

ALPENA FWCO NEWSLETTER

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Renovation of Besser Museum Fish Exhibit Rolls On

By Steven Gambicki

Riparian Besser Museum located in Alpena, Michigan is in the process of updating and enhancing their fish exhibit. Christine Witulski, the Executive and Education Director at Besser Museum, had reached out to the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (Alpena FWCO) for assistance in 2013, and Steven Gambicki, a fish biologist at the Alpena FWCO, agreed to assist the museum with reorganizing and improving the exhibit. Gambicki recently delivered a lake trout replica with a sea lamprey attached, which is a key piece for the new and improved fish exhibit at Besser Museum.

The current exhibit is lacking information about the commercial fishery, sport fishery, and impacts that introduced and invasive species have had on the Great Lakes fishery. This one mount will help tell the history of the lake trout fishery and impacts of sea lamprey in the Great Lakes. The new exhibit will also include information about other established invasive species and the impacts they have had on native species and the fishery, and will highlight species that are threatening to invade the Great Lakes such as Asian carp.

Gambicki also connected with Biology professor Brenda Kelley at Alpena Community College. She has agreed to enlist the help of her field biology class to research the fish species that are present. "The students are excited about the project and have some good ideas about the display" said Kelley. The information the students provide will be incorporated into new exhibit labels.

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Christine Witulski, Executive and Education Director at Besser Museum, accepts the lake trout/sea lamprey replica from Steven Gambicki Fish Biologist at the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office. Photo credit: USFWS.

Reorganization of the Besser Museum fish exhibit is a collaborative effort between the museum, Alpena Community College, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Witulski hopes the improved fish exhibit will "... educate the public, and bring an awareness that will deepen their appreciation of the Great Lakes."



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Look at Those Chompers: Place Based Education

By Joseph Gerbyshak

As part of the Connecting People with Nature (CPWN) initiative, the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (Alpena FWCO) has been connecting students with nature inside and outside of their classrooms by providing hands-on environmental education activities related to the school curriculum. Alpena FWCO's involvement with this initiative provides the students and teacher a change of pace, while giving them a conservation professional's perspective.

Besser Elementary School has been studying mammals as part of a reading unit. On March 6th, Joseph Gerbyshak presented a lesson to two 4th grade classes about the various feeding groups of mammals. Gerbyshak used mammal skulls as props to demonstrate the difference between carnivore, omnivore, and herbivore teeth. The students learned to easily identify carnivores by their characteristic canines and sharp carnassial teeth. The distinctive, long incisors and flat molars were used by the students to distinguish herbivores. They quickly learned that omnivorous animals have teeth with the features of both carnivores and herbivores.

Once the students had learned these basic concepts, they were given a skull of an unknown species of animal and tasked with classifying it based on the skull's dentition. After the students determined the correct feeding group, they tried to determine the correct species of animal from a list. This proved to be slightly more difficult for the students, but once they completed this, they were asked to speculate what the animal normally eats in the wild. This generated some interesting and creative responses. The students enjoyed the up-close look at the various mammal skulls and quickly learned how much care was needed when handling the delicate specimens.



Top: Gerbyshak explains what types of teeth carnivores have to a group of inquisitive students at Besser Elementary School.

Bottom: Gerbyshak shows a class of 4th graders how to categorize mammals into feeding groups based on their dentition as part of the CPWN Initiative. Photo credits: USFWS.

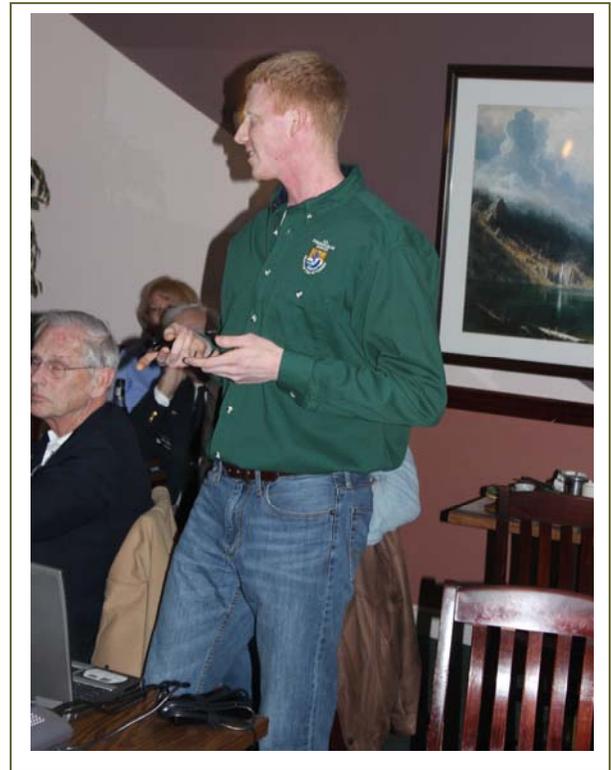
The Friends of the Lake Huron Watershed group will hold their monthly meeting on May 21, 2014 at 4:30 pm. The group meets at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office at 480 W. Fletcher Street in Alpena, Michigan. All are welcome to attend!

Fish Biologist Invited to Educate Dearborn Sail and Power Squadron

By Andrew Briggs

Fish biologist Andrew Briggs of the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford Substation was invited to present to the Dearborn Sail and Power Squadron at their monthly membership meeting. The Dearborn Sail and Power Squadron is a unit of the United States Power Squadrons and is a non-profit, educational organization. They educate all levels of sail and power boaters on safe boating practices. The meeting took place at Richard's Family Restaurant in Livonia, Michigan on March 20th and approximately 30 members were present.

The Dearborn Sail and Power Squadron was interested in the habitat restoration projects currently underway in the St. Clair-Detroit River System (SCDRS). Andrew presented information on the artificial spawning reefs that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and partners have constructed and plan to construct in the system. Since 2008, three artificial reefs have been constructed in the SCDRS, two in the Detroit River (Belle Isle and Fighting Island), and one in the lower St. Clair River (Middle Channel). The intent of the reefs is to increase native fish species spawning habitat, which has been lost in these rivers as a result of dredging in the early 1900's. The construction of these reefs has been identified as restoration targets for the "Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat" and "Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations" Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) in these two Areas of Concern (AOCs). Attendees of the meeting were impressed at the amount of effort that goes into determining where reefs are constructed and the amount of physical and biological data collected to determine the success of the reefs. Project partners use side scan sonar equipment, underwater video, scuba diving, acoustic Doppler current profilers, and other gears to assess the physical characteristics of each reef site. Biological data collection includes larval, juvenile, and adult fish assessments along with fish egg deposition studies to evaluate the success of each reef. Participants were amazed at the positive impacts that the current reefs have had on the fish community in such a short period of time. Members expressed concern over the habitat degradation that has taken place in the SCDRS, but were excited to see that there were people out there making a difference.



Fish biologist Andrew Briggs presents information on artificial spawning reefs being constructed in the St. Clair-Detroit River System to the Dearborn Sail and Power Squadron at Richard's Family Restaurant in Livonia, Michigan. Photo credit: USFWS.

Presenting to local groups is an excellent way that the Service can inform the public of the important work that is being conducted right in their backyards. These groups often develop an appreciation for the work being conducted along with the importance of conserving the environment around them. These reef construction projects are conducted in cooperation with the Huron-Erie Corridor Initiative partnership, which recently received the Department of the Interior (DOI), Partners in Conservation Award, one of the highest recognitions bestowed on organizations by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

For more information please visit the Huron-Erie Corridor Initiative website: <http://www.huron-erie.org/index.html>

YouTube Video Links:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VHf9YsrzT8>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_oXh3306mg