

ALPENA FWCO NEWSLETTER

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, 480 W. Fletcher St., Alpena, MI 49707
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/alpena> Alpena@fws.gov 989-356-5102

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

By Adam Kowalski

Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC) instructors Adam Kowalski (Alpena FWCO), Dave Wedan, (LaCross FWCO), Scott Koproski (Alpena FWCO), Dave Bohn (M/V Baird), Rob Dickson (M/V Baird), Keith Duffton (M/V Baird), and Keith Colborn (M/V Baird) put on a two day M/V Spencer F. Baird Safety Module in Cheboygan, MI from July 21 and 22, 2015. 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, line handling procedures, emergency egress, fire suppression, and gear setting concerns.

There was a diverse student body with a student from Iron River NFH, one from Pendills Creek NFH, one from Green Bay FWCO, one from Alpena FWCO and one Alpena Community College professor. Overall this course was a success, and all 5 students successfully completed 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.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

M/V Spencer F. Baird Safety Module Held	1
Early Life History Sampling of Huron Coregonines	2
NE MI Tributaries Surveyed for Invasive Ruffe	2
2015 Fishery Independent Lake Whitefish Survey	3
Biologists in the Classroom	4
5 th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival	4
Region 3 Certifies New Watercraft Safety Instructors	5
Partners Take a Ride on the Detroit River	6
Alpena FWCO Assists with Reef Habitat Restoration	7
Engaging Today's Youth: Lake Sturgeon & Beyond	8



Students learn egress routes on the Spencer F. Baird during the Spencer F. Baird Safety Module. Photo credit: USFWS.



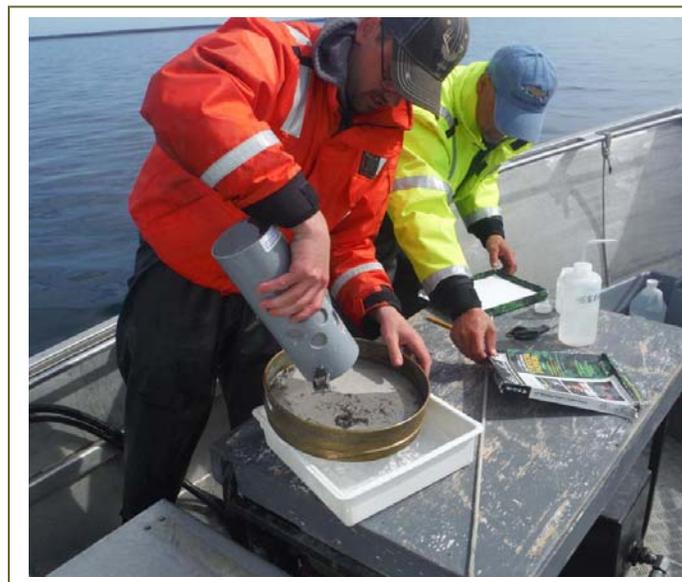
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Early Life History Sampling of Lake Huron Coregonines

By Adam Kowalski

Coregonids are among the most valuable commercial fish species in the Great Lakes basin and are the subject of intensive monitoring and fisheries management. Despite this, the dynamics of coregonid recruitment remain largely understudied and the mechanisms that drive variable recruitment are not well understood. An independent recruitment index is needed to provide a more complete perspective on the mechanistic drivers of variable recruitment and is needed to address this substantial source of uncertainty for fisheries management. With current efforts looking to reestablish depleted coregonine stocks, this work will aid in identifying current distribution for pre and post re-establishment assessment efforts.

During the spring of 2015 the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office conducted neuston net tows in Saginaw Bay and Thunder Bay. Five, five minute tows were completed at six sites around Saginaw Bay and five sites in Thunder Bay. The tows consisted of three parallel to the shoreline and two perpendicular to the shoreline, all approximately two kilometers apart. The Saginaw Bay sites included Port Austin, Sebawaing, Caseville, Linwood, Au Gres, and Tawas. Two additional tows were completed at Charity Island. All of the Thunder Bay sites were completed out of Alpena. This was done from early-April to mid-May. On the East side of Saginaw Bay Caseville produced the most coregonid larvae. On the West side of Saginaw Bay Au Gres produced the most coregonid larvae. In Thunder Bay the Northern sections seems to produce a little more



Adam Kowalski and Ryan Pokorgnski examine a trawl catch during our spring early life history survey for lake whitefish. Photo credit: USFWS.

coregonid larvae than the Southern Sections. This tow data will be used to identify beach seining sites adjacent to areas with high larvae numbers.

Beach seining will begin in Saginaw Bay and at the previously sampled areas in Thunder Bay during 2014. Saginaw Bay seining sites will be in adjacent areas where neuston net tows had high catch rates of coregonines or where suitable habitat is identified via aerial imagery. Beach seining will begin at the end of May through the end of June.

Northeast Michigan Tributaries Surveyed for the Presence of Invasive Eurasian Ruffe

By Anjanette Bowen

Surveys were conducted in spring 2015 to detect the presence of Eurasian ruffe (ruffe) in tributaries of northeastern Michigan. The surveys are part of an annual effort to assess the status of ruffe in tributaries to northern Lake Huron. The ruffe is a small invasive

fish native to Eurasia. Ruffe only reach sizes of five to six inches in length and are not of value as a sport species; however, due to their small size, they may compete with juvenile perch and other valuable bottom dwelling species for food and habitat.

Ruffe were first found in northeastern Michigan in 1995, where they were discovered at the mouth of the Thunder Bay River in Alpena, MI. Alpena FWCO initiated annual spring and fall surveillance for ruffe in U.S. waters of Lake Huron in 1996. Ruffe were not detected at other sampling locations on Lake Huron, however they persisted in the Thunder Bay River and produced a large year class (young-of-the-year) during 1999. Their numbers declined abruptly by 2000, and ruffe have not been captured from the Thunder Bay River or other nearby locations since 2003. Recent ruffe sightings reported from the Trout River (Rogers City, MI) and the Cheboygan River (Cheboygan, MI) spurred Alpena FWCO to expand surveillance in these areas.

During May, Alpena FWCO staff and volunteers sampled the Thunder Bay River, Lafarge Corporation on Thunder Bay, the Devils River (Ossineke, MI), Trout River, and Cheboygan River to detect the presence of spawning-phase ruffe. Boat electrofishing, backpack electrofishing, windermere traps, and small fyke nets were used during sampling. No ruffe were captured following 41 trap/fyke net lifts and 2.8 hours electrofishing effort. Ruffe sampling will continue in fall 2015 at these locations and ports in U.S. waters of Lake Huron.



Alpena FWCO staff and a volunteer lift fyke nets used to detect the presence of Eurasian ruffe in the Thunder Bay area during spring 2015. No ruffe were captured. Photo credit: USFWS.

Early detection and increased public awareness about ruffe and other invasive species may aid in slowing or preventing their spread to new areas. For more information about ruffe, please visit the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force website at <http://anstaskforce.gov>.

Alpena FWCO Conducts 2015 Fishery Independent Lake Whitefish Survey in Northern Lake Huron

By Adam Kowalski

During July and August, staff from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) and volunteers conducted the annual fishery independent lake whitefish survey in 1836 Treaty waters of northern Lake Huron. The purpose of this survey is to collect fishery independent abundance and biological data on lake whitefish stocks in treaty waters for use in statistical catch-at-age population models. The models are updated annually to determine harvest regulations for commercial fisheries in 1836 Treaty waters of the Great Lakes.

During the survey, 24 variable mesh gill nets (two to six inch) were set at randomly selected sites in lake

whitefish management unit WFH 04 (Hammond Bay to Presque Isle) and lake whitefish management unit WFH 05 (Presque Isle to Alpena). All whitefish and lake trout collected were measured, weighed, sexed, assessed for maturity and visceral fat content, and checked for sea lamprey wounds, fin clips, and tags. Scales and otoliths were collected for age determination. Similar biological data were collected from non-target species. Four lake whitefish were collected from unit WFH04 and one was collected from unit WFH05.

Biologists in the Classroom

By Steven Gambicki

For years staff from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) have been involved in teaching students about environmental topics that meet their current science curriculum. The 2015 school year has not been any different. Steven Gambicki from Alpena FWCO assisted Paul Haver from the Jordan River National Fish Hatchery (NFH) with a fish dissection demonstration for students at AuGres Elementary School in AuGres Michigan.

On February 17th 2015, the biologists met with the fifth grade students to lead the fish dissection and discuss organ identification and function. The fifth graders were then able to dissect a brook trout raised at the Jordan River hatchery. Students were given a handout with a drawing of fish and asked to locate and name the organs. The handouts were then reviewed in class.

The biologists gave the students a unique hands-on experience and provided professional insight on the activity. Students enjoyed the presentation and change of pace from their daily routine. The biologists also enjoyed giving the presentation. "It's great to see the excitement in their eyes when you walk into the classroom" said Gambicki.



TOP: Paul Haver demonstrates how to dissect a fish. BOTTOM: Steven Gambicki answers a student's question. Photo credits: USFWS.

5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival

By Justin Chiotti

The weather cleared up for the 5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival held at Milliken State Park and Harbor along the Detroit RiverWalk. This year, the event was held on June 14th during Michigan's Free Fishing Weekend. Fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford Substation and staff from the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge were present to introduce children and adults in the Detroit Metropolitan Area to fishing and to promote aquatic stewardship. Over the past three years nearly 2,000 children have fished along the Detroit River during this event.



A family prepares to fish during the 5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival. Photo credit: Detroit RiverFront Conservancy (Keith Tolman).



LEFT: A rock bass caught in the Detroit River during the 5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival. RIGHT: Children playing during the 5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival. Photo credits: Detroit RiverFront Conservancy (Keith Tolman).

The stormy weather in the morning did not deter the nearly 300 participants this year who were taught “fishing basics” by instructors from the Michigan State Parks Explorers Program, boating safety by the United States Coast Guard, and educated about aquatic invasive species by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. This year a trophy was given out to the largest fish captured in both girl and boy divisions. Fishing poles, tackle, and other prizes were also raffled off throughout the day.

The Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival gives the youth in the Detroit Metropolitan Area an opportunity to connect with the outdoors. The list of volunteers and supporters for the event grows each year and it’s not hard to understand why after seeing the joyful smile of

a child catching a fish for the first time. The Detroit River is designated as an Area of Concern in the Great Lakes, but is undergoing a transformation before our eyes. Funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is restoring fish and wildlife habitat all along the Detroit River and the children attending the Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival are reaping the benefits.

This year the event was presented by the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy with support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Rivertown Detroit Association, Concentra, Wayne County Parks, Sierra Club, Concentra, Friends of the Detroit River, Michigan State University Extension, and Michigan Sea Grant.

Region 3 Certifies New Watercraft Safety Instructors

By Adam Kowalski

During the week of May 10th, Region 3’s Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC) Instructor team conducted a Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course (MOICC) at Bayfield, Wisconsin. Twelve Department of Interior (DOI) students were mentored and certified as Watercraft Safety Instructors. New instructors are trained and added to the regional MOCC group cadre each year or two to compensate for losses due to retirements and transfers. There are

currently 33 FWS certified watercraft safety instructors in this region.

The following is a list of topics covered during the course: DOI and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) Policy, Planning and Conducting a Course, Emergency Procedures, Rules of the Road/Aids to Navigation, Instructional Techniques, Testing and Evaluation, Marlinspike, Boat Orientation, Visual Distress Signals,

Trailing, On the Water Boat Handling, Survival Techniques, Required and Recommended Equipment, Float Plans and GAR Model, Towing, and Trailer Orientation.

Region 3 is a Service and DOI leader in watercraft safety course development, and has been providing employees with watercraft safety training since 1991. The basic 24-hour Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC), is mandatory for all employees and volunteers who operate a Service motorboat. In addition to the MOCC, there are six specialized training modules offered: Airboat, Winter Airboat Operation, Open Water, Non-Motorized (canoes/kayaks), Shallow-Water Drive Specialty Motorboats, and the M/V Spencer F. Baird Course. The Airboat module provides training to students on safe airboat operations. The Winter Airboat Module focuses on operating an airboat in cold weather on ice, snow, and open-water. Rescue and survival techniques are also part of the curriculum. The M/V Spencer F. Baird Safety Module is a mandatory course

for all Service personnel who plan to work aboard this vessel. The M/V Baird Module provides students with a working knowledge of the vessel, life saving techniques, in water survival, emergency egress, and many other factors to be aware of while working aboard the vessel. The Open Water Module is optional and provides training to students who operate on the Great Lakes and focuses on boat handling, charting and navigation, life saving techniques, and much more. All modules, except the Non-Motorized and the M/V Spencer Baird Module, require students to successfully complete the basic MOCC course prior to enrolling.

The student-instructors reported that they learned a great deal and felt that this course gave them the expertise and tools needed to be successful instructors. A sincere “thank you” is due to all the supervisors who support the DOI Watercraft Safety Training Program by allowing their talented and committed employees to become instructors for the good of all Service watercraft operators and crews.

Partners Take a Ride on the Detroit River

By Andrew Briggs

Building and maintaining partnerships is an essential element to tackling the challenges associated with conserving natural resources. Partnerships allow groups

and agencies to come together and attack a common goal by sharing resources, whether it is personnel, equipment, or funding. This type of collaboration



A rendition of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Gateway boat dock and fishing pier located along the Detroit River. Image credit: Hamilton Anderson Associates.

enhances the quality and quantity of work that otherwise would have been done individually, if done at all. In the St. Clair – Detroit River System (SCDRS) collaboration between groups and agencies is nothing new. Partners have been working together for many years and in 2013 the SCDRS Initiative (<http://scdrs.org/>) received the Department of the Interior “Partners in Conservation” award, one of the highest recognitions bestowed on organizations by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

In the SCDRS, major restoration efforts have been undertaken by many groups, organizations, and agencies to address Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) in the Detroit River Area of Concern (AOC). On August 11th, fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford Substation took staff and trustees of the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, including Deputy Regional Director Charlie Wooley, on a tour of the lower Detroit River to highlight some of the

collaborative restoration work that is scheduled to take place. The stops included the location of a new boat dock and fishing pier that will be constructed at the site of the new Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge visitor’s center, Gibraltar Bay, Celeron Island, Stony Island, and Sugar Island. Twenty-five organizations are working together to make the \$3 million boat dock and fishing pier a reality. Gibraltar Bay is adjacent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service property on Gibraltar Island acquired in 2010 that was once home to a Navy seaplane base and Nike missile base. Celeron Island, Stony Island, and Sugar Island are all proposed shoreline restoration sites.

Taking time to showcase the restoration work being done is important to building and maintaining partnerships. Without actually going out in the field and seeing restoration sites first hand, it can often be difficult to communicate the success of current restoration work or the need for future work.

Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office Assists Partners With the Thunder Bay Reef Habitat Restoration Project

By Adam Kowalski

Since 2009, the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office has worked with a variety of partners, including the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, on a reef restoration project in Thunder Bay by Alpena, Michigan on the eastern shore of Lake Huron.

For decades cement kiln dust generated from a local cement plant had leached into Thunder Bay, degrading a near-shore reef. This leaching caused a loss of spawning and rearing habitat for lake trout, lake whitefish, and other reef-spawning fishes. In 2002, the dust pile was capped and a retaining wall was constructed to prevent further leaching. The goal of the project was to mitigate for the degraded spawning habitat by constructing new spawning reefs out of limestone cobble donated by Lafarge North America to create approximately two acres of new spawning habitat. The purpose of the reefs is to increase reproduction of reef-spawning fishes in Thunder Bay. Although the project is focused on lake trout, other reef-associated fishes such as lake whitefish, walleye,

and smallmouth bass should also benefit. Pre-construction monitoring of egg and fry survival on the existing spawning reefs was completed in 2009. Funding for the project, which is managed by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, was obtained from Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act and the Estuary Restoration Act run by NOAA in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Twenty-four mitigation reefs were constructed during the summer of 2011 and subsequent activities have focused on measuring reef use by adult lake trout and other fish species. During the fall of 2012, Alpena staff assisted Michigan DNR with the deployment of 96 egg traps and egg bags, deploying them on both the new mitigation reefs and the existing control reefs. Alpena staff also provided assistance with electro-fishing and gill netting to capture adult lake trout that were to be implanted with transmitters as part of a movement study. Gillnets were deployed on two existing reefs and six mitigation reefs. The control reefs produced the

majority of the lake trout captured, though adult lake trout were captured on all six mitigation reefs as well.

Transmitters were implanted in forty adult trout, divided equally between males and females of hatchery and wild origin. Similar effort was expended in 2013 and 2012, with similar results. One exception was that more lake trout fry were captured on the mitigation reefs in 2013 than in previous years. The 2014 season results were very similar to 2013. Sediment traps revealed that sediment is slowly filling in the reefs. Even so, the reefs are also being cleaned by large waves and strong winds. The Spring of 2015 produced the most lake trout fry

from the mitigation reefs so far. This suggests that the mitigation reefs are attracting lake trout during spawning.

In addition to lake trout, lake whitefish, small mouth bass, walleye, long nose suckers, and common carp were also captured. Finding lake trout and other species on the new mitigation reefs seems to be an improvement from the previous year, though actual usage for spawning will be verified when the egg traps and bags are retrieved.

Engaging Today's Youth: Lake Sturgeon and Beyond

By Andrew Briggs

Engaging today's youth in the importance of conserving our natural resources is essential to the goals of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In a world full of distractions that remove youth from outdoor activities, the Service is working to bring them back outside. One method used by the Service to engage youth is speaking to students at schools. On May 22nd, fish biologist Andrew Briggs of the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford Substation was invited to speak at his former high school about the lake sturgeon work being conducted by the Alpena FWCO and his path to becoming a fish biologist.

Tenth grade students in Mr. Mike Weinert's biology class at Mason County Central High School in Scottville, Michigan took great interest in Andrew's presentation. Most students had little previous knowledge of lake sturgeon or the types of habitats they lived in. Andrew also brought some show-and-tell items, including lake sturgeon scutes, tags that the Alpena FWCO uses to track lake sturgeon, and a couple examples of sampling

gears used by the Alpena FWCO. Other projects and topics discussed during the presentation included work being done to combat the spread of invasive species in the Great Lakes, monitoring artificial spawning reefs that the Service and partners have constructed in the St. Clair – Detroit River System, and the outreach work the Service conducts.

Many students in Mr. Mike Weinert's class expressed interest in potentially exploring a career in biology. Students had the opportunity to ask many questions after Andrew's presentation. Among many other topics, they were curious about the cost of the tags used to track lake sturgeon, what fish biologists do when they aren't working in the field, and the positive and negative experiences Andrew has encountered as a fish biologist. After the presentation students thanked Andrew for coming in and took some of the educational materials he brought with him on invasive species, conservation, and career opportunities.