



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Midwest Region

## Fisheries Program

# Fish Lines

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Still Proving to be the  
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# *fish lines*

June 18, 2015  
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Tim Sullivan, or "Sully", is no ordinary U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee. Since he can remember, Sullivan's dream...[Read More](#)

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### **A Path to Nature**

Since the Iron River National Fish Hatchery's inception and construction throughout the 1970s and early 1980s...[Read More](#)



**A Path to Nature**



**Historical Fishing Gear, Still Proving to be the Best**



**American Woodcock Surveys**



**Mysterious Chubs of the Missouri River**



**Teaming up for Kids Fishing Events**

## 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.



## A Path to Nature: School Helps Improve Iron River National Fish Hatchery Trail System

BY CAREY EDWARDS, IRON RIVER NFH



Carey Edwards, fish biologist at Iron River NFH, assists students with planting trees along the trailhead. Credit: USFWS

a row, the second grade class from South Shore Elementary School spent a morning assisting hatchery staff to address this problem. Approximately 50 evergreen trees were planted along the trailhead located at the hatchery parking lot.

Students planted spruce trees in already prepared holes in hopes that in a few years, these trees will provide enough of a wind break to allow for proper winter time trail maintenance. They were also able to pot their own tree to take home. Students took time out from planting for a hike and a tour to gain awareness of the fish hatchery process and view a portion of the 1.5 million lake trout and coaster brook trout that are raised annually. The hatchery hopes that this will continue to be an annual project with the school to improve our trail system.

Since the Iron River National Fish Hatchery's inception and construction throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the land has changed in appearance with buildings, hatchery residences, water intake structures and service roads. The hatchery sits on 1,200 acres of land that encompasses and protects the headwaters of the hatchery's water supply.

A little known change is the addition of a three mile trail system that can be accessed anytime of the year and which was dedicated to the Simpson family in the summer of 2012. There are two loops, red and blue, with trailheads located in the hatchery parking lot and on Weidenhaar Road. The trails are maintained all year long and can be used for just about anything done on foot, including hunting, hiking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing.

Keeping the trails groomed in the winter can be challenging. In open areas, snow blows and drifts over the path making it nearly impossible for users to find their way on the trail. For the second year in



Biologist Brandon Keesler assists a South Shore Elementary School 2nd grader with planting trees. Credit: USFWS



## Trotlines:

### Historical Fishing Gear, Still Proving to be the Best

BY JONATHAN YONCE, COLUMBIA FWCO



Fishing with trotlines is a blast! A highly successful method of fishing that has been used for hundreds of years. Volunteer crew members, Jackie Harris and Karen Rouse work in tandem to pull trotlines out of the Missouri River and collect fish. Credit: Colby Wrasse, USFWS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) annually perform duties as a vital team member in the ongoing effort to monitor Pallid Sturgeon populations. In the lower 250 miles of the Missouri River we act as part of the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment Project and have done so for the past 13 years. This project requires the use of a full spectrum of fishing gears in order to collect this rare and endangered fish. One such gear that is widely used to capture sturgeon and many other species is the trotline. Many recreational fishermen are familiar with the trotline and bank line; they are commonly used to capture popular game fish, like catfish. This trotline season began in November of 2014 and ended this May. The length of this season allows us to sample during a variety of ever changing environmental and behavioral patterns.

In 1741, a British naturalist named William Bartram observed the first recorded North American trotline sets by the Florida Seminole Indians. The first inhabitants of this continent used this method for survival and to feed their people. The native people of North America had been using this method of fishing long before the first settlers arrived from the

Old World. However, the term "trot" was coined in Europe; the origin of the word "trot" is debated but in all original forms it is associated with the bed of a stream or river with moving water.

Trotlines are as simple as they are effective. Multiple baited hooks are attached to a main line and anchored to the river bottom. Our bait of choice is the earth worm. Most predatory fish love worms, and Pallid Sturgeon are no different. Worms have been found to be one of the most successful baits for trotline sets in the lower Missouri River when targeting sturgeon. Though not commonly available for a snack in the Pallid Sturgeon's favored habitat; these great fish seem to key into their presence when trotlines are set.

Much of the trotline season takes place during the coldest part of the year, but it's such a great time you rarely notice the icicles forming on your face. This year 3,251 fish were captured using 266 trotlines, deployed across 250 miles of river. This total catch number includes 15 different species found within the Missouri River, including: 71 Pallid Sturgeon, 24 Lake Sturgeon, 2,474 Shovelnose Sturgeon and 2 American Eel. Trotlines are a favored method among Fisheries Biologist to collect brood stock Pallid Sturgeon for use in propagation efforts. Each year, before the peak spawning season, trotlines are set in specific locations in order to collect adult Pallid Sturgeon that may be ready to spawn. These fish are used to supplement the ongoing effort to rear Pallid Sturgeon in captivity and help support the imperiled wild population through stocking efforts. During this busy part of trotline season our crew is bolstered by much needed volunteer efforts. This allows us to cover a lot more river and send out more crews. Although not part of the standard trotline season; this sampling is essential to a collective effort to increase Pallid Sturgeon numbers and will hopefully allow them to thrive once again within the muddy waters of the Missouri River.



## Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office: 2015 American Woodcock Habitat Enhancement and Surveys

BY TED KOEHLER, ASHLAND FWCO

With the help of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, three habitat restoration projects were completed in northern Wisconsin during the late winter of 2015 to benefit American woodcock and other wildlife species which depend on young forest. The American woodcock is a popular migratory game bird throughout eastern North America. During the past three plus decades the woodcock population across its range in the Northeast and Midwest United States and Canada has shown a steady decline.

Habitat improvement projects are taking place throughout the woodcocks range to stop this decline, and locally projects took place in Price and Douglas Counties. All were done with the help of many partners including private landowners, Douglas County Forestry Department, Ruffed Grouse Society, WI Department of Natural Resources, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Service's Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office. A total of 38 acres were enhanced through alder shearing with heavy duty mowing equipment. The alder is sheared low while the ground is frozen, and in the spring it rejuvenates in dense stands with an open understory which the birds prefer. Project shearing takes place in preplanned and rotating blocks of habitat. Every five to ten years, different locations will be sheared in order to create a mosaic of habitat. The blocks are strategically placed in order to create a rotational system of management to ensure decades of long term benefits.



Alder shearing on private land in northern Wisconsin. Credit: Wisconsin DNR



Overview of American Woodcock project. 2015 cuts are outlined and other areas of the project will be cut in a rotational system with 5 to 10 year intervals. Credit: Wisconsin DNR

As part of this effort, Ted Koehler and Gary Czypinski from the Service's Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office survey singing ground routes in Ashland and Bayfield counties. Male woodcock give vocal calls described as "peents" and perform aerial displays called "flight songs" shortly after sunset as part of their courtship behavior. Along a four mile transect the number of peenting males are recorded and the results entered into the national database. This annual survey provides an index to the relative size of the woodcock breeding population and is the most important source of data used to guide the United States and Canadian woodcock programs.

The management objective of the Service is to increase populations of woodcock to levels consistent with the demands of hunters and non-consumptive users. Therefore, reliable annual population estimates are essential for woodcock management. Due to their small size, natural coloration and preference for dense vegetation woodcock are difficult to find and count. Because of these difficulties the North American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey has been developed by the Service and its partners to provide information on abundance and recruitment.



American Woodcock. Credit: Carlos Guindon, USFWS Contractor



## Mysterious Chubs of the Missouri River

BY COLBY WRASSE, COLUMBIA FWCO

Here today and gone tomorrow. The ebb and flow of chub populations on the Missouri River go unnoticed by many people, but these small fish may have big implications for our Nation's longest river. The Missouri River is home to four species of *Macrhybopsis* chubs - a genus of minnows that is uniquely adapted for life in large, turbid rivers. Possessing barbels and external taste buds, these chubs rely on taste more than sight to locate food; and their streamlined bodies are well suited for swift currents. Despite these evolutionary traits, *Macrhybopsis* chubs are struggling in most of the Missouri River. Historically, chubs were abundant in the Missouri River; however, populations have drastically declined since human modifications to the river. Concerns over declines in abundance and reduction in range of Sicklefin Chub and Sturgeon Chub triggered a 1994 petition to list these species as endangered.

Today, populations in upper reaches of the river remain sparse, while populations in lower reaches of the Missouri River have been extremely variable. Ongoing research is providing some glimpses into

what drives chub populations; however, many questions remain. A better understanding of chub population dynamics would not only benefit chubs but would also benefit the federally endangered Pallid Sturgeon. Studies have demonstrated that chubs are a major component of the adult Pallid Sturgeon diet; therefore, whatever affects chub populations will likely affect Pallid Sturgeon also. Long-term trend data from the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment project has provided us with an understanding as to how chub populations have fluctuated over the last thirteen years, but the "why" still remains somewhat a mystery. Determining management actions that benefit *Macrhybopsis* chubs may be an important piece of the Pallid Sturgeon recovery puzzle.



Sandbars are one of the favored habitats for chubs on the Missouri River.  
Credit: Colby Wrasse, USFWS



The Sicklefin Chub - with its streamlined body and fins, small eyes, barbels, and external taste buds - is adapted for life in turbid, swift rivers.  
Credit: USFWS



## Celebrating National Fishing and Boating Week: National Fish Hatcheries Team up with Partners and Friends for Kids Fishing Events

BY JULIE TIMMER, PENDILLS CREEK NFH AND DOUG ALOISI, GENOA NFH



Lions Club volunteer with happy participant at the 3rd Annual Fishability Days.  
Credit: USFWS

Friends of Pendills Creek Hatchery (FPCH) held their 7th Annual Children's Fishing Event on Pendills Creek. The weather was perfect, the bugs weren't too bad, and we had a great turnout! We were pleased with the number of participants successfully catching a few of the brook trout and rainbow trout that were planted for the event. It's a great feeling seeing the youngsters grinning from ear to ear, jumping for joy as they land a fish.

The event was created to provide children with an opportunity to get outdoors and fish. Each year, FPCH has been working hard to provide an opportunity to do just that. The Friends group Event Chairperson, Denice Friez, solicits local businesses and organizations to donate items for the event. This event would not be possible without those donations. This year, sixty local businesses and organizations donated for the 7th Annual Children's Fishing Day.

With the donations, a free hot dog lunch was provided to all attendees, a free prize drawing was held with prizes awarded to some lucky attendees toward the end of the day.

So we thank all who donated to and volunteered for the Children's Fishing Day. Your contributions certainly created smiles for the kids, their family and friends, the Friends group members, volunteers, and the staff at Pendills and Sullivan Creek NFH.

### Genoa NFH, Genoa Wisconsin

The Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) partnered with the Southwest Wisconsin Lions Club District 27 to host the 3rd Annual Fishability Days, providing fishing and fun for families of children with limited access to the outdoors.



Lucky young angler admires her catch at Fishability Days held at Genoa NFH. Credit: USFWS

The event was open to families of area children with special needs and families of critically ill children. Twenty eight children were pre-registered for the event and they and their families had great time fishing for rainbow trout that had been recently stocked in the hatchery's accessible fishing pond.

The pond is also equipped with a fishing dock with 4 accessible fishing stations provided by local power company Dairyland Power. Parents, siblings, hatchery staff, volunteers from Lions Clubs, Friends of Pool 9 and the Friends



Pink was a lucky color for this young angler at the 7th Annual Friends of Pendills Creek Hatchery-Kids Fishing Day. Credit: USFWS

of the Upper Miss assisted the young anglers with casting, provided fishing tips, and helped to land the whoppers and even to clean their trout!

A light lunch was served by the Lions and kids were sent home with a fishing pole and tackle box to use in their future fishing ventures. Many thanks to the Lions Club, Friends of the Upper Miss and Friends of Pool 9 for making the day

a great success. This is the third year that Fishability Days has been held at the hatchery, and judging by the smiles on the faces of the parents and kids, it won't be the last.



Friends, Families, Fishing and a lot of Fun at Pendills Creek NFH. Credit: USFWS



## A Lamprey Legacy

BY JOANNA GILKESON, REGIONAL OFFICE - EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



Tim "Sully" Sullivan has been with the Sea Lamprey Control Program for 29 years.  
Credit: Joanna Gilkeson, USFWS

Tim Sullivan, or "Sully", is no ordinary U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee. Since he can remember, Sullivan's dream job was to be a biologist with the Sea Lamprey Control Program and help preserve the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem through controlling this invasive species – the mission of the Sea Lamprey Control Program.

Sullivan is a second generation sea lamprey control employee and has a special connection to the Program. The program was established in 1956, and Sullivan's father was part of this original team. Sullivan describes his father as a "pioneer" in the program, working on the front lines developing control and treatment techniques. Tim now holds the same position as his father did – Treatment Supervisor. For him, this is not just a job; it is his legacy, supported by teamwork and a strong sense of mission and passion. Sullivan's father worked in the Marquette office and eventually helped to establish and start the Ludington office for sea lamprey control, where Sullivan is now stationed.

Sullivan got his start studying Fisheries in college.

He graduated from Lake Superior State University in Michigan with a B.S. in Fisheries and Wildlife Management, and spent a few years bouncing back and forth between the public and private sector before he finally ended up in the sea lamprey control program 29 years ago.

Sullivan is as humble as he is experienced. When asked what his favorite part of the job was, he spoke endlessly about the teamwork and partnerships that make this work possible and successful, "It is a challenging, yet very rewarding job. It takes teamwork, and it's good to know our team is working together to save the Great Lakes fish from sea lamprey." Sullivan described the sea lamprey control program as a "border blind program" in which the Service's Marquette and Ludington offices work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada as a team. The two countries plan treatment schedules together and support each other during treatments. For 29 years, Sullivan has been a significant part of building and strengthening this bi-national relationship and fostering this partnership.

Sullivan says that during a treatment, you do whatever it takes to get the job done. A single sea lamprey treatment is typically around 10 days in the field. The staff conduct pre-treatment assessments and determine treatment logistics specific to a single stream and then spend 3-5 days treating the streams, "I have very talented people on the team. It takes a lot of people to manage, steer and adjust the treatment as weather conditions are constantly changing." Sullivan said. Whether this means working an overnight shift or a double shift, the team goes the extra mile.

Sullivan made a point to end on this note, "I am very fortunate to be a team member here. No one is more or less important than others on the team. I'm very lucky and we all support each other." From this one interaction it is easily understood that Sullivan is dedicated to the mission, his team and the legacy of protecting the Great Lakes, all while working in his dream career field.



## 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.

### At Least We Had Perfect Weather...

BY MICHAEL WILSON, COLUMBIA FWCO

It was a beautiful spring day, perfect for trawling on the Illinois River. We launched our twenty-five foot trawl boat out of Ottawa, Illinois to sample invasive carps in Starved Rock Pool. Due to recent rains, the river was up and the current was swift, but that didn't matter – the weather was great! Around mid-morning, while running upstream to our next sample site, the outboard began to overheat. No big deal, the river was high with some debris – maybe the motor sucked in some trash. We slowed to idling speed and after a couple of minutes, the engine cooled and we continued on our way. Half a mile further upstream, the engine overheated again and shut down. This was a slightly bigger deal. Fortunately, we were able to duck into a nearby side channel, where we dropped anchor. The water pump seemed to be functioning normally so we removed the cowling to inspect the thermostats (little did I know that most larger outboards have two!). The first thermostat looked fine; the second thermostat cap broke off in the wrench. Great... it is now officially a Big Deal! The engine has a nonfunctioning cooling system, we are nearly three miles away from the ramp and we have swift currents on a high river to contend with (paddles would be of little use in this situation) "Maybe there is a spare cap in the tool box," someone offered. Good news! No spare cap! Now what? Using electrical tape, we taped the busted cap back over the thermostat housing, fired up the engine and hoped for a miracle. As expected, water spewed from the port like a geyser... time for lunch. At least we have stunning weather for lunch on the boat!

After we ate and had time to strategize, we still didn't have any ideas. We were too far from our duty station to call out another boat so we had to fend for ourselves. I rummaged around the toolbox again and found a roll of duct tape. Ah, good ol' duct tape! I removed the broken cap and applied four crisscrossing pieces of tape directly over the opening, wrapped the collar several times and hoped for a water tight seal. Tentatively, we fired up the motor and this time water only leaked out in a slow trickle! We pulled anchor and eased out in the current to try our luck. We were on our way! Running in a super cooled state, the engine didn't operate optimally but it did just fine at a fast idle.

Twenty minutes later we were back to the ramp. Time for the real test. This boat was too big to load onto the trailer without help from the outboard. I opened up the throttle and crossed my fingers. The duct tape held tight and the boat climbed right up. Once again, duct tape saved the day! I guess the moral of this story is to always have a roll on hand...or maybe, if all else fails, there's always duct tape. At least we had perfect weather....

### Engaging Today's Youth: Lake Sturgeon and Beyond

BY ANDREW BRIGGS, ALPENA FWCO-WATERFORD, MI SUBSTATION

Engaging today's youth in the importance of conserving our natural resources is essential to the goals of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). In a world full of distractions that remove youth from outdoor activities, the Service is working to bring them back outside. One method used by the Service to engage youth is speaking to students at schools. On May 22nd, fish biologist Andrew Briggs of the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) – Waterford Substation was invited to speak at his former high school about the lake sturgeon work being conducted by the Alpena FWCO and his path to becoming a fish biologist.

Tenth grade students in Mr. Mike Weinert's biology class at Mason County Central High School in Scottville, Michigan took great interest in Andrew's presentation. Most students had little previous knowledge of lake sturgeon or the types of habitats they lived in. Andrew also brought some show and tell items, including lake sturgeon scutes, tags that the Alpena FWCO uses to track lake sturgeon, and a couple examples of sampling gears used by the Alpena FWCO. Other projects and topics discussed during the presentation included work being done to combat the spread of invasive species in the Great Lakes, monitoring artificial spawning reefs that the Service and partners have constructed in the St. Clair – Detroit River System, and the outreach work the Service conducts.

Many students in Mr. Mike Weinert's class expressed interest in potentially exploring a career in biology. Students had the opportunity to ask many questions after Andrew's presentation. Among many other topics, they were curious about the cost of the tags used to track lake sturgeon, what fish biologists do when they aren't working in the field, and the positive and negative experiences Andrew has encountered as a fish biologist. After the presentation students thanked Andrew for coming in and took

some of the educational materials he brought with him on invasive species, conservation, and career opportunities.

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### **From River to Conference Room**

*BY COLBY WRASSE, COLUMBIA FWCO*

Conferences provide biologists with great opportunities to present important scientific findings, learn about their colleagues' work, and collaborate on new ideas. The Missouri River Natural Resources Conference (MRNRC) is one of Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office's (FWCO) favorite conferences to attend because of its relevance to the office's work and the high quality presentations given. This year's conference was held in Nebraska City at the beautiful Lied Lodge, and Columbia FWCO was fortunate enough to send several employees. Columbia FWCO staff collaborated on two poster presentations and one oral presentation for the conference. These presentations represented the culmination of several years of field work and data collection. The FWCO presentations tackled a variety of Missouri River issues as they related to species such as: Pallid Sturgeon, Lake Sturgeon, Sicklefin Chub and Sturgeon Chub. Columbia FWCO was pleased with the positive feedback they received on their presentations and the interesting conversations that followed. Conferences such as these are important for the advancement of Missouri River science. Columbia FWCO is looking forward to next year's MRNRC.



## 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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