



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Midwest Region

Fisheries & Aquatic Resources Program

fish lines

Lake Trout Fins
Indicate Success

Wood Duck Box
Partnership

Take a "Bite" out of
Classification

Successful
Bloater Egg
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School Gets New
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries



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Lake Trout Fins Indicate Success

Something really cool is happening on Lake Michigan. Anglers and biologists are capturing lake trout...[Read More](#)



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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: April 18, 2013



Lake Trout Fins Indicate Restoration Success: Natural Reproduction of Lake Trout in Lake Michigan!

BY DALE S. HANSON, GREENBAY FWCO



An aggregation of lake trout over a spawning reef.
Credit: J. Ellen Marsden and Bret Ladago

Something really cool is happening on Lake Michigan. Anglers and biologists are capturing lake trout that have a complete set of fins! The first evidence suggesting successful natural reproduction of lake trout was obtained from large numbers of small lake trout recovered during Green Bay FWCO bloater egg collection surveys.

Lake trout disappeared from Lake Michigan in the 1950s due to overfishing and sea lamprey predation. In the 1960s a reintroduction program began in Lake Michigan with widespread stocking programs to restore self-sustaining populations. Over the last 50 years, between two and three million lake trout yearlings were stocked annually into Lake Michigan waters. These fish were marked by clipping one or more fins so they could later be identified as having originated from hatchery stocking. In the last two years a notable percentage of lake trout caught in the lake have a full complement of fins. This is a clear sign that these fish originated from natural reproduction in the lake!

Between 2010 and 2013, the Green Bay FWCO worked with commercial gillnetters and bottom-trawlers in offshore waters of western Lake Michigan to capture and spawn bloater, a deep-water species of cisco. The primary objective of these surveys was to obtain fertilized eggs to support a bloater reintroduction effort in Lake Ontario. However, lake trout were commonly caught as by-catch. Unclipped, wild lake trout accounted for 20 percent of all lake trout caught from surveys in the Southern Refuge. In waters off the northern Door Peninsula, between 10 and 27 percent of the 2007 – 2009 year-classes were wild. Preliminary data from 2013 indicates 22 percent of the lake trout by-catch from the northern Door Peninsula was wild, and 21 percent of lake trout by catch was wild from bottom trawling near Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

These findings of wild recruitment were just published in the latest issue of North American Journal of Fisheries Management. More evidence is mounting that recent natural reproduction may be widespread in Lake Michigan: multiagency fall lake trout spawn surveys reported 9 to 50 percent of the fish recovered were unclipped and these included surveys in Grand Traverse Bay, Michigan and Illinois waters.

Why, after more than 50 years of stocking, are we only now seeing widespread reports of lake trout natural reproduction? There is no simple answer to this question. Several impediments to lake trout natural reproduction have been suggested, including contaminants, stocking of lake trout in poor habitats, insufficient numbers of spawning lake trout, predation of newly hatched lake trout by alewife, and a deficiency of thiamine in lake trout eggs caused by a diet rich in alewives. Any one of these factors may have played a role in preventing natural reproduction of lake trout over the years. Most contaminants have dropped precipitously in Lake Michigan since the 1960s. Lake trout stocking practices have changed and most are now stocked in offshore areas with suitable spawning habitat. Lake trout harvest is more effectively managed these days and reducing the abundance of sea lamprey remains a priority of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and U.S Fish and Wildlife Service. Finally, alewife populations in Lake Michigan are near their lowest levels since the 1950s, reducing the potential for fry predation and increasing the likelihood that lake trout now consume a more diverse diet that has led to increased thiamine concentrations in lake trout eggs.

Restoration of self-sustaining lake trout populations is not complete. Lake trout densities are still far below target levels and natural reproduction is only just starting to reach detectable levels. Still, after 50 years of stocking it is great to see a lake trout with all of its fins!



Dale Hanson holds a "wild" lake trout captured in the bloater egg-take surveys from a gill-tug off the northern Door Peninsula.

Credit: Todd Kinn USFWS



Student Led Wood Duck Box Partnership Helps Northern Wisconsin Waterfowl

BY TED KOEHLER, ASHLAND FWCO

Wood ducks were possibly the most abundant duck east of the Mississippi River before European settlement, but clearing of mature forests, market hunting, and year round shooting led to drastic declines in this migratory bird's population. Regulation, habitat restoration and management projects such as wood duck box programs have helped the wood duck make a great comeback over much of its range.

Northland College's student chapter of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) and other natural resource program students were interested in partnering on a project with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to benefit local resources. Kevin Grand, Northland's AFS chapter president, worked with staff from the Service to develop the wood duck box building project. He coordinated 16 volunteers to help spend a Saturday building 30 boxes that will be placed on wetland habitat restoration projects.

"It is great that Northland College students can work with staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on things like this wood duck box building project," said Kevin. "There is a lot of great energy here at the college, and the more that can go into great projects that help migratory birds like wood ducks and other fish and wildlife, the better off the whole area will be from a natural resource standpoint".

"The kids were absolutely awesome" said Glenn Miller, a biologist with the Service who helped organize the box building. "They gave up a Saturday of their time, and then some of them went out and skied the six plus mile Book across the Bay that evening".

Wood ducks lay their eggs and incubate them in tree cavities, but will readily accept artificial structures. They also have a high tendency to return to the same nesting area year after year. When the ducklings hatch their mother flies down and starts to call for them to follow. The little ducks, born with special toes for climbing, follow their mothers call and crawl to the opening of the natural tree cavity or box. They then leap out, sometimes more than 100 feet, and float to the ground. Wood ducks currently nest in the area and the additional nest sites will benefit the local population. Spring is still weeks away here in northern Wisconsin, but soon wood ducks will be winging their way to the Chequamegon Bay area. This year and for many more to come, they will have some extra places to call home.



The Construction Team – Left to Right: Front Row: Hunter Shira, Eva Hayes, Gavin Hayes, and Danielle Browne. Middle Row: Allison Phillips, Eleesa Kline, Kevin Grand, Hanna Florio and Allison DeRose. Back Row: Ted Koehler, Lucas Harguth, Sarah Moodie, and Dalton Lebada. Dogs: Standing in for FWS Construction Team leader Glenn Miller is his Labrador Zeek and furry friend Jim. Credit: Glenn Miller



Wilson Elementary and Alpena FWCO take a “Bite” out of Mammal Classification

BY JOSEPH GERBYSHAK, ALPENA FWCO



Third grade students at Wilson Elementary School are hard at work classifying a mammal skull into the correct feeding group as part of the Connecting People With Nature (CPWN) initiative. Credit: USFWS

flat molars were used by the students to distinguish herbivores. The students quickly learned that omnivorous animals have teeth of both carnivores and herbivores.

Once the students had learned these basic concepts, they were given skulls of unknown species of animal and tasked with classifying it based on the skull's dentition. After the students classified the animal into the correct feeding group, they tried to determine the correct species of animal from a list. Once they accomplished this task, they were asked to speculate what the animal normally eats in the wild. This generated some interesting and creative responses. The students enjoyed seeing the various mammal skulls up close and quickly learned how much care was needed when handling these delicate specimens.

As part of the Connecting People with Nature (CPWN) initiative, staff from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) has been teaching students at Wilson Elementary School for the past four years about environmental topics that meet their current science curriculum. This school year Alpena FWCO's staff adopted a new cohort of third grade students. Alpena FWCO staff will be teaching these students lessons once a month via hands-on, classroom activities and field trips until they reach the fifth grade. Alpena FWCO's involvement at Wilson Elementary School provides a change of pace for the students, while providing unique insight from conservation professionals.

Alpena FWCO biologist Joseph Gerbyshak presented a lesson about the classification of mammals into feeding groups based on the animal's dentition. Gerbyshak used mammal skulls as visual aids to demonstrate the different types of teeth of carnivores, omnivores, and herbivores. The students learned to easily identify carnivores by their characteristic elongated canines and sharp carnassial teeth. The distinctive long incisors and



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Another Successful Year of Bloater Egg Collections for Lake Ontario Restoration Project

BY DALE S. HANSON, GREENBAY FWCO

Since 2010 the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) has been working with commercial fishermen on Lake Michigan to capture spawning bloaters (a species of cisco) during from January through March. Bloater eggs are collected and fertilized right on the boat and shipped overnight to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources White Lake Fish Culture Station. Since 2012, Roger Gordon and Paul Haver from Jordan River National Fish Hatchery in Elmira, Michigan have been instrumental in increasing the fertilization and survival rates of the bloater eggs. These fertilized eggs are the foundation of bloater restoration work in Lake Ontario, a project that is led by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. In November 2012, a small number of juvenile bloater were reintroduced to Lake Ontario, and roughly twenty thousand more juveniles will be released into the lake in 2013.



Roger Gordon removes the testes from this bloater which will be rinsed over the eggs to fertilize them. Credit: Dale Hanson, USFWS

This winter Green Bay FWCO and Jordan River NFH staff collected roughly 500,000 bloater eggs during sixteen trips. Most of these eggs went to White Lake FCS where a small number will be raised to maturity in a brood stock program as a future egg source. The rest will be raised to the juvenile life-stage and released into Lake Ontario in 2014. Another 50,000 eggs were sent to the US Geological Survey Tunison Lab to support experimental work aimed at increasing the survival rates of larval and juvenile bloater in hatcheries. Egg collections this last winter set the stage for a promising future for bloater restoration in Lake Ontario.



Columbia Montessori School Gets New Mussel Work

BY PATRICIA HERMAN, COLUMBIA FWCO



Columbia Montessori Primary Student dives into their new mussel work.
Credit: Nicole Johnson

It is hard to be incognito in my Service uniform when I drop my daughter off at school in the morning. The students of Columbia Montessori School love to touch the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service badge on my uniform and ask questions about the "fish and bird" on the sleeve. Even teachers are curious about my job. When they find out what I do, they are eager to tap into my knowledge of science. Recently, my daughter's teacher approached me with a request. She was developing a continuous lesson unit on the species of Missouri and needed a little help.

The species of Missouri is a pretty broad topic to cover – especially for three to six year olds. As I was brainstorming one evening wanting to create "work" for the classroom that would be lasting, I had an epiphany...freshwater mussel shells! Knowing that most learning is facilitated by sensory experience, mussel shells would be perfect for a primary classroom. From practicing fine motor control by matching shells together to learning shell anatomy, the mussel shells would hold the attention of all ages in the class, as well as holding up to the

rigors of a primary classroom.

I was picking up a few mussel shells on the river one morning and discussing my plans for them with fish and wildlife biologist, Andy Roberts, who specializes in freshwater mussels. He told me that he had boxes of nice shells that he would be happy to donate to the class. I was thrilled, and a couple of days later Andy delivered on his promise and provided me with shells of over 20 common freshwater mussel species from Missouri rivers and streams. He also donated two copies of, "A Guide to Missouri's Freshwater Mussels" to the classroom. As I was preparing the new classroom work, I found myself asking questions - of which Andy and Josh Hundley, also a fish and wildlife biologist, graciously answered for me. From the collection of mussels, I created flash cards with color pictures, common names and scientific names (it is never too early to teach Latin) for the students to practice matching the shells to pictures. I also provided labeled diagrams of shell anatomy and the life cycle of a freshwater mussel. After a weekend of scrubbing and labeling the mussel shells, printing and laminating cards, and carefully bundling everything together, the work was ready for the classroom.

As reported by teachers, school administrators, parents and students, the freshwater mussel lesson has been a huge hit! The students of Columbia Montessori School love choosing the mussel work and are eager to show (and tell) their parents how to use the shells and pictures. I have even noticed the adults examining and matching the mussel shells. Thanks to the generosity of Columbia Ecological Services Field Office, children and adults alike will become familiar with some of the most imperiled animals in Missouri. I've got a new idea for some classroom work now. If only I had enough time to tan some mammal skins...



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La Crosse FWCO - Wow...They do a LOT of Stuff!

BY MARK STEINGREABER, LACROSSE FWCO



Menominee Tribal Chair Randal Chevalier (right) assists Wisconsin DNR biologists in preparing a lake sturgeon for release into reservation waters of the Wolf River. Credit: T. Skelding

The La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) was established in 1981 and is one of sixty-five FWCO field offices across the country managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Originally located in Winona, Minnesota, this office moved to Onalaska, Wisconsin in 1995, and has since experienced considerable growth in its programs, staff, facilities, and funding.

The La Crosse FWCO helps fulfill the Service's national mission by working with partners throughout the Upper Mississippi River Basin (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri) to safeguard populations of native aquatic species and their habitats. This is accomplished by a staff of ten permanent and three term employees who work as a team to: restore native, inter-jurisdictional fishes and their aquatic habitats; survey national wildlife refuges to provide management options; fulfill federal trust responsibilities to Native American Tribes; attain fish passage on rivers and streams to restore historic fish migrations; prevent extinction of federally endangered fish and mussels; coordinate the Driftless Area and Upper Mississippi River Basin regional partnerships of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan; impede the spread of nonindigenous aquatic nuisance species; prevent the introduction of unwanted medications and aquatic pets into surface waters; coordinate the Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee; provide environmental education; work with Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services and volunteers; support the Regional Dive Team with two SCUBA-certified divers including the Regional Dive Safety Officer; and lead Motorboat Operator Certification courses for the Service's eight-state Midwest Region. The FWCO staff consists of a project leader (currently vacant), an assistant project leader, two administrative specialists, four fishery biologists, two biological science technicians, a biological technician, a logistics management specialist, and a Pathways Student Intern.

Some of the more notable accomplishments of the La Crosse FWCO team and its partners in 2012 include: collecting and processing of more than 11,000 fish and 345 water samples during surveillance efforts to detect Asian carps, round goby, and other invasive species of fish in the Chicago Area Waterway System; transferring 100 adult lake sturgeon beyond migration barriers along the Wolf River that allowed this species to reproduce at historic spawning sites on the Menominee Indian Reservation for the first time in more than a century; providing training opportunities to certify hundreds of Department of the Interior employees as boat operators; coordinating the permitted shipment of 95,000 fertilized lake sturgeon eggs across international (Canadian-U.S.) borders in efforts to help restore this species to tribal waters in the Red River of the North drainage basin; participating in the U.S. delegation at the Great Rivers International Scientific and Industrial Forum in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia; leveraging \$650,000 in support of six projects that enhanced seven miles of stream habitat, restored 13 upland acres, and removed two fish barriers in the Driftless Area; acquiring \$4.9-million for four fish passage projects that removed five barriers and reconnected 69 miles of stream habitat in the Midwest region; and hosting a record setting crowd of 2,500 participants at the annual Youth Outdoor Fest in La Crosse.



2012 Annual Youth Outdoor Fest. Credit: J. Weigel



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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.

FWCO Biologist Teaches Course for Southern Illinois Master Naturalist Program

BY JEFF STEWART, CARTERVILLE FWCO

On March 7th I taught an ichthyology module for 31 participants of the southern Illinois Master Naturalist program. This is the first year that the program is being offered in the Southern Illinois area. The program is put on by the University of Illinois Extension, Shawnee National Forest, and the Illinois Natural History Survey. The Master Naturalist Program has a mission to provide science-based educational opportunities that connect people to nature and help them become engaged environmental stewards. Participants learn about a wide variety of natural phenomena from archaeology to zoology. Many of the participants go on to volunteer at wildlife refuges and various other nature centers.

I taught the class at the Cache River Wetlands Center located in the Cache River State Natural area and adjacent to the Cache River NWR. Participants included a wide variety of people including folks from Cypress Creek NWR, the Shawnee National Forest, and Shawnee Community College as well as a number of retired folks. We began the class indoors with an introduction to ichthyology (the study of fishes) in Illinois, an overview of the fish diversity in southern Illinois, and examples of written and online resources for fish identification. The classroom portion of the day wrapped up with lots of good questions about Asian carp from the participants. We then carpooled a short distance to the Cache River where they experienced hands on fish sampling. A number of the students donned waders and helped sample fishes in backwater and main stem habitats with mini-fyke nets and seines. Fishing was tough with very cold water temperatures but we were able to catch a number of fishes including banded pygmy sunfish in breeding colors.

Genoa NFH Staff Present at World Aquaculture Society 2013

BY DOUG ALOISI, GENOA NFH

Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) staff moderated a recent session at a sturgeon culture for restoration symposia at the World Aquaculture Society at Nashville, Tennessee in February. Orey Eckes, a Pathways Student Employee at Genoa NFH presented the results of his thesis on the development of a larval lake sturgeon development index over variable water temperatures. He currently is a student in the Masters of Science Program at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse. Staff with Genoa NFH also presented on the site specific design of streamside rearing units to facilitate river specific lake sturgeon restoration. Streamside rearing units have been used during the last ten years alongside Lake Michigan to restore river specific lake sturgeon stocks, and recent advances in water treatment processes and larval sturgeon rearing were disseminated at the symposia. The symposia also included papers on pallid and shovelnose sturgeon culture, Endangered Gulf sturgeon culture and Atlantic sturgeon milt cryopreservation. The experience garnered specifically by Orey should serve him well in the future as he finishes his education and begins what is anticipated to be an illustrious career in the field of fisheries conservation.

From Trash to Fish Habitat: Carterville Staff Helps with the 2013 Brush Pile Drop at Crab Orchard Lake

BY JOSE RIVERA, CARTERVILLE FWCO

This winter staff from the Carterville Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) took part in the annual brush pile drop at Crab Orchard Lake. At 7,000 acres, Crab Orchard Lake is the largest of three reservoirs located within the Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in southern Illinois. The lake is popular with local anglers for its healthy populations of sport fish; bluegill, channel catfish, crappie, and largemouth bass are the most commonly targeted species.

The benefit of dropping brush piles in Crab Orchard Lakes is twofold. The brush piles provide needed underwater structure, which fish utilize as feeding grounds and as shelter to avoid predators. Without sufficient structure in a lake, fish can be difficult to locate, leading to poor fishing. The placements of brush piles provide more fish habitat which can help strengthen the Crab Orchard fishery. They also help to concentrate fish, making it easier for anglers to locate and catch fish. Aside from enhancing fish habitat, the annual brush pile drop also provides an outlet to recycle discarded Christmas trees. Each year the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR) accepts old trees from the public (as well as unsold trees donated by local retailers) which keep the trees out of area landfills by turning them into fish habitat.

Carterville FWCO staff teamed up with the Illinois DNR, as well as with local volunteers, to construct brush piles by attaching cinder blocks to bundles of discarded trees with wire. After being loaded on to boats, the brush piles were dropped at predetermined locations throughout the lake. While these fish attracting structures can be easily found by boaters with depth/fish finders, the Illinois DNR maintains maps which are updated annually. Pinpointing the brush pile locations, these maps are provided to the public free of charge. Shore anglers were also considered, as many brush piles were placed within casting distance of accessible shore fishing spots. The annual brush pile drop at Crab Orchard Lake is great example of the re-purposing of items otherwise destined for the dump, giving a second life to discarded trees as cost-effective habitat enhancement and structure for fish. The annual event also highlights how federal and state resource agencies can join forces with the public to enhance our natural resources.

One at a Time: Bringing “Children in Nature” to the Forefront

BY SHAWN SANDERS, IRON RIVER NFH

Traveling to Ashland, Wisconsin for youth hockey practice was usually a quiet event. However, on one of those many trips I got a question from the back seat, “Shawn, have you ever heard of a Central Stoneroller or Brook Silversides?”

My jaw was slightly agape with this question from (until now) an unrecognized seven-year-old, future naturalist, my son’s friend Stasz Kaszuba. This query led to some “light” fish discussion in the car, along with my interest as to how such a young child was so interested in fish. The chance to share my experiences and vocation with friends was exciting. I offered to Stasz’s parents the opportunity to bring him out for the “grand tour” of Iron River National Fish Hatchery. They were both excited, to have the chance to come out and tour a Lake and Brook Trout facility, at Iron River National Fish Hatchery. December and January are oftentimes the “slower” months for tourism; however these are the best time(s) to see the whole trout life-cycle. During this time we have adults, eggs, fry, small fingerlings, and advanced fingerlings (yearlings) on-station, this allows staff to explain what we do and how each portion of the life cycle is different on the hatchery. So, we had this chance to share the hatchery with our friends and share the story of how US Fish and Wildlife Service biologists are lending a hand in restoration of the Great Lakes. The need is there to share this vision with those that we contact and help nurture these future biologists, naturalists and citizens that they too may help spread the message of resource management and conservation.

Midwest Region Fisheries Divisions

National Fish Hatcheries

The Region's National Fish Hatcheries primarily focus on native fish restoration/rehabilitation by stocking fish and eggs, such as pallid and lake sturgeon and by developing and maintaining brood stocks of selected fish strains, such as lake trout and brook trout.

Hatcheries also provide technical assistance to other agencies, provide fish and eggs for research, stock rainbow trout in fulfillment of federal mitigation obligations and assist with recovery of native mussels and other native aquatic species.

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices conduct assessments of fish populations to guide management decisions, perform key monitoring and control activities related to invasive, aquatic species; survey and evaluate aquatic habitats to identify restoration/rehabilitation opportunities; play a key role in targeting and implementing native fish and habitat restoration programs; work with private land owners, states, local governments and watershed organizations to complete aquatic habitat restoration projects under the Service's 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

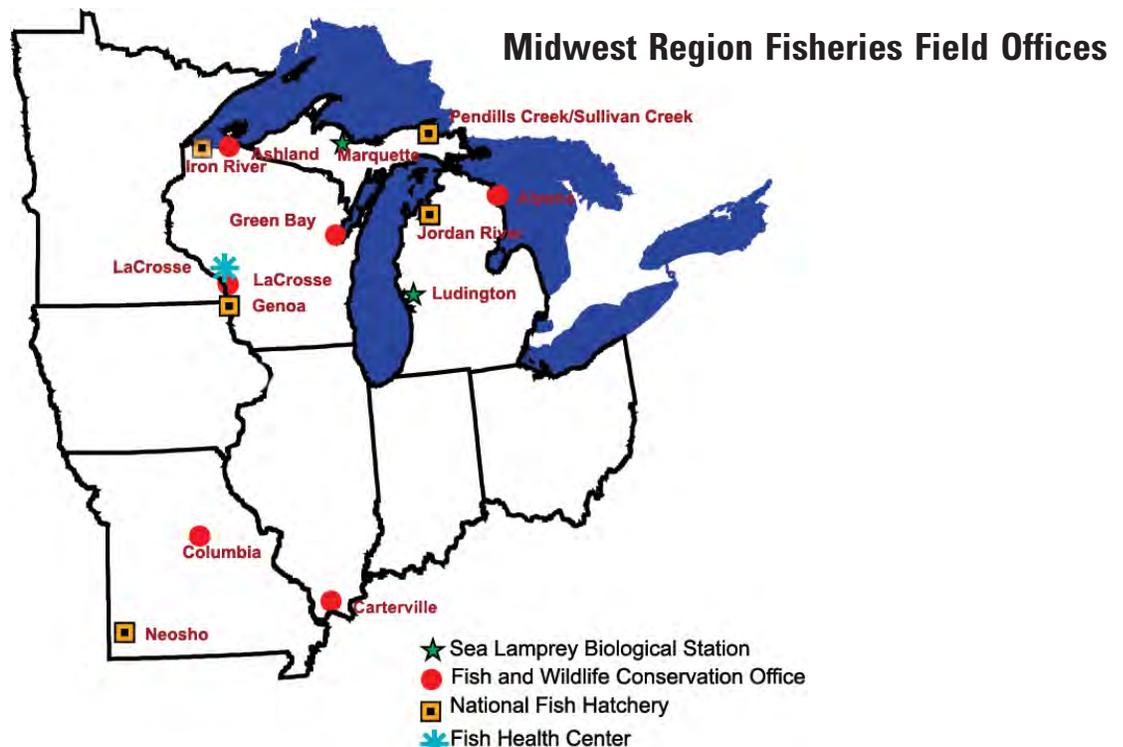
technical expertise to other Service programs addressing contaminants, endangered species, federal project review and hydro-power operation and relicensing; evaluate and manage fisheries on Service lands; and, provide technical support to 38 Native American tribal governments and treaty authorities.

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.



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