



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Midwest Region

## Fisheries Program

# *Fish Lines*

The Search Continues... -  
for Wild Pallid Sturgeon

Studying Lake Sturgeon  
Movements

Pallid Sturgeon Make it to their  
New Home

Ultrasound... What do you  
use that for?

Freeport Dam Removal  
Project





## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

### The Search Continues...for Wild Pallid Sturgeon

BY COLBY WRASSE, COLUMBIA FWCO



Jordan Fox with a Missouri River Pallid Sturgeon. Although this fish was large enough to be used in propagation, analysis indicated that it was a stocked fish.  
Credit: Colby Wrasse, USFWS

Propagation and stocking remain important components of Pallid sturgeon recovery on the Missouri River. Our colleagues at Neosho National Fish Hatchery (NFH) and Blind Pony State Fish Hatchery do a great job in propagating, rearing and stocking these sturgeon. In order for the hatcheries to work their magic, they need brood fish (adult, "wild" Pallid sturgeon) to collect eggs and milt from. These brood fish are captured each spring from the Missouri River by fisheries crews deploying trotlines and gill nets. To maintain genetic diversity, the hatcheries are in continual need of new brood fish.

Each year we at Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) "fish" the Missouri River in hopes of catching large, "wild" Pallid sturgeon to use in the propagation program - however capturing these fish can be challenging. Truly "wild" Pallid sturgeon - those not of hatchery origin - remain relatively rare in the lower Missouri River. Of the 46 we captured during the 2014 field season, only one of the adult sized fish was genetically determined to be "wild". This particular fish was a reproductive male, and was transported to Neosho NFH for use in propagation.

Fortunately, collecting broodstock Pallid sturgeon is a team effort, and our colleagues at the Missouri Department of Conservation and Nebraska Game and Parks captured several broodstock fish this year. The collaborative, team approach to propagation has led to stockings which have greatly supplemented the Pallid sturgeon population in the lower Missouri River. Hopefully, someday the populations in the lower Missouri River will be robust enough that stocking will no longer be necessary, but until that day, we will continue working with our partners to recovery Pallid sturgeon in the lower Missouri River.



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

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### Studying Lake Sturgeon Movements in the St. Clair-Detroit River System

BY JUSTIN CHIOTTI, ALPENA FWCO - WATERFORD, MI SUB-STATION

For the past 3 years, fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) have been implanting lake sturgeon with acoustic transmitters to assess movement throughout the St. Clair – Detroit River System (SCDRS). The SCDRS is home to nearly 40,000 lake sturgeon inhabiting the Detroit River, St. Clair River, and Southern Lake Huron. While genetically, the lake sturgeon population in the SCDRS is considered one population, the movement data collected as a result of this study investigates behavioral patterns that may be unique to the different spawning stocks. Using existing infrastructure through the Great Lakes Acoustic Telemetry Observation System, the sturgeon implanted in this study can be tracked throughout the Great Lakes for up to 10 years.



Fish biologist James Boase inserting an acoustic transmitter into an adult lake sturgeon. Credit: USFWS

Lake sturgeon are captured on setlines during the spring



Lake sturgeon captured during set line assessments on the Detroit River, 2014. Credit: USFWS

spawning season and biological information such as total length, girth, and weight, is recorded from each fish. Adult lake sturgeon, those typically greater than 51 inches are implanted with an acoustic transmitter. The transmitter emits a signal unique to each fish and when that fish passes a receiver submerged in the water (see image), the date and time is recorded. The information can then be used to describe movement between males and females and make comparisons between fish collected from different areas. This year, a total of 40 adult lake sturgeon were implanted in the Detroit River and 57 more in Southern Lake Huron. Over the past 3 years more than 275 lake sturgeon have been implanted with transmitters as part of this project, making this the largest lake sturgeon telemetry project to date.

This project is part of a multi-faceted effort to learn more about lake sturgeon in the SCDRS. In addition to studying the movements of lake sturgeon, mark-recapture information is used to determine population demographics such as population size and survival. This project is conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, West Virginia University, University of Windsor, and Purdy Fisheries. For more information about lake sturgeon work in the SCDRS please visit the following websites:

<http://www.huron-erie.org/>; <http://data.glos.us/glatos/>



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

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### Pallid Sturgeon Make it to their New Home

BY BRUCE HALLMAN, NEOSHO NFH

The day began with rain, and a forecast of more to come. An hour before normal opening time, we convened at the sturgeon facility to begin our mission. For most other people, this was just another Monday, the beginning of another workweek. But for the three of us, we were about to haul a very precious cargo away from the hatchery. This would be the culmination of a year's efforts to help restore the population of the federally endangered pallid sturgeon in the Missouri River.

Almost thirteen months ago, a single, wild-caught female of at least 15 years of age was spawned in Neosho yielding roughly 10,000 eggs. Of those, about a third had survived to become yearlings ranging from 8 inches in length up to about a foot. Approximately two-thirds of our yearlings were marked with passive inductive transducer (PIT) tags two weeks ago, and the 410 fish we were loading up represented the final members of that group. The other 1800 or so were sent off station last week, and our stocking trip was the final one until the rest go out in September.

With trailer filled with fresh, clean well water, we net up the little fish from two large rearing tanks and gently move them to their traveling home for the next few hours. Our journey would take them mostly straight north to the Missouri River up near Mound City, north of St. Joseph, over 260 miles away. Although our day began in the rain, the clouds didn't stay long, and the rest of the day was filled with sunshine. Our piscine passengers didn't know the difference, but we did.



FWS biologists Jeff Messens and Justin Perkins of the Neosho NFH unload yearling sturgeon from the transport unit. Credit: Bruce Hallman, USFWS



Young pallid sturgeon are introduced to their new home in the "Big Muddy" Missouri River. Credit: Bruce Hallman, USFWS

would be a harmless onlooker to our business at hand. The fish were then netted out and released gently in the muddy waters of the mighty river. It was a wonderful feeling to see them happily swim off into the great murky unknown depths of their new home. We hope that as the days and weeks and months elapse, they will all survive and even thrive in their natural habitat – a place very different from their first year's home in Neosho. Our crystal clear water and daily feedings of brine shrimp have been left behind for this new and possibly harsh environment. As we motor away from the drop-off area, we don't think about the forces that work against these little fish, but rather happy and hopeful that our efforts will indeed keep this fascinating species from extinction.

Meanwhile back in Neosho, in the blue rearing tanks at the hatchery, the next batch of

Once we found the boat ramp at the Thurnau Conservation Area on the river, we met some Missouri Department of Conservation workers that were already out on the water. These two partners were familiar with the twists and turns of the river, and they had already scoped out the perfect place to take the yearlings. The ramp where we met them saw too much fishing traffic, they said, and they wanted to go upstream to where traces of civilization were pretty much absent. We transferred the fish to their boat, putting them in a large trough onboard. The river temperature had recently increased to 75°F – more than ten degrees warmer than our water – so we had to try to cool the trough water down so they wouldn't stress from the transfer. We poured buckets of our water into the holding tank to help temper the water.

With all parties onboard, the boat took the yearlings upriver about half a mile to a calm sandbar cove area. While getting in position, we saw a banded water snake swimming along, and then it got out on the sandbar. He



One of the last fish from the boat - hand

tiny fry pallids are swimming with carefree abandon in our protective care to start this delightful cycle of fish life all over again.

released into the river.  
Credit: Bruce Hallman, USFWS

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## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

### Ultrasound...What do you use that for?

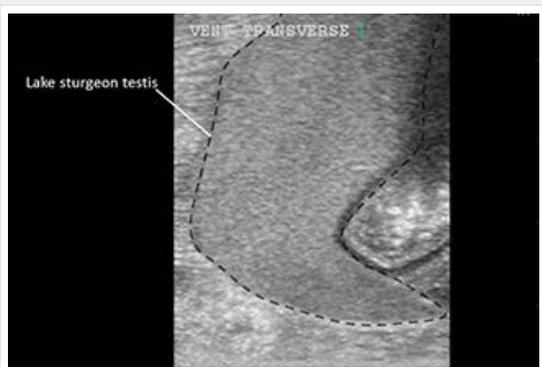
BY JUSTIN CHIOTTI, ALPENA FWCO WATERFORD, MI SUB-STATION



Fish biologist Justin Chiotti and contaminants specialist Jeremy Moore collecting ultrasound images from a lake sturgeon captured in Southern Lake Huron, 2014. Credit: USFWS

Typically when we pull out the ultrasound unit on our boat, the question we get is "What do you use that for?" An ultrasound unit is not something that you commonly see on a boat, but a lake sturgeon telemetry project in the St. Clair-Detroit River System (SCDRS) has provided fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) with a unique opportunity to evaluate the use of a portable ultrasound to determine the sex of lake sturgeon.

Sex determination of fish species in the field is difficult to assess when sexual dimorphism and gametes are not apparent. For threatened and endangered fish species such as lake sturgeon, unobtrusive techniques are needed to minimize stress and the potential for mortality. Some of the more common techniques used to determine sex of lake sturgeon include: gonadal biopsy, endoscopy, blood plasma, and ultrasound. All of these techniques have their pros and cons, however collecting images using ultrasound may be done in the field and results can be obtained immediately.



An ultrasound image collected from a male lake sturgeon during the spawning season in the Detroit River, 2014. Credit: USFWS



An ultrasound image collected from a female lake sturgeon during the spawning season in the Detroit River, 2014. Credit: USFWS

Lake sturgeon are captured on setlines during the spring spawning season and biological information such as total length, girth, and weight, is recorded from each fish. Adult lake sturgeon, those typically greater than 51 inches are implanted with an acoustic transmitter. The small incision used to insert the transmitter allows us to visually determine the sex of the lake sturgeon. Ultrasound images are then collected at six different locations along the body of the fish. Back in the office, the sex and maturity status of each lake sturgeon is assigned based on the ultrasound images and compared to the information we obtained in the field by visually determining the sex through the incision. If our data suggests we can determine the sex and maturity with little error, ultrasound images will be collected from all lake sturgeon in the future to assign sex and maturity status even when gametes are not apparent.

This project is conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Survey, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. For more information about lake sturgeon work in the SCDRS please visit the following websites: <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/alpena/>; <http://www.huron-erie.org/>



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### Freeport Dam Removal Project: Protecting the Past and Connecting the Future

BY RICK WESTERHOF, GREEN BAY FWCO



Looking upstream at the Freeport Dam and house (old powerhouse) before removal of the house and abutments spring 2014. Credit: USFWS

Prior to removal of the dam and culverts, the FWS must do National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act and Sea Lamprey Program reviews. Clearance or approval is necessary for all the reviews before the structures can be removed. All these reviews were completed by the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) staff with assistance from numerous partners. The partners on the project include: CWRC, Streamside Ecological Services, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Barry County Road and Drain Commissions, Barry Conservation District, Frey Foundation, Vogt Foundation, several Michigan Trout Unlimited Chapters and Kent County.

The NHPA requires a field survey if the structure is older than 50 years, to determine if it is eligible as a "historic property" under the National Register of Historic Places. With guidance from the FWS's Regional Historic Preservation Officer, the Green Bay FWCO staff set out on a fact finding mission. With survey template, camera, measuring tape and clipboard in hand, staff traveled to the Freeport Dam on March 4, 2014, to meet with Streamside Ecological Services staff and two representatives from the CWRC to survey the dam, house and other structures.

After reviewing all the available information, it was determined that the Freeport Dam was made of poured concrete and had no special engineering qualities. The current house was modified so much from its original structure and had no special engineering qualities. Information gathered from the City of Freeport, Consumers Power and a public meeting, lead us to believe that there was no historic event that happened at the Freeport Dam or house. The current condition of the Freeport Dam and house was documented in a presentation and sent to the FWS Regional Historic Preservation Officer (RHPO) for review. The RHPO reviewed all the information and then sent a letter to the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office in Lansing, Michigan for review and concurrence that, the Freeport Dam, house and associated structures were not eligible as "historic properties".

The NHPA is just one of the necessary reviews that must be completed before a structure like the Freeport Dam and old powerhouse can be removed. Determining whether a structure is "historic or not" is just one piece of the puzzle to ensure historic sites are protected. The house and abutments on top of the dam were removed in the spring of 2014 to prevent flooding from large woody debris catching on the dam and backing up the river, like it did in 2012. The Freeport Dam will be removed later this summer.

Once completed, the removal of Freeport Dam and replacement of the two culverts upstream on the Coldwater River will reconnect 17 miles of coldwater habitat to migrating fish and aquatic species, and permanently restore a critical link between the

In 2011 Timberland Resource Conservation and Development was provided funding through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) National Fish Passage Program (NFPP) to inventory fish passage barriers in the Lower Grand River Watershed. The Freeport Dam was identified as one of the barriers adversely impacting the Coldwater River and recommended for removal. The Coldwater River Watershed Council (CRWC) submitted a proposal and was funded in 2013 by the FWS through the NFPP to remove the Freeport Dam and replace two culverts on the Coldwater River to reconnect 17 miles of quality habitat for fish and aquatic species.



View of the Freeport Dam house after removal of the house and abutments spring 2014. Credit: Aaron Snell, Streamside Ecological Services.

Thornapple River and the Coldwater River. At the same time, the project will enhance a popular fishing area, reduce the liability associated with the dam and build relationships between partners for future conservation efforts. Removal of the dam is the first step in the long term vision of creating of a public riverfront and natural area in Kent County, Michigan.

For more information: [http://timberlandrcd.com/uploads/Lower\\_Grand\\_Barrier\\_Report\\_v4\\_Final.pdf](http://timberlandrcd.com/uploads/Lower_Grand_Barrier_Report_v4_Final.pdf)

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## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

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### Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

BY COLBY WRASSE, COLUMBIA FWCO



A Pallid Sturgeon is released back into the Missouri River after data has been collected. Credit: USFWS

Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO), located in Columbia, Missouri, was established in 1991. The office is conveniently located just a few miles from the Missouri River, home of the federally endangered Pallid Sturgeon, a species that Columbia FWCO and our partners are working on recovering. However, Columbia FWCO's work extends well beyond the muddy banks of the Missouri River and includes a diverse array of fisheries work performed across the Midwest Region.

#### Pallid Sturgeon Monitoring and Recovery

Since 1997, Columbia FWCO has been part of a basin-wide monitoring effort and is responsible for assessing the lower 250-miles of Missouri River in search of Pallid Sturgeon - an ancient species of fish that was listed as federally endangered in 1990. Throughout the duration of the long term monitoring project Columbia FWCO has led the effort to improve sampling methodology and efficiency including developing new trawling techniques uniquely adapted for the challenges of sampling the Missouri River. In addition to monitoring Pallid

Sturgeon, Columbia FWCO assists our partners at Neosho National Fish Hatchery and Blind Pony State Fish Hatchery with propagation of the species. Columbia FWCO participates in broodstock collection, where wild Pallid Sturgeon are captured from the Missouri River and transported to hatcheries for propagation. Through propagation efforts, more than 139,000 Pallid Sturgeon have been stocked into the lower Missouri River.

#### Asian Carp

Columbia FWCO is part of the massive effort underway to prevent Asian carp from spreading into the Great Lakes. The office monitors the Chicago Area Waterway system for the invasive fish and also collects environmental DNA (eDNA) samples. Columbia is working on developing new gears to monitor and capture Asian carp. The office continues to develop and improve the electrified butterfly skimmer (Paupier) boat to capture the fast swimming adult carp. Columbia has also recently employed a surface trawl to capture young-of-year carp.



Heather Garrison displays a Shovelnose Sturgeon, - a species commonly present in our lower Missouri River samples and a close relative of the Pallid Sturgeon. Credit: USFWS

#### Fish Passage Program

Manmade structures and barriers which impede natural passage of fish and aquatic organisms are

of nationwide concern. Columbia FWCO is working closely in Missouri and Iowa with state and county partners to identify river crossings, dams and other unnatural barriers in priority areas to collectively benefit native aquatic fauna and the safety of area citizens. Columbia's work replacing slab crossings in the historic range of federally endangered Niangua Darter since 2007 is aiding recovery of the species and providing safer free span bridges. Fish passage projects are also included in recovery plans for the federally endangered Topeka Shiner and a host of threatened and endangered mussel species in the Meramec



Jeremiah Smith with a silver carp captured in the electrified butterfly skimmer (Paupier) boat - a new gear being developed by Columbia FWCO. Credit:USFWS

River and its tributaries.

Columbia FWCO has long been committed to servicing the fisheries needs of Federal Lands including the Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuges and U.S. Army military bases. We also work with the Army Corps of Engineers to assess habitat creation projects on the Missouri River. Perhaps the most rewarding aspects of our work comes through numerous outreach events designed to reach out to the public and children to introduce them to conservation and appreciate the fish we work so hard to protect.



Columbia FWCO Fish Biologist  
Clayton Ridenour on a chilly Chicago  
morning of Asian carp sampling.  
Credit: USFWS

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Fisheries, Midwest Region

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# Fish Tails

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.

### **USFWS Deputy Director Dr. Rowan Gould Visits Midwest Fish Technology Center**

*BY NICHOLAS BERNDT, WHITNEY GENETICS LAB*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Midwest Fish Technology Center was excited to host Deputy Director of Operations, Dr. Rowan Gould for a brief visit and tour of the facilities including the new Whitney Genetics Lab (WGL). After introductions, Dr. Gould gave guidance from headquarters on a number of subjects and was happy to answer any questions from employees. This was a great opportunity because it's not every day we get a visit from the Deputy Director. Dr. Gould was eager to see the new facilities, and with eDNA sampling season under way, WGL employees demonstrated every step in the eDNA sample processing line. WGL staff felt a great sense of accomplishment showing Dr. Gould our top notch facility. We have gone from an empty building to a fully operational lab capable of processing thousands of samples in a little over a year and we're looking forward to another great sampling season!

### **Pallid Sturgeon Monitoring – the 2014 Edition**

*BY COLBY WRASSE, COLUMBIA FWCO*

Long term monitoring of Missouri River fish populations remains an important component of Pallid Sturgeon recovery efforts. We at Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) monitor the lower 250 miles of the Missouri River as part of the larger basin wide Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment Project. We deploy a suite of gears designed to catch Pallid Sturgeon of all sizes, as well as other species of the fish community. Unusually persistent ice on the Lower Missouri River prevented sampling during much of this past winter - which made for an extra busy spring. By the end of May, we had completed our standard gill net and trotline efforts for the 2014 season. This year was notable for the relatively high gill net catches of Pallid Sturgeon and the overall strong representation of the 2011 Pallid Sturgeon hatchery year class. Once again, Shovelnose Sturgeon was the most common species collected in both gill nets and trotlines, and Blue Sucker catches appeared to be promising. This year represents the 12th year Columbia FWCO has fully implemented the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment Project.



U.S. Fish &amp; Wildlife Service

# Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

## Midwest Region Fisheries Divisions

### National Fish Hatcheries

The Region's National Fish Hatcheries (NFH) focus on native species recovery and restoration. Primary species include: lake trout, endangered pallid sturgeon, and endangered, threatened, and native mussels. Other major programs include coaster brook trout and lake sturgeon restoration, fulfilling tribal trust responsibilities for native aquatic species, and cost reimbursed rainbow trout production for recreational fishing. Hatcheries also provide technical assistance to other agencies, provide fish and eggs for research, and develop and maintain brood stocks of various species and strains.

### Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices (FWCO) conduct assessments of fish populations to guide management decisions, play a key role in targeting and implementing native fish and habitat restoration programs; perform key monitoring and control activities related to aquatic invasive species; survey and evaluate aquatic habitats to identify restoration/rehabilitation opportunities; work with private land owners, states, local governments and watershed organizations to complete aquatic habitat restoration projects under the Service's National Fish Passage Program, National Fish Habitat Partnerships, 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. The Whitney Genetics Lab serves as a leading edge genetics laboratory and conducts environmental DNA (eDNA) sample processing for early detection of invasive species.



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

### Midwest Region Fisheries Contacts

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#### Cartersville Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office

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#### Columbia Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office

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#### Genoa National Fish Hatchery

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#### Iron River National Fish Hatchery

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#### Jordan River National Fish Hatchery

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#### LaCrosse Fish Health Center

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#### LaCrosse Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office

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#### Ludington Biological Station

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#### Marquette Biological Station

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#### Neosho National Fish Hatchery

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Neosho, MO 64850  
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#### Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery

National Fish Hatchery  
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Brimley, MI 49715  
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#### Sullivan Creek National Fish Hatchery

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