaneous lesions and can affect the internal organs, in some instances even leading to mortality among the adult sturgeon. This pathogen is much less commonly isolated in sturgeon in the United States, and USFWS biologists are much more concerned with several viruses that have been isolated in connection with sturgeon disease outbreaks and mortality in some of our state and federal hatcheries. The Chinese biologists were also interested to learn about our biosecurity efforts and routine health screening as efforts to combat and prevent the spread of disease within our hatchery system and native watersheds. While the cornerstone of our fish health policy involves routine fish health screening and monitoring, the Chinese fish health program seemed to focus on treatment rather than prevention.

This trip highlighted both the similarities and differences between sturgeon restoration in the two countries, allowing both sharing information and obtaining possible new methods for culture or conservation efforts. Both countries hope to preserve the native populations and to educate the public to create a sense of stewardship for the resources; ensuring future generations continue the fight to preserve these great fish.

Last updated: December 16, 2015



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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.

Iron River NFH, Gears up for Several Milkweed Projects

BY SHAWN SANDERS, IRON RIVER NFH

Iron River National Fish Hatchery (NFH) is lending a hand to the monarch butterfly by focusing efforts to propagate and manage milkweed plants on the 1200 acre property. The locally abundant species of milkweed is the "common milkweed", *Asclepias syriaca*. Four species of milkweed are present in our area: Common (*A. syriaca*), Poke (*A. exaltata*), Butterfly (*A. tuberosa* L.), and Swamp (*A. incarnata*) Milkweeds. Currently, our efforts have only focused on Common Milkweed because it is readily identifiable, abundant in the area, and located within the boundary of the property.

This fall, a small number of seed pods were harvested on station for use in an experimental germination study and a grant project with local schools. Other fall management efforts included an on-site inventory to define locale and population of milkweed at Iron River NFH.

Winter efforts will focus on experimental germination at the hatchery by comparing different seed preparation processes. Information gained through this experiment will be directly applied to the grant project.

In early spring, two local schools will have the opportunity to culture milkweed seeds in the classroom and plant their bounty in designated restoration areas at the hatchery. Other spring projects will include an "early" mowing management effort that targets other weeds and aggressive grasses and theoretically giving milkweed the habitat needs for survival.



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.

Whitney Genetics Lab

The Whitney Genetics lab provides environmental DNA (eDNA) surveillance for the early detection of invasive Silver and Bighead carp as part of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee's plans to detect, monitor, and respond to the threat of invasive carp in the Great Lakes. The lab also provides analysis for determining the ploidy of wild-caught Black and Grass carp, two more invasive carp species.



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