U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Midwest Region

Fisheries Program

Fish Lines

Isle Royale Lake Trout Research Project

FWCO's Team Up!

2014 Lake Trout Tagging Complete

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The Next Generation of Lake Erie Lake Sturgeon

Conserving America's Fisheries
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Nov 12, 2014

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Isle Royale Lake Trout Research Project

Dr. Matthew Kornis, a fish biologist and data analyst from the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office...**Read More**

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: November 12, 2014

Green Bay FWCO Fish Biologist Assists in Completion of Isle Royale Lake Trout Research Project

BY MATTHEW KORNIS, GREEN BAY FWCO

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish Biologist and Data Analyst Dr. Matthew Kornis hoists a siscowet lake trout captured for research on morphological diversity. Credit:
Andy Jasonowicz, NOAA

Dr. Matthew Kornis, a fish biologist and data analyst from the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO), spent the weeks of August 11th and September 22nd assisting a team of Great Lakes scientists studying lake trout morphotypes in Lake Superior near Isle Royale National Park. The cooperative study, which was coauthored by Charles Bronte from the Green Bay FWCO and funded by a competitive grant from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, included researchers from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Northwest Fisheries Science Center, the Ashland FWCO, the National Park Service, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Over the past two years, this research team sampled lake trout during spring, summer and fall using gill nets deployed from the Michigan DNR's R/V Lake Char. Lake trout are among the world's most morphologically diverse fish species, meaning that physical characteristics of lake trout (e.g., body shape, head shape, pigmentation) are highly variable and can reflect different genetic backgrounds and/or environmental conditions. In Lake Superior, there are four principal morphotypes of lake trout: leans (low fat content, found in relatively shallow water), siscowets (high fat content, found in very deep water), humpers (slow-growing fish associated with underwater reefs) and redfins (fish with elongated fins often found at moderate depth).

One objective of this study was to further document differences in morphometric measurements and compare genetic relatedness, muscle lipid levels, gonadosomatic index (GSI) and length-at-age among the four morphotypes. The various lake trout morphotypes also reproduce at different times of year in Lake Superior and especially near Isle Royale. Thus, another objective of the study was to characterize spatial and temporal isolation in the reproduction of each morphotype by examining eggs from mature females to evaluate fecundity, and by collecting and fixing cross-sections of gonads so that histological examination could determine the developmental stage of male and female gametes. By characterizing morphological diversity and reproductive life histories in Lake Superior lake trout, this study will provide additional insight into alternative options for restoring lake trout in the lower Great Lakes, which lost this diversity due to lake trout population crashes caused by sea lamprey predation and overfishing.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fish Biologist Mike Seider prepares a siscowet lake trout for a digital photograph. The red light down the center of the fish helps line up the head, body, tail and fins for morphometric measurements. Credit: Matt Kornis, USFWS

Dr. Kornis also helped the scientists with a pilot study that placed archival satellite tags on several large lake trout of different morphotypes during the week of August 11th. The tags, which are engineered to release from the fish at a predetermined date, were recovered the week of September 22nd. Over this six week time period, each tag collected continuous data on the depth, location and temperature experienced by the tagged trout. Although the field component of the original two year study is complete, pilot studies such as this could motivate additional lake trout research projects in the future.

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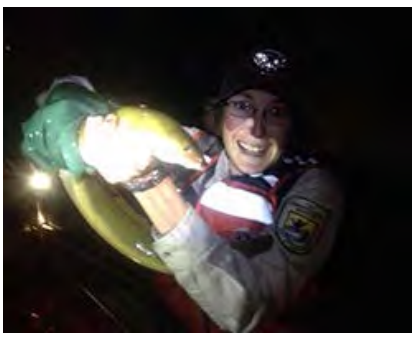
Fish and Wildlife Conservation Offices Team Up!

BY ERIC STADIG, ALPENA FWCO WATERFORD MI SUB-STATION

Fish Biologists from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) teamed up with members of the Lower Great Lakes FWCO in upstate New York as part of a collaborative effort to monitor for non-native aquatic species (NNAS). This monitoring is for a large-scale Great Lakes collaboration for the early detection monitoring program of NNAS across multiple USFWS field offices and regions.

This specific sampling event sampling took place within the Niagara River, a connecting waterway between the Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. From a USFWS perspective, Lake Erie falls between two regional jurisdictions and fisheries offices. The lake is shared by USFWS regions, Region 3 Alpena FWCO and Region 5 Lower Great Lakes FWCO. Alpena FWCO coverage includes the states of Michigan and Ohio, where as the Lower Great Lakes office covers Pennsylvania and New York. The two offices were able to share the workload on Lake Erie system sites, helping each office complete yearly monitoring goals.

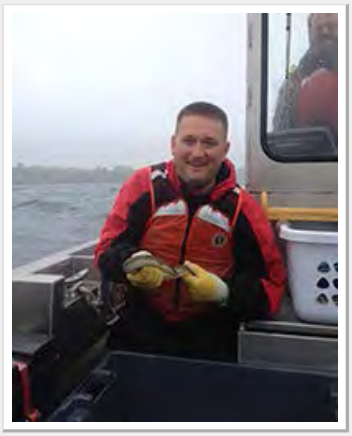
After a long field season, fish biologists from the Alpena FWCO-Waterford Substation, are happy to pull in their last paired-fyke net of the 2014 early detection monitoring program. Credit: Eric Stadig, USFWS



Native species, such as American eels, were captured during both nighttime and daytime surveys from the lower Niagara River (Lake Erie-Lake Ontario Corridor). This one was captured during a nighttime electrofishing sample. Credit: Eric Stadig, USFWS

The two offices worked together to prioritize sampling for the Lake Erie system, which included the use of multiple crews, vessels and sampling types/gears (i.e. environmental DNA, ichthyoplankton, benthos, paired-fyke netting, daytime/nighttime electrofishing and bottom trawling) to maximize the likelihood of detecting a new non-native species.

The biologists were impressed by the diversity of the Niagara River system, catching 44 fishes ranging from native species, such as banded killifish, American eels, and smallmouth bass to already established non-native fishes such as rainbow smelt, round goby, and Eurasian rudd. Field crews were happy to report that no new non-native species were discovered.

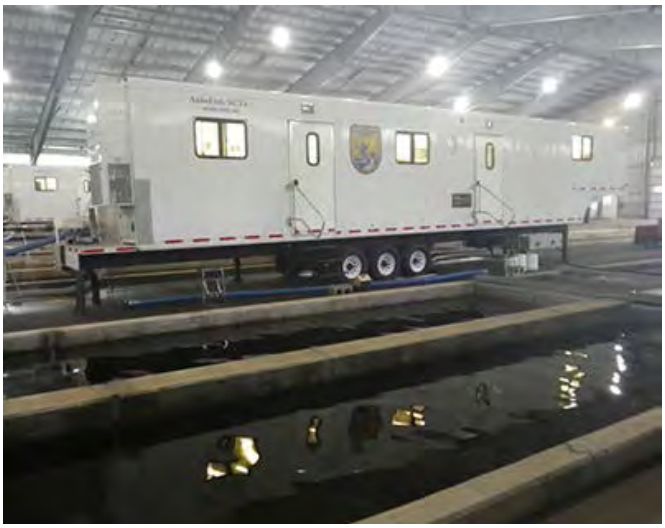


Native species, such as American eels, were captured during both nighttime and daytime surveys from the lower Niagara River (Lake Erie-Lake Ontario Corridor). This one was captured during a paired fyke net sample. Credit: S. Hensler, USFWS

These efforts highlight the value of intra-agency cooperation, improving short-term sampling capability as well as crew safety. The Great Lakes are vast, consisting of 21% of the surface freshwater found on the planet. Searching such a large area for new, non-native species requires collaboration among regional field offices to ease burdens such as staff constraints, project time availability, and limited availability of sampling gears. With continued cooperation, we strive to effectively monitor the Great Lakes to help protect and support the $7 billion commercial and sport fishing industries and help maintain the integrity of the ecosystem as a whole.

Great Lakes Fish Tag and Recovery Lab Completes 2014 Lake Trout Tagging

BY KEVIN MANN GREEN BAY FWCO



Automated fish tagging trailers setup at Jordan River National Fish Hatchery. During the 2014 lake trout tagging season, on average, each trailer tagged nearly 65,000 lake trout a day. Credit: Allen Lane, USFWS

Each year, about ten million lake trout are released into the Great Lakes in an effort to restore this native species while increasing angling opportunities. In U.S. waters this effort is led by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In 2005, the Council of Lake Committees (CLC) of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission agreed to establish a program to tag and/or mark all trout and salmon stocked into the lakes. For lake trout, this program will allow biologists to determine which strains survive the best and contribute the most to lake trout populations; evaluate the movement and survival of stocked fish; and estimate the amount of natural reproduction.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Lakes Fish Tag and Recovery Lab, based at the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO), coordinates the program and operates four automated trailers to mark and tag every lake trout released into all the Great Lakes in the U.S.

Service employee Tom Myers loads lake trout into the sorter. Lake trout are measured to the nearest tenth of a millimeter using optics and computer software before being directed to the correct tagging line based on the size. Each of the six tagging lines is setup to process fish between a specific range of lengths. Credit: Kevin Mann,USFWS

The 6 tagging lines (background) in each trailer processed approximately 90% o the 6.4 million lake trout tagged this year while hand taggers (foreground) processed those fish rejected or missed by the tagging lines. Credit: Allen Lane, USFWS

These automated tagging trailers are able to process large numbers of fish quickly and accurately (~8000 fish/hour) while minimizing mortality. Each fish has its adipose fin removed (the mark) to give anglers and biologists a visual cue to identify those fish that have had a tiny coded wire tag (CWT; the tag) injected into their snout. Each 1 millimeter long CWT has a code etched into it that references the fish's year class, hatchery of origin, strain, and release location. As fish grow and are caught by sport and commercial fishers or sampled in assessment fisheries, snouts containing tags are collected by biologists and anglers and returned to the Fish Tag and Recovery Lab in Green Bay, Wisconsin where the tags are extracted and read.

Each fall the Great Lakes Fish Tag and Recovery Lab sends an experienced team of trailer operators around the Great Lakes basin to tag lake trout reared at four federal hatcheries and one state hatchery as part of the basin wide program. More than 28.5 million lake trout have been tagged and marked since the program's inception in 2010 and with each tagging season speed and tagging efficiency improves. This year the team traveled to five hatcheries in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, and tagged over 6.4 million lake trout at a rate of 8,300 fish per hour between mid- July and the first of October, and was the largest number of lake trout tagged in one year. Recoveries of tagged fish over the next several years will lead to decisions on strains of fish to be stocked in the future, as well as the effects of fishing on fish stocked in and out of protective refuges.

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Our Fishing Events provide Free!...Family!...Fun!

BY TIM SMIGIELSKI MIDWEST REGION FISHERIES PROGRAM

So...if a "picture is worth a thousand words" then these pictures...are worth a lot more...
Enjoy!

Baiting hooks and untangling lines is just part of the fun at Neosho NFH fishing events. Credit: Bruce Hallman, USFWS

Enjoying the free, family fun at a Jordan River NFH fishing event. Credit USFWS

Volunteer fishing mentor entertains this lucky angler at Genoa NFH fishing event.Credit: USFWS

It takes four hands to hold a fish that big! Credit: USFWS

Making new friends through fishing and fun. Credit: Brigid O 'Donaghue, USSA

Alpena FWCO Waterford Substation staff help this youngster celebrate his "Big Fish" trophy during the 2014 Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival. Credit: Detroit River Front Conservancy

Keeping Tabs on the Next Generation of Lake Erie Lake Sturgeon

BY ANDREW BRIGGS, ALPENA FWCO-WATERFORD MI SUBSTATION

Looking a lake sturgeon right in the eye. Credit: James Boase, USFWS

Lake sturgeon are a long lived fish species that can reach enormous lengths. They have been found to live over 100 years and reach lengths greater than seven feet. However, lake sturgeon are an endangered or threatened species in much of their range, including the Great Lakes. In Lake Erie, they are thought to be extirpated from much of their historic habitats and spawning areas. Remaining spawning populations are known to exist in the Detroit and Niagara Rivers and numerous lake sturgeon sightings have been made throughout Lake Erie.

In order to learn more about the remaining lake sturgeon populations in Lake Erie, a Juvenile Lake Sturgeon Index Survey for Lake Erie is being implemented. This survey is part of the binational Coordinated Science Monitoring Initiative where federal, state, and provincial agencies collaborate to conduct a lake-wide lake sturgeon assessment. Similar to the lake-wide juvenile lake sturgeon assessment conducted in Lake Superior, the objectives of this survey are to describe the current status of juvenile lake sturgeon in Lake Erie, create a means of estimating recruitment, year class strength, and population trends over time, and to describe and compare the biological characteristics of juveniles within and among locations throughout Lake Erie and over time. To meet these objectives, personnel from several U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) offices, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, New York State Department of Environment and Conservation, and Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission set gill nets targeting juvenile lake sturgeon at the mouths of thirteen known historic lake sturgeon spawning tributaries.

Fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford, Michigan Substation conducted assessments near the Sandusky and Maumee Rivers in Ohio, and near the mouth of the Detroit River in Michigan and Ontario waters. Gill nets with varying mesh sizes were used to target juvenile lake sturgeon. In addition to gill nets, water quality and substrate information was collected at each net location. No lake sturgeon were captured near the Sandusky, Maumee, and Detroit Rivers this fall; however, seven were captured during the summer of 2013 at the mouth of the Detroit River using the same technique. Species commonly caught included channel catfish, common carp, freshwater drum, gizzard shad, and walleye.

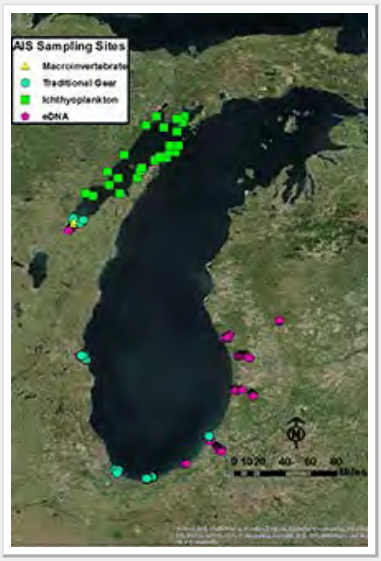
USFWS fish biologists Andrew Briggs and Margaret Hutton with some cooperative juvenile lake sturgeon. Credit: Justin Chiotti, USFWS

Juvenile lake sturgeon captured during fisheries assessments in the St. Clair-Detroit River System. Credit: Justin Chiotti, USFWS

Although few lake sturgeon have been captured during these assessments, they are important for comparing future catches as lake sturgeon restoration efforts continue in Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes. Hopefully as restoration efforts continue, lake sturgeon catch rates will increase. Additionally, these assessments offer the opportunity for the Service to build and maintain partnerships; collaborating with partners to conduct a lake-wide assessment of juvenile lake sturgeon would not be achieved without the dedication of multiple agencies.

Green Bay FWCO's Hunt for the Proverbial Needle:
Early Detection Surveillance Program for Aquatic Invasive Species

BY TIMOTHY STRAKOSH, GREEN BAY FWCO



Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office sampling locations around Lake Michigan for the AIS program in 2014. Credit: USFWS, Green Bay FWCO

The Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) completed another field season of the multifaceted aquatic invasive species (AIS) early detection program. Activities involved close collaboration with a variety of local, state, federal, and non-profit partners. Efforts in 2014 included ichthyoplankton sampling, environmental DNA collection (eDNA) for Asian carp, participating in state lead mock rapid assessments, and traditional sampling for fishes and macroinvertebrates.

The start of the ichthyoplankton field season in Green Bay was delayed by icebergs that conjured images of the Arctic Circle. Larval fish sampling finally began in May and continued to August collecting every two weeks. The ichthyoplankton program is part of a collaboration comparing traditional taxonomic methods with next generation genetic sequencing for detecting new AIS. The Green Bay FWCO is funding a Master's project at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay and working with Ashland and Alpena FWCOs, US Environmental Protection Agency, and US Geological Survey (USGS). A total of 118 bongo net tows and 118 light trap samples were collected around Green Bay in 2014.

Ken King (USFWS) prepares to filter and eDNA sample from the Kalamazoo River. Credit: USFWS

The eDNA program started the year off with Green Bay FWCO participating in a comparison study of eDNA collection methods. The study compared the current method of two liter bottles versus five 50 milliliter tubes. The two techniques were taken together in areas of different Asian carp densities in the Illinois River and processed on site using the Green Bay and Alpena eDNA mobile labs. The samples were sent to the Service's Whitney Genetics Lab, the USGS, and the US Army Corp of Engineers for testing.

Tony Rieth (USFWS) deploys a minnow trap array on lower Green Bay as part of

The Lake Michigan eDNA surveillance program searched for silver and bighead carp DNA in eight tributaries collecting a total of 1,750 samples. The Green Bay FWCO, led by the Regional Office, worked closely with state partners to identify high priority locations for sampling. Positive detections for silver carp eDNA were found in the Kalamazoo (1 out of 400 samples) and the Fox (1 out of 200) rivers. The detections prompted an additional 200 samples to be collected from each of the tributaries for a total of 2,150 eDNA samples collected for 2014.

Traditional gear sampling for the early detection and monitoring of invasive fishes in 2014 deployed seven different gear types in four locations for a total of 223 units of effort. Areas that were targeted for sampling included Green Bay, Milwaukee, Burns, and Calumet harbors. Additionally, 38 Ekman dredges were collected from Green Bay for macroinvertebrates. A grass carp was collected in Burns Harbor this year and is of interest to multiple agencies. The eyes were sent to the Whitney

the traditional gear monitoring program for AIS. Credit: USFWS

The USGS was provided the rest of the fish for additional testing.

Another facet of AIS programs is the support of state partners and their efforts to respond to potential new invasions. In 2014, the Green Bay FWCO was invited to participate in two mock response events in the Great Lakes. The first was a Eurasian ruffe response in Calumet Harbor lead by the states of Illinois and Indiana, and the second was an Asian carp response in the western basin of Lake Erie lead by the states of Michigan and Ohio. The main purpose of the events was to practice coordinating multiple agencies just in case a new AIS is found.

Genetics Lab to test if the carp was sterile, which it was, indicating the fish escaped from a stocking.

Matt Petasek (USFWS) holds a grass carp captured in Burns Harbor during a nighttime boat electofishing run. Credit: USFWS

Last updated: November 12, 2014

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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.

Iron River NFH Staff "Roll On" To Make It Easier On the Fish

BY NICK STARZL, IRON RIVER NFH

Maintenance at a National Fish Hatchery is a never ending issue which managers throughout the nation must assess. Some projects are too large, or dangerous for hatchery crews to tackle. Others can simply be too costly and would take many years to find their way into station budgets, like the recent raceway floor rehab project in the Iron River National Fish Hatchery's (NFH) nursery building. The twenty two 45 foot x 3 foot concrete tanks in the nursery building are original to the hatchery. The tanks are coated with black epoxy paint on the inside for several reasons. It keeps the tanks from eroding over the many years of water flowing through them, and it helps keep fish waste products from adhering to the walls and floor. Throughout most of the year, each tank is brushed daily in order to keep the culture environment clean for the fish. Eventually over 30 years of use, the floors of the tanks needed a fresh coat of epoxy to maintain their use. It is estimated that if the job were to be hired out it would consume half of the stations annual maintenance budget of $85,000 to be completed. So in October of 2014, the hatchery staff decided to "roll on" and get the job done themselves. By purchasing the supplies and doing the job in house, it only cost the station around $4,000. Many thanks go out to the crew of the Iron River Fish Hatchery for doing what needs to done, even during busy times of the year with limited help.

Testing the Waters at Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery

BY STEVEN GAMBICKI, ALPENA FWCO

Pendills Lake, located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, provides a backup water supply for the Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery located near Brimley, Michigan. The hatchery raises over one million lake trout each year for stocking in the Great Lakes. Water that is free of bacterial and viral pathogens is crucial for the health of fish at the hatchery. Each year staff from the La Crosse Fish Health Center in Wisconsin leads efforts to assess the bacterial and viral status of wild fish captured from Pendills Lake.

Late this summer, Steven Gambicki from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) in Michigan provided assistance to Ryan Katona and Beka McCann from the La Crosse Fish Health Center with fish sampling efforts on Pendills Lake. Pumpkinseed sunfish, yellow perch, brown bullhead and rock bass were targeted as representative species of the fish community. Trap nets were used to capture the fish, and after the fish were collected they were assessed for bacterial and viral pathogens.

Bacterial pathogens were assessed by collecting a swab from the kidney of each fish and applying it to a media to look for bacterial growth. If bacteria are found, they are isolated into a single colony and run through a series of biochemical tests to see if any certifiable bacterial pathogens are detected. Polymerase chain reaction, or PCR, is then used to verify the results. Viral pathogens were assessed by placing a sample from the kidney and spleen of each fish into a saline solution, which was further analyzed at the La Crosse Fish Health Center. These samples will be diluted and placed on appropriate fish cells to see if any viruses are detected. Any positive results will be confirmed with PCR. Results from bacterial and viral pathogen testing generally take between 28 and 42 days, and can depend on how toxic the samples are, or if there are any pathogens present.

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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.

Whitney Genetics Lab

The Whitney Genetics lab provides environmental DNA (eDNA) surveillance for the early detection of invasive Silver and Bighead carp as part of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee's plans to detect, monitor, and respond to the threat of invasive carp in the Great Lakes. The lab also provides analysis for determining the ploidy of wild-caught Black and Grass carp, two more invasive carp species.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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