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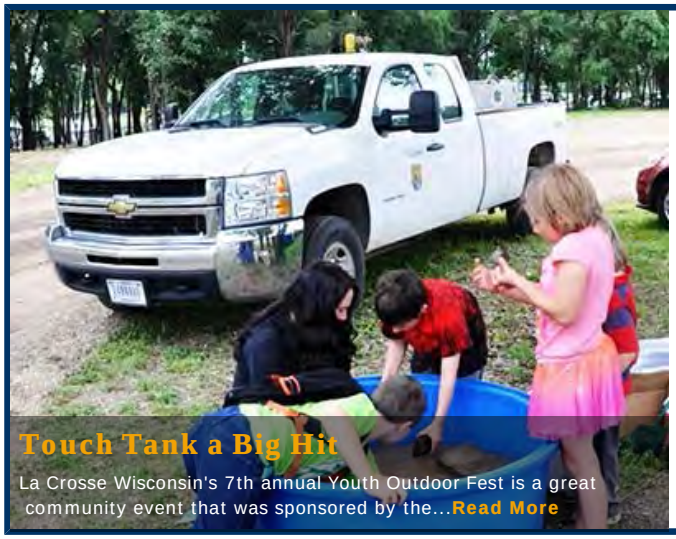

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Fish Tails

"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.

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Genoa National Fish Hatchery

Touch Tank a Big Hit at La Crosse's Youth Outdoor Fest

BY DOUG ALOISI, GENOA NFH

Hatchery volunteer Liz Hackner assists children diving into the touch tank at Youth Outdoor Fest. Credit: USFWS

La Crosse Wisconsin's 7th annual Youth Outdoor Fest is a great community event that was sponsored by the La Crosse Park and Rec department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Friends of the Upper Miss. Over 2000 kids and their parents showed up for this year's event on July 11th, 2015. Many outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, canoeing, kayaking, archery, hatchet throwing, bird-watching, an electrofishing demonstration, fish dissections, fly fishing, fur identification, geocaching, Genoa's touch tank, pontoon rides and storytelling were all on display. Many local vendors and conservation agencies also had booths at the event. One of the stars of Genoa National Fish Hatchery's touch tank was a young of the year map turtle found on the hatchery grounds. Other inhabitants of the tank were a red-eared slider turtle, lake sturgeon, minnows and several species of freshwater mussels. The touch tank gave the children an opportunity to root through the bottom substrate, just like kids from all generations have to catch fishing bait, explore for mussels, and generally just have an all- around good time. In fact one little girl fell in love with our map turtle, and ended up camping out at our booth for the entire length of the event. The hatchery booth also included fish on a stick to help with fish identification and an aquarium with cold and coolwater species of fish. Many of the children came back for seconds on the touch tank, and the lake sturgeon was also a big star of the tank. This ancient fish amazed the kids with its camouflage and sharp scutes to protect itself against predators. Events such as Youth Outdoor Fest give children a fun day of activities in hope to pique their interest in the outdoors, and desire to protect it for future generations.

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Sixth Season of Mass Marking Lake Trout Begins

BY KEVIN PANKOW, GREEN BAY FWCO

Lake trout in the staging area of a tagging line in the automated tagging system. Credit: Kevin Pankow, USFWS

Beginning in July 2015 with an expected finish in early October, lab staff will tag and fin clip more than six million lake trout at six hatcheries throughout the Great Lakes basin. The team will begin tagging at Michigan Department of Natural Resources Marquette State Fish Hatchery and then move operations to three Service hatcheries including Pendills Creek National Fish Hatchery (NFH) in Brimley, Michigan, Jordan River NFH in Elmira, Michigan, and Iron River NFH in Iron River, Wisconsin. Those four hatcheries rear all the lake trout stocked into lakes Michigan and Huron. For lake trout that are stocked into lakes Erie and Ontario the team will again be tagging at the Service's Allegheny NFH in Warren, Pennsylvania and for the first time this year, at the Dwight D. Eisenhower NFH in North Chittenden, Vermont.

The lab operates four automated tagging systems contained in 44-foot mobile trailers that inject coded-wire-tags (CWT) and remove the adipose fin of hatchery reared fish. The CWT is a 1-mm long piece of stainless steel wire etched with a six-digit code that is unique to batches of fish, referring to its year class, strain, stocking location and hatchery origin. The information gained from CWT returns provides the Service and its partners the ability to estimate levels of natural reproduction, identify fish movement within and among the lakes, and assess the resultant contributions to regional fisheries. Biological data collected will also help to evaluate the health of the populations by providing growth rates and age composition of the fish at time of capture. In addition, the tag recoveries allow managers to determine post-release survival of various strains, hatcheries, and stocking locations providing the ability to evaluate the performance of hatchery rearing and stocking practices.

Since the program's inception in 2010, nearly 48 million fish stocked into the Great Lakes have been mass marked by the Lab. The program is currently funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

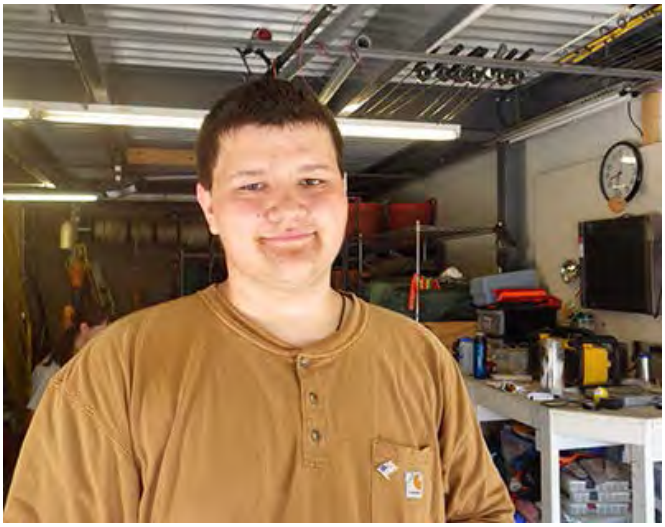
Hatchery	Affiliation	No. of Lake Trout
Marquette	Michgian Dept. of Natural Resources	200,000
Pendills Creek	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service- Region 3	1,111,000
Allegheny	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service- Region 5	1,080,000
Jordan River	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service- Region 3	2,340,000
Dwight D. Eishenhower	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service- Region 5	200,000
Iron River	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service- Region 3	1,310,000
	TOTAL No. of Lake Trout	**6,241,000**

Number of Lake trout to be mass marked in 2015. Credit: Kevin Pankow, USFWS

Learning Life Skills at the Columbia FWCO

BY AMBER MASTERS, COLUMBIA, FWCO

Once again, the Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) is providing a summer job to local youth through the Columbia Parks and Recreation's Career Awareness and Related Experience (CARE) Program. The CARE program provides work experiences to at-risk youth by partnering with local business to create job opportunities for high school students. Many of the interns have never had a job and would have had a difficult time securing employment without any work experience. CARE's mission is to provide job opportunities, guidance, and assistance during employment and ensure that the interns are getting the most out of their experiences.



CARE intern Austin Freitag takes a break from his endless net-mending work at the Columbia FWCO. Credit: Amber Masters, Columbia FWCO

This summer, Austin Freitag joins our fisheries crew. Austin is 17 and will be a senior in high school this fall. He has had experience working for his stepdad's landscaping business, but is proud to have his first "real" job. Austin is particularly excited to be a part of the Columbia FWCO because he plans to pursue a career in biology or natural resources management. In working with the USFWS, Austin gains great career experience, learns basic job skills and responsibilities, as well as being able to talk to biologists about his future and how to accomplish his goals.

Austin started working for us at the end of June. At first, he was very nervous and uncomfortable; now, however, his confidence around his supervisors and coworkers has grown. Austin is eager to do even the most mundane tasks with great care and attention to quality. His ability to be self-motivated is more like that of an experienced worker than a teenager with his first job. He requires no supervision and very little direction. When the rest of us are hot, tired and grumpy, his attitude is one of incredible cheer and gratitude. It is clear that in his short time here, Austin has grown and learned valuable work and life skills that he would not have received anywhere else. He has finished much of the necessary net-mending and shop work in record time. In fact, it has been a challenge to constantly find new jobs for him because he completes his work so quickly.

In July, Austin was able to help out with a Nature Camp event hosted by the Columbia FWCO where he helped kids ages 4-9 during a cave tour and stream bed exploration. Austin was often more enthusiastic, inquisitive and excited than the kids were. He asked many questions to the biologists leading the cave tour. Once in the stream, Austin eagerly taught the kids how to catch crayfish and look for stream invertebrates under rocks. It was a treat to have Austin showing the group that even the big kids still get excited about the critters outside.

Over all, the Columbia's involvement with the CARE program has been a successful experience. In addition to Austin joining us as a CARE intern this year, two of our former interns have come aboard as contract employees for the summer. Andrew Murphy (CARE 2006) and Molly Vornholt (CARE 2014) are the newest members of our Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment and Monitoring Program. The CARE Program gives the Columbia FWCO a unique opportunity to inspire youth by allowing them to directly experience natural resources work. We hope that his time here has many positive impacts on Austin's future and inspires him to pursue his interest in biology, continue learning about the Missouri River ecosystems and challenges and share his knowledge with his friends and family.

Genoa National Fish Hatchery
Lake Sturgeon Research Continues

BY OREY ECKES, GENOA NFH

Staff members recording lengths and weights of lake sturgeon. Credit: USFWS

Following publication of an “Egg and Larval Development Index for Lake Sturgeon” the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) staff has initiated a new research project researching growth rates of juvenile lake sturgeon at different water temperatures. We will be determining an optimal temperature range for growth of juvenile lake sturgeon. To evaluate the relationship between temperature and growth rate, juvenile lake sturgeon from the Wolf River will be incubated at four constant water temperatures (12, 17, 22, and 27 Celsius) in years 2015 and 2016. Experimental design will consist of four temperature treatments with 3 replicates at each test temperature for a total of 12 experimental units. Lake sturgeon will be fed to satiation a diet of bloodworms (Chironomid larvae) and feed required per day will be weighed and recorded. Three sample counts per tank (fish per pound) will be taken bi-weekly to determine growth rate at each temperature and feed rates will be adjusted accordingly throughout the study. The results of this study will be submitted for peer review.

This study is particularly important to the Genoa NFH since we have the ability to control larval rearing water temperatures in our culture buildings. Identifying the optimal temperature for growth will allow hatchery staff to grow large healthy fish for stocking in the fall while also minimizing feed costs. In addition, information gained from this study would be beneficial for off sight sturgeon rearing trailers. Linear growth models are the mainstay of scientifically based production and restoration programs for many species of fish such as Atlantic and Pacific salmon. Benefits to lake sturgeon restoration programs will also include ability to model culture programs through anticipated temperature regimes, estimate costs and quantities of feed for restoration programs, as well as increase survival rates in lake sturgeon stream-side rearing facilities by placing units at locations that will maximize survival and health of lake sturgeon fingerlings in the trailers. A side benefit of this study will be to determine optimal feed rates for lake sturgeon at varying water temperatures. This study will also allow production models to be formulated for specific watersheds and culture facilities to estimate size at stocking, the number and size of culture units to have for each desired stocking number at release size, and allow culturists and managers to plan their programs to achieve restoration goals.

Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

Experts Share Their Love of Fish with Missouri Master Naturalists

BY AMBER MASTERS, COLUMBIA FWCO

A Chestnut Lamprey, one of the lesser-known Missouri fishes about which the Master Naturalists learned during training with the Columbia FWCO experts. Credit: Cal Yonce, USFWS

The Missouri Master Naturalist Program is a partnership of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and the University of Missouri Extension. It is a community based natural resource education and volunteer program. Its purpose is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. The Naturalists undergo hours of training from natural resource professionals, biologists and professors in subjects ranging from native plants and birds to the Missouri River. When the Boone's Lick Chapter needed to be trained on the fish community in Missouri, the Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) had the experts for the job. Fish biologist, Colby Wrasse and fisheries technician, Amber Masters spent a morning giving talks on Missouri's diverse fish community and the plight of the endangered Pallid Sturgeon.

Prior to the fish talk, Dr. David Galat from the University of Missouri gave an impressive and detailed talk on the Missouri River's ecosystems. The crowd learned about the history of the Missouri River and how drastically the system has changed due to human development. Dr. Galat also discussed some of the issues threatening the Missouri River and some of the species that live there.

It was a tough act to follow; fortunately Missouri is home to some unique and interesting fish species. Field technician, Amber had only been working in Columbia for a year and gave her first talk as a "fish expert". Even though she was still learning about the fishes herself, she was able to entertain and educate the group with stories about the life histories of some of the most common and popular species like blue catfish and bluegill; show them pictures of the seldom seen but very unique beauties like the Ozark Darter; and surprise them with little-known facts about simply weird creatures such as American eel, lamprey and cavefish. The Naturalists were interested and engaged, asking intelligent and thoughtful questions.

Biologist, Colby Wrasse followed with a talk on the three sturgeons found in Missouri- shovelnose sturgeon, lake sturgeon and pallid sturgeon. He delivered a more somber discussion on the predicament of the state endangered Lake Sturgeon and the federally listed pallid sturgeon. Being a part of recovery efforts as a part of the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment and Monitoring Program for many years, Colby was able to provide in depth information on the current status, reasons for decline, and the programs in place to restore populations of the prehistoric pallid surgeon.

After the talks, the group was shown preserved specimens from the Columbia FWCO's reference collection. These included Chestnut Lamprey, Silver Carp, Yellow Bullhead, and potential future invaders- round gobies and northern snakeheads. They were also able to see and handle a live shovelnose sturgeon that was captured during sampling efforts the previous day. Of course, the live fish was a huge success and the naturalists were grateful for the experience. Both Colby and Amber received many positive comments on the training. The Columbia FWCO hopes to continue working with great programs like Missouri Master Naturalist chapters to share our knowledge and love of Missouri's wonderful fishes.

Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office Update

BY TED TRESKA, GREEN BAY FWCO

Mass Marking employee Kevin Mann at work in one of the 4 automated trailers used to coded wire tag fish stocked into the Great Lakes. Credit: USFWS

Nestled along the Niagara Escarpment overlooking the waters of Green Bay, the Green Bay Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) is a bustling hub of activity this time of year. With fish tagging trailers rolling out to hatcheries around the Great Lakes, AIS Invasive Species trucks and boats coming and going with samples, and field crews from the native fish restoration program preparing nets and boats for late summer sampling, it seems that there is always traffic in the parking lot, as well as across the Lake Michigan basin and beyond.

Native Species Restoration

Lake Trout

The lake trout program is involved with a number of ongoing projects, both in Lake Michigan and other Great Lakes focused on native species such as lake trout, lake whitefish, and bloater. In addition to the annual surveys monitoring lake trout and whitefish populations as part of a lakewide effort on Lake Michigan, the office plays an integral part in an effort to restore bloaters to Lake Ontario, plying the icy waters of Lake Michigan in January and February to collect the eggs that are then raised up to be stocked into Lake Ontario to bring back a native forage species to the ecosystem. This past winter's collection effort yielded a record 1.3 million bloater eggs, surpassing the annual goal of 1.1 million and providing enough fish for comprehensive rearing studies in the two hatcheries that receive the eggs.

This summer, the program participated in a coordinated effort to measure the varying levels of lake whitefish recruitment around the lake, sampling up to 5000 young-of-the-year in a single beach seine haul from some locations. In the coming months, staff will perform hydroacoustic surveys paired with mid-water trawling aboard the *M/V Spencer Baird* to assist in producing lakewide estimates of preyfish abundances, recently incorporating transects in Green Bay proper into the sites sampled. The program also continues to work with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and the Sea Lamprey Control Program to provide metrics used to measure the impact that sea lamprey predation is having on fish communities across the Great Lakes.

Lake Trout Program staff finish a beach seine haul while surveying for young-of-year lake whitefish. Credit: USFWS

Lake Sturgeon

The lake sturgeon program stays busy with numerous projects each year and has actively partnered with federal, state, tribal and non-profit partners in the common goal of Lake Michigan lake sturgeon rehabilitation. Lake sturgeon passage around the Menominee and Park Mills dams on the Menominee River, bordering Michigan and Wisconsin, has been a large undertaking over many years. This spring, for the first time in over 100 years, adult lake sturgeon were passed around these first two dams. The passage facilities include a fish lift and three large sorting and holding tanks that allows biologists to actively select those fish to pass while denying invasive species, including sea lamprey, access above the dam. Once passed, lake sturgeon have access to an additional 24 miles of previously unreachable habitat. These fish then are able to pass back downstream through bypass channels around each dam to safely return to Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

For the fifth consecutive year, the Green Bay FWCO has helped advance lake sturgeon rehabilitation on the Kalamazoo River, Michigan as a partner in the daily operation of the streamside rearing facility located on that river. Sturgeon eggs and larvae are collected from the river and from wild Kalamazoo River

Results of seine catch from young-of-year lake whitefish survey, yielding astounding numbers. Credit: USFWS

spawners each spring and reared within the portable streamside facility. These gametes are reared in their birth waters so that they can imprint to the river and ultimately return to the Kalamazoo once they are mature enough to spawn. Fish in the facility are protected from predation and disease while being fed for approximately five months and grow to 6-10 inches before being released back into the river. Before their release, each fish is given a unique PIT tag to identify its origin and release from this streamside rearing facility so that it can be identified throughout it's life.

Mass Marking

The Great Lakes Fish Tag and Recovery Laboratory, stationed at Green Bay FWCO, has been hard at work both tagging fish and collecting data from captured tagged fish in the sport fishery. The lab operates four automated tagging trailers which inject a 1-mm coded wire tag (CWT) into the snout of Chinook and Atlantic salmon and lake trout in the hatcheries while simultaneously removing the fish's adipose fin. Each CWT contains a six-digit code representing a year class, hatchery of origin, stocking location, and genetic strain. Since the program started in 2010, the lab has marked almost 48 million fish. As the tagging program expands, the lab hopes to tag other species such as brook trout and steelhead. After each tagging season is complete, the lab heads into high gear extracting and reading all the tags collected throughout the season from fishing tournaments, angler returns, and agency surveys. Biological data including length and weight are collected from each fish missing an adipose fin before a small section of the snout containing the tag is removed. A steady stream of CWT snouts funnel into the lab throughout the year. Once all tags are extracted and read, the biological data is disseminated to state agencies for a cooperative analyses.

Lake sturgeon raised inside the Kalamazoo River streamside rearing facility. Credit: Stefan Tucker

Aquatic Invasive Species

The Green Bay FWCO multifaceted aquatic invasive species early detection and monitoring program (AIS-EDMP) in is full swing. Activities involve close collaboration with a variety of local, state, federal, and non-profit partners. Field crews have been out sampling all over the Lake Michigan basin for ichthyoplankton, eDNA, juvenile/adult fish, and macroinvertebrates. So far this year a total of 2,400 eDNA samples have been collected from six high priority tributaries monitoring for Silver and Bighead carp. For ichthyoplankton sampling more than 230 samples have been collected in Green Bay alone. Sampling for juvenile/adult fish employs a large suite of gears and occurs from midsummer to late fall to cover the time period the young of the year fish grow large enough to catch. Additionally, number of research projects to improve sampling efficacy are being incorporated into the EDMP to get the most out of the season.

Also for 2015, the Cooperative Science and Monitoring Initiative is being conducted in Lake Michigan and the AIS-EDMP is taking advantage of this great opportunity. In collaboration with Sea Grant, USGS, EPA, NOAA, Central Michigan and Cornell Universities the AIS-EDMP is sampling ichthyoplankton, juvenile/adult fish, and macroinvertebrates at eight sites around the lake. The first round of sampling took place in late May/early June and will be repeated in August and October. Sampling gear for each round includes both micro and large mesh gillnets, as well as bongo tows for ichthyoplankton. Additionally, rock bags are deployed for invertebrate colonization over a four to six week period.

Passage and Habitat

On June 1, 2015 Joe Sheahan took over the Lake Michigan Fish Passage and Habitat Restoration Program and is the co-coordinator of the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative. Prior to joining the program Joe had worked for the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife where he coordinated the Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program.

The Upper Midwest and Great Lakes Landscape Conservation Cooperative recently adopted the charter for the Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative. The purpose of the Collaborative is to harness the capacities, expertise, and abilities of all partners in support of common conservation outcomes for connectivity within riverine networks and between the lakes and the tributaries in the Great Lakes Basin, and to serve as a strategic forum for collaboration, coordination, and integration.

The major work that is being funded through the National Fish Passage Program includes the removal of the Fawn River State Fish Hatchery in Indiana that will reconnect 25.6 miles habitat. The program also funds monitoring of mussel relocation efforts and genetic monitoring of slimy sculpin populations above and below a barrier associated with barrier removal.

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.

Friends of Pendills Creek Hatchery's Donation

BY CURT FRIEZ, PENDILLS-SULLIVAN CREEK NFH

The Friends of Pendills Creek Hatchery (FCPH) continue to be a loyal, trusted group of dedicated volunteers in support of the Pendills Creek/Sullivan Creek National Fish Hatchery (NFH) complex since 2004. The Friends Group has accomplished many activities and enhancements for the Hatchery Complex. The list is long but several highlights come to mind and included in this list is their dedication to making the public access site more user friendly to the visiting public. This includes the accessible foot bridge and boardwalk from the parking area to Lake Superior. They have also enhanced the site with a picnic pavilion, picnic tables, pedestal grill and trash receptacle. The site is heavily used throughout the year and remains a very popular destination for both locals and visitors.

FPCH recently donated to the hatchery. This time, their donation is in the form of a needed piece of equipment for the hatchery's new pickup, which is a cap. The cap will enclose the bed of the pickup protecting the very valuable cargo that will be shipped later each fall to sister Federal hatcheries. That's right; you probably guessed the cargo, lake trout eggs from the Sullivan Creek NFH. Millions of eggs will be transported in the back of this pickup to these other facilities to complete the egg incubation process and hatch out and then provide another year's worth of production fish for Lake Trout restoration activities. This movement of eggs is a mission critical activity occurring in the middle of winter; the eggs are boxed up in specialized Styrofoam shipping containers especially made for fish eggs. The precious cargo cannot freeze, and must remain viable while in shipment. The Friends group stepped up to assist the hatchery by purchasing this topper for Pendills Creek NFH. Once again showing their resolve and support for the hatchery complex and its mission. FPCH realizes the true value in supporting the activities of the hatchery complex and the US Fish and Wildlife Service deeply appreciates the donation by FPCH. Heartfelt thanks go out to all the members of FPCH for this fine donation. This partnership with our Friends Group enhances both partners in a variety of ways and sometimes it's extremely hard to put some sort of value on these benefits especially, when it comes to natural resources and the full potential they can represent over time.

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.

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