

# ALPENA FWCO NEWSLETTER

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## Lake Sturgeon Get Up Close and Personal at Blue Water Sturgeon Festival

By Andrew Briggs

The Blue Water Sturgeon Festival has been an annual affair in Port Huron, Michigan since 2013. The event is a way to celebrate and raise awareness about lake sturgeon and show pride in Port Huron and the surrounding community. The area near Port Huron and the Blue Water Bridges that connect the United States and Canada is home to the largest free ranging spawning population of lake sturgeon in the Great Lakes. This year the festival took place on May 30<sup>th</sup> and was held at the Great Lakes Maritime Center, located along the St. Clair River.

Every year the Blue Water Sturgeon Festival has added something new to attract more people. This year the event added a 5K race and 1K fun run entitled "Run with the Sturgeon." As in previous years, patrons could participate in "Sturgeon Cruises" (1.5 hour boat cruises on the St. Clair River featuring a live video feed of the river bottom as seen by SCUBA divers), attend workshops given by scientists, eat birthday cake dedicated to lake sturgeon, visit booths of area vendors, and view and touch live lake sturgeon. This year's event was also showcased on the Michigan Out of Doors TV series (<https://www.michiganoutofdoorstv.com/shows.cfm>).

Fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford substation provided the two live lake sturgeon for the festival. The two adult sturgeon were caught the morning of the event while conducting annual lake sturgeon surveys to estimate the population size in this area. While at the event the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) biologists and biologists from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Lake St. Clair Fish Research Station discussed

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*Fish biologist Andrew Briggs of the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford substation helps children touch a live lake sturgeon at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Blue Water Sturgeon Festival in Port Huron, MI. Photo credit: USFWS.*

lake sturgeon life history, ecology, restoration, and helped willing attendees touch the two sturgeon. The attendees came away impressed by the size of the lake sturgeon and the amount of lake sturgeon that reside in the area.

In order to make this event possible, the Service collaborated with many agencies and groups. Collaborators included the St. Clair County Health Department, Gregory AD (Absolute Diving), St. Clair-Detroit River Sturgeon for Tomorrow, DTE Energy, Cargill, SEMCO Energy, St. Clair River Bi-national Public Advisory Council, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Friends of the St. Clair River, Michigan Sea Grant, U.S. Geological Survey, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, and many others. The Blue Water Sturgeon Festival has grown in each year of its

existence, with approximately 1,200 attendees in 2013, 2,400 in 2014, and over 4,000 this year.

For more information of the Blue Water Sturgeon Festival and this year's event, please visit:

<http://www.sturgeonfestival.com/>

<http://www.thetimesherald.com/story/news/local/2015/05/30/blue-water-sturgeon-festival-celebrates-huge-fish/28223713/>

## Region 3 SCUBA Dive Team Assembles for Safety

By Andrew Briggs

Fish biologists Andrew Briggs and James Boase of the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford substation traveled to La Crosse, Wisconsin for a SCUBA meeting and training session with other members of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Region 3 SCUBA dive team. The meeting and training session took place March 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> at the La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office and Logan High School pool. The training is one of the requirements to become an authorized diver for the Region 3 SCUBA dive team and must be completed annually. James was attending to become reauthorized and Andrew to become authorized for the first time.

During the meeting, dive team members were able to introduce themselves and discuss their SCUBA plans for the upcoming field season. The Alpena FWCO dive team plans to utilize SCUBA to evaluate habitat enhancement projects throughout the St. Clair-Detroit River System. Dive team members were also able to convey their plans and any safety concerns that they had to Service safety specialist Janet Dalton. All members agreed that safety was the top priority while SCUBA diving in the field.

In the pool, each dive team member had to demonstrate a number of swimming and SCUBA skills. The swimming skills included being able to free swim (no gear) 400 yards continuously, swim 800 yards continuously with snorkel and fins, and tread water for 15 minutes (hands out of the water for the last two minutes). SCUBA skills included a 100 yard disabled



*TOP: Fish biologists Andrew Briggs and James Boase prepare and inspect their SCUBA gear in the pool prior to training. BOTTOM: The USFWS Region 3 SCUBA Dive Team poses for a picture in the pool at Logan High School. Photo credit: Andy Roberts, USFWS.*

diver tow, clearing a mask underwater, removing and replacing gear underwater, breathing from a free flowing regulator, buddy breathing, and buoyancy control.

The SCUBA meeting and training session offered a great

opportunity for dive members to share stories and advice on SCUBA diving along with work on skills. One of the priorities of the Service is to maintain a well trained staff so that they can perform their required duties efficiently in a safe manner. This meeting and training session definitely aided in that goal.

## Lake Sturgeon 101

By Andrew Briggs

A critical goal of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is to engage today's youth in the importance and conservation of our natural resources. Today's youth are the future of natural resource conservation; however, with the expansion of urban areas, fewer youth get to experience nature first hand. At Waldon Middle School in Lake Orion, Michigan, 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in Mr. Jon Gray's classes are getting the opportunity to raise lake sturgeon and chinook salmon. They are participating in the Sturgeon and Salmon in the Classroom programs, run by the St. Clair-Detroit River Chapter of Sturgeon for Tomorrow and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. These programs give the students a hands-on opportunity to learn about the life history and habitat requirements of lake sturgeon and chinook salmon.

To further educate his students on lake sturgeon physiology, biology, and conservation, Mr. Gray invited fish biologist Andrew Briggs of the Alpena Fish and

Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) – Waterford substation to speak to his four classes. Aside from information on lake sturgeon, Andrew also discussed what the Alpena FWCO is doing to assess and improve habitat and combat the spread of invasive species. For the many students that had an interest in future jobs in biology, Andrew discussed the tasks that he completes as a fish biologist and the steps he took to become a fish biologist.

Students took great interest in Andrew's presentation and had the opportunity to ask questions during and after his talk. Questions included how big was the largest lake sturgeon that Andrew had ever caught, what is the most lake sturgeon Andrew has caught in one day, and how did invasive species get to Michigan. The 100 students that heard Andrew speak came away with a better understanding and appreciation of lake sturgeon and became aware of some of the career opportunities that are available to them in biology.



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The Friends of the Lake Huron Watershed group holds their monthly meeting on the third Wednesday of each month 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!

## Sturgeon Make a Big Splash at Detroit River Festival

By Justin Chiotti

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partner agencies have been conducting lake sturgeon research in the Detroit River for nearly two decades. During that time, over 400 adult lake sturgeon have been tagged to assess population trends, two artificial reefs have been constructed in the river to increase lost spawning habitat, and several spawning sites have been identified through the collection of eggs and larvae. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, several organizations attended the First Annual Detroit River Sturgeon Day held at Milliken State Park and Harbor along the Detroit River. The event was intended to educate students about the river and the giant fish swimming in its waters.

More than 200 students from University Prep Science and Math High School in Detroit attended the event where learning stations were setup to describe the history, habitat, life cycle, and health of lake sturgeon in the Detroit River and around the Great Lakes. Employees from the U.S. Geological Survey Great Lakes Science Center were on hand to describe the unique life history characteristics of sturgeon. Student had an opportunity to view sturgeon larvae through a microscope, see some of the assessment gear used by biologists, and view live juvenile sturgeon. Michigan Sea Grant operated a station where students learned about the reef construction process and habitat requirements of spawning lake sturgeon by placing rock material on a mat of a mock river. Staff from the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge described the history of the Detroit River, emphasizing habitat conditions which led to the decline of the species. The Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation office operated the sturgeon recovery learning station where students learned about the historical status of lake sturgeon, what management agencies are doing to recover the species, and some of the factors impeding restoration. At this station students were able to hold crayfish and mudpuppies commonly found in the river.

The event culminated with a 300-gallon live lake sturgeon touch tank where students could get up close to adult lake sturgeon. Students were unaware that adult sturgeon were going to be a part of the event and the screams could be heard all along the Detroit River



*TOP: Staff from the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and Alpena FWCO show students from University Prep Science and Math live adult lake sturgeon at Detroit River Sturgeon Day. CENTER: Staff from the U.S. Geological Survey talk about lake sturgeon assessments performed in the Detroit River at the life history learning station at Detroit River Sturgeon Day. BOTTOM: Agencies partner together to teach students about the Detroit River and lake sturgeon at the First Annual Detroit River Sturgeon Day. Photo credits: USFWS.*

walk as they approached the fish. The students received a good background about lake sturgeon before they reached the touch tank, but nothing beats getting up close to the largest fish species in the Great Lakes. Students came away from the event with a better understanding of the history of the Detroit River, increased knowledge of the work organizations are doing to restore this species, and a story to tell for years to come.

This event was held in partnership with the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, U.S. Geological Survey Great Lakes Science Center, Michigan Sea Grant, and Detroit Riverfront.