



Making Waves



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Lake Sturgeon Line Up for Opener



by Jenna Merry

Early on Saturday, February 9, Nick Bloomfield and I drove to Winneconne (WI) for the opening day of the lake sturgeon spearing season



on the Lake Winnebago System.

The lake sturgeon population here has been studied

for many years and the annual spear fishery offers the public (particularly those who are lucky enough to get an upriver-lakes license) a chance to harvest a behemoth.

Sturgeon enthusiasts from around the country make the trip to Winnebago County for the unique opportunity to spear a mammoth sturgeon. This year, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources sold 12,092 spearing licenses, most issued to state residents. The majority of these (96%) were issued for spearing on Lake Winnebago, the largest inland lake (137,000 acres) in the state.



We settled in at our registration station and waited for the first fish of the morning to

arrive. Our task was to collect spleen and kidney samples for viral



Knowing this 179-pound fish was speared opening day last year, we had high hopes to see a few monster fish in 2013

and bacterial pathogen screening at the La Crosse Fish Health Center. Meanwhile, Ron Bruch (WI DNR) led a group of Northland College students from Ashland (WI) who acted as sturgeon surgeons to collect stomach content and muscle tissue samples for research on sturgeon diets.

The morning was slow with a fish arriving every 20 minutes or so. Each was weighed, sexed for maturity, measured for length and fat content, and scanned for a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag. A pectoral spine was also collected to later estimate fish age.



The sex and maturity of each fish are essential data because the duration of the spearing season depends on how many juvenile females, adult females, and males are harvested.



Sturgeon are lined up to register late in the day

In all, a total of 179 fish were speared opening day. Some fish were near or

above 100 pounds, and a few of the successful spearkers were lucky rookies.

It was a great day for biologists like us as well, having collected samples from 36 fish (including a 120-pound female) to help preserve the health of this population and maintain a popular fishery for years to come.

120-pound female



Another successful opening day under wraps — see you next year!

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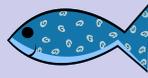


Upcoming Event Page 4



What's for Dinner?

By Mark Steingraeber



On a recent Saturday morning when many area grade school students may have been roasting indoors as couch-potatoes watching cartoons on TV, more than 290 children and nearly as many adults (parents, grandparents, and guardians) braved sub-freezing temperatures on January 26th to enjoy a mid-winter day outdoors while ice fishing at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH).



Arriving by the carload, they came to participate in the Kids Ice Fishing Clinic, an annual event sponsored since 2003 by Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services, a non-profit organization supporting the work of three local Service fishery program offices. This was the fifth consecutive year the Genoa NFH hosted the event with assistance from the La Crosse Fish Health Center and the La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.



Held entirely on a frozen two-acre pond, attendees began their outdoor adventure in a heated tent learning from experts about safety on the ice, fishing regulations, and winter angling techniques.



Throng of children and guardians then set out across the slick water to claim one of hundreds of fishing holes pre-drilled through the ice

It wasn't long before many of the stocked rainbow trout, most 10 to 14 inches long, began to emerge from the frozen depths at the end of a baited hook and line.

Before leaving that day, most participants returned to the warming tent where hot chocolate and grilled hot dogs were served for lunch. And what was on the dinner menu at most of these homes that night?

Why, fresh trout, of course!



Fever Reliever

By Mark Steingraeber

Four Service offices (La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, Genoa National Fish Hatchery, La Crosse Fish Health Center-Whitney Genetics Lab, & the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge-Winona District) hosted over 2,600 cabin-fever victims who came to the Service display booth during the 36th annual La Crosse Boat, Sports, Travel, & RV Show held February 7-10 at the La Crosse Center.

Representatives from these offices were here throughout the four-day event to greet visitors and report on a variety of local/regional Service programs and activities.



Many sport show visitors were unaware that most freshwater mussels depend upon native fish for their early life survival

An inviting arrangement of posters, maps, photos, brochures, watch cards, and aquaria containing fish and mussels were prominently displayed near a main entrance to the exhibition hall.

Key topics of conversation included invasive species, native mussels, lake sturgeon, wildlife habitat on private lands, and personal actions to improve water quality.

The opportunity to personally exchange natural resource information with the large, diverse audience that attends this annual mid-winter event makes Service participation here a valuable outreach tool for all area offices.

Derby Benefits Sturgeon Guard



By Ann Runstrom

On February 9, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin held an ice fishing derby on Legend Lake. The purpose of the event was to raise funds for two worthy tribal causes. Volunteers arrived at the lake early in the morning to set up a registration station, plug in coffee and crock pots, and display unique, artistic sturgeon t-shirts for sale (see page 4) outside the Thunderbird Casino.

Sponsored by the Menominee Conservation Department and the Menominee Cultural Museum, staff from the La Crosse FWCO participated in the event by measuring fish at the registration station and offering educational outreach.

Cash prizes were awarded to the biggest fish in four categories: northern pike, yellow perch, largemouth bass, and crappie. Raffle tickets were sold for donated prizes (including a portable ice fishing shack) and many hungry anglers took advantage of the fresh frybread, hot coffee, and cold pop that was for sale.

Proceeds from the event went to support the Menominee Cultural Museum and the new Menominee Sturgeon Guard program. The Sturgeon Guard program began in 2012 when the first lake sturgeon spawning run at Keshena Falls was observed on the reservation in more than a century.



The guard consists of a small group of dedicated tribal members who patrol the shores of the Wolf River to protect these revered fish, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week over a four-week period as the sturgeon finally return to their historic spawning grounds at Keshena Falls. This year, the Conservation Department and the Museum want to provide hot meals and an appreciation gift for each Sturgeon Guard participant.

The Menominee Conservation Department is looking for volunteers for the 2013 Sturgeon Guard. Anyone wanting to join the program (or purchase a sturgeon shirt in support of it) should contact the Department (715-799-5116) for details.



End of an Era

By Mark Steingraeber



All of us at the La Crosse FWCO knew that, eventually, the day would come. Since late October, we were acutely aware that we were now working on borrowed time. The end of an era was staring us in the face.

But what a face to look up to ... from near, as the project leader of our office for the past two decades ... and from afar, as a guiding light to others for the conservation of aquatic resources in the Upper Mississippi River Basin and far beyond. With a contagious smile, an ever optimistic spirit encouraging personal and professional growth, gender equity, and a mantra that "it's all about the resource", who could ask for a better mentor and friend!

My first clue came about five years ago, when I was asked for advice on federal health insurance plans. The most recent hint came early last fall: the office beside mine took on a lingering Spartan-like appearance (long after it was painted in the summer) with uncharacteristic bare



Pam Thiel, a Service employee for 25 years and FWCO project leader for two decades, retired and left our building January 31 — We look forward to her return as a volunteer in the field walls and large boxes (filled with books and years of valuable records) that suspiciously occupied too much floor space.

The final shoe dropped and a bombshell landed on October 22 during our staff meeting when Pam Thiel announced we were the first to know (besides husband John) that she would retire in 3 months. We took the news with mixed emotions (note the black arm bands we still wear) and immediately began preparing a celebration to send Pam out riding in style.

Held in La Crosse on February 2, Pam's retirement party attracted more than 150 colleagues and friends from around the region who came to wish her well.

Kurt Welke (WI DNR) did a yeoman's job as master of ceremonies, introducing guests who recounted tales of Pam's professional career (see page 5), community service, and world-wide travel adventures. Special guest appearances were made by some of Pam's seldom seen but often mentioned acquaintances (aka, *The River Mafia*), as well as humorist Red Green who presented her with the parting gift she asked for: a special bike to ride during retirement.

Continued on Page 4



The Illinois Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) held



two continuing education courses February 7-8. Jenna Merry and I attended and were joined by employees from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), area consulting firms, the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS), and students from state universities.

The Illinois AFS Continuing Education Committee provides these courses yearly to help fish biologists stay current with fisheries techniques, based on needs suggested by members. They strive to keep costs of attending down by utilizing chapter member facilities as venues.

This year, the courses were held at my old stomping grounds, Western Illinois University's (WIU) Alice L. Kibbe Life Science Station near Warsaw. The field station is situated atop a bluff overlooking Pool 20 of the Upper Mississippi River.

Continuing Education

By Nicholas Bloomfield

The first half-day course focused on the statistical software *R* and was taught by Dr. Timothy Spier, an ichthyologist at WIU and my graduate school advisor.



The biggest advantage of *R* is that it is free and can do all of the analyses that most other statistical software packages can. A site license for some of the more popular packages can climb into the thousands of dollars, so learning a free system that you can use on any computer has big benefits in a world of shrinking budgets. It seems that this will be the future of statistical analysis, so thanks to Dr. Spier for giving us a head start!



Day two featured a course on minnow and darter field identification. This was taught by Josh Sherwood, an INHS fisheries research scientist. Josh performs stream surveys all over the state of Illinois, so he was able to provide lots of insight as to how he distinguishes similar species.

There are a couple of major benefits to identifying minnows in the field. First, it puts the fish you sample back into the water instead into a jar of preservative destined for the lab. Secondly, it reduces the use of formalin, a carcinogenic chemical used to preserve specimens.



This United Nations Globally Harmonized System symbol is a universal warning sign for chemical carcinogens, like formalin, which have target organ toxicity

Thanks go out to Josh, Dr. Spier, the Illinois AFS Continuing Education Committee, and WIU for putting on an informative and useful session to help us better ourselves as fish biologists!

Register Now



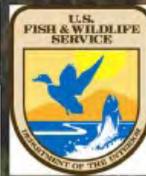
6th Annual Driftless Area Symposium

Tuesday, March 26th, and
Wednesday, March 27th, 2013

Radisson Hotel
200 Harborview Plaza
La Crosse, WI

Join Us!

This is a great opportunity to network, learn and connect! Two separate tracks will be offered. Breakout sessions covering: Watershed and Riparian Management



Registration and Hotel information is now available at:
<http://www.darestitution.com/Symposium.html>

Upcoming Event

March 26-27



Mark Your Calendars Now!

Tuesday Sessions Include

- Climate Change
- Monitoring for Success
- Nongame Species Management

Wednesday Sessions Include

- Frac Sand Mining
- Engaging Land Owners
- Resident Led Watershed Management
- Monitoring for Success
- Invasive Species Management

Hope to See You!



Era

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What awaits Pam (and John) in the future?

As those of you who know her may have guessed, she anticipates pursuing a balanced mix of some things old (world travel, fishing, community service) and some things new (sleeping in, bike riding, wearing less brown and more purple clothing).

So don't be surprised if she reminds you of a colorful Eleanor Roosevelt rather than a somber Mary Todd Lincoln when you see her in the days ahead. After all, the end of one era leads to the start of another.



M. Steingraeber

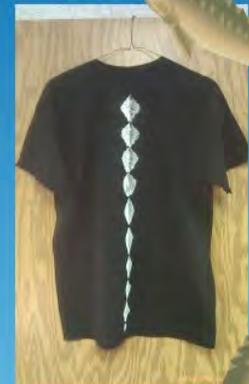
Best Wishes Pam!



Sturgeon shirts for sale; proceeds will go toward the Menominee Sturgeon Guard program to provide support for the spring volunteers. Shirts will be available at the February 9th fishing derby at a cost of \$20.00. For more information call 715-799-5116.

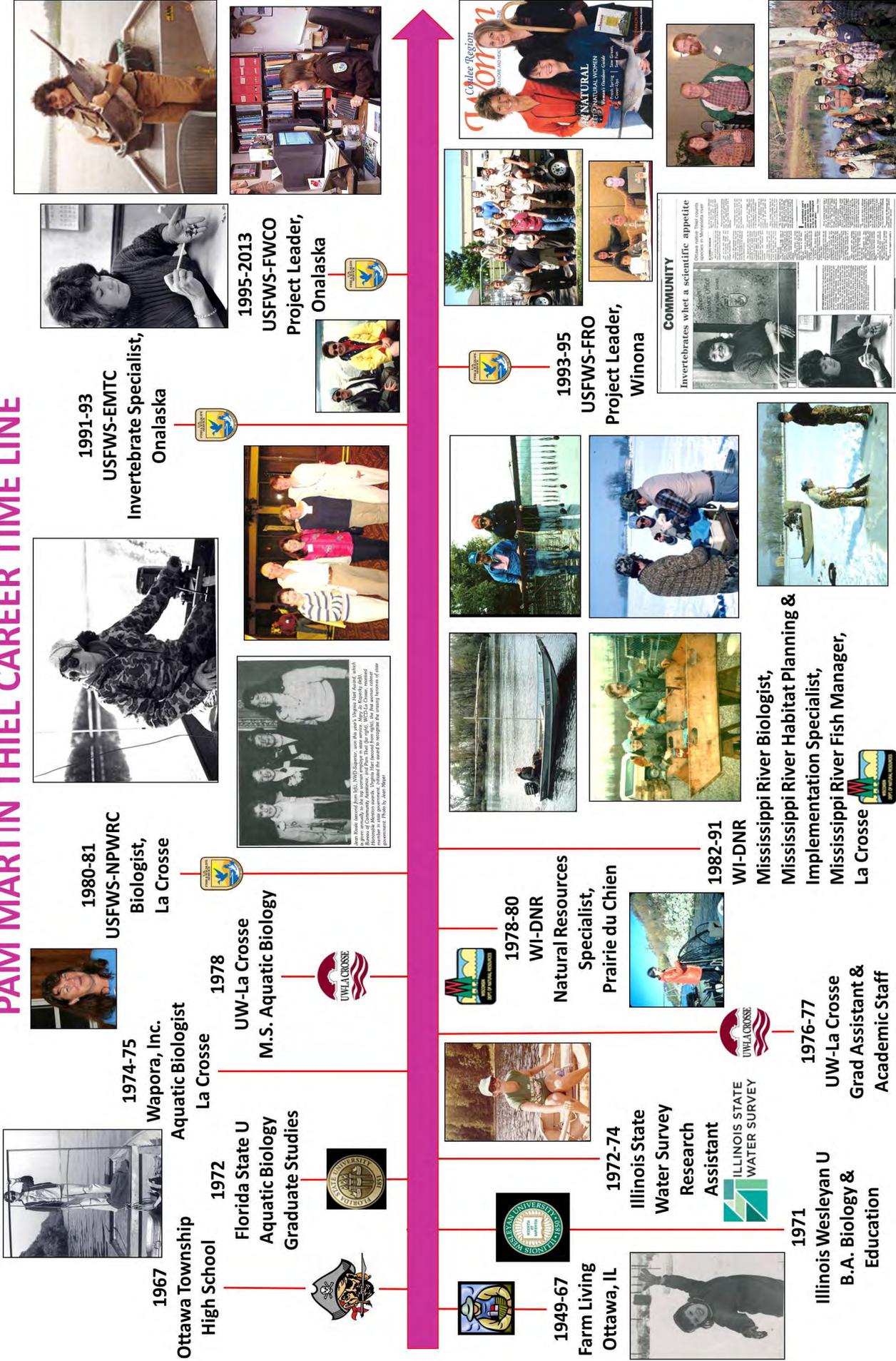


Front View



Back View

PAM MARTIN THIEL CAREER TIME LINE



Thanks for the Memories!