



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Midwest Region

Fisheries Program

Fish Lines

Fun with Fishin' Buddies!

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

Conserving America's Fisheries



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A Close Inspection of River Habitat



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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.



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

Conserving America's Fisheries

Fun with Fishin' Buddies!

BY SAM FINNEY, CARTERVILLE FWCO



Fish Biologist Sam Finney with Carterville FWCO discusses Asian carp and presentation pointers with the student Asian carp team. Credit : Kelly Baerwaldt, USFWS

This past July four U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and a few staff members of Fishin' Buddies with hearts of gold, gathered in Chicago to help thirteen high achieving inner city youth work on natural resource projects. The projects are part of a summer program that brings these youth in and has them prepare a presentation on a hot topic in natural resource management. The winning group with the best presentation at the end of the week wins a cash prize and the best overall student wins an additional cash prize. And everyone wins the prize of learning more about our natural resources and how to be better stewards.

This year's topics were invasive species (with a focus on Asian carp), sea turtles, and monarch butterflies. The presentations were very unique and quite impressive! The Asian carp group did a mock court room skit with an Asian carp as the defendant, for hitting the defendant in the head during one of its signature leaps. The plaintiff was an innocent river fisherman that was just trying to catch a few fish and was assaulted! The turtle group did a "night at the museum" spoof where they broke into an aquarium

and learned all about turtles from the night watchman. The monarch group was the "mystery gang" and used clues to solve the mystery of why monarch butterflies are declining and what we can do to help. Not only were the topics good and the skits creative, but the high school juniors and seniors did a great job of utilizing the presentation software and making extremely impressive visual aids complete with videos and other fun visual effects. I think they taught me more than I taught them!

Fishin' buddies is a great program. John Kidd has been running the program since 1989 and has helped hundreds of kids through the various programs that they offer. John is about to pass the torch of fishin' buddies on to his son. After almost 30 years, he deserves a little break. The fishin' buddies program is a fantastic way to get youth that might not otherwise have good access to natural resources get such exposure. We look forward to helping them out in the future on other projects, and with more inspiring youth from the Chicagoland area!



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2015 Fish Habitat and Passage Projects in the Ohio River Basin

BY BRIAN BARTOS, CARTERVILLE FWCO

This year holds some exciting prospects for the fish passage program in the Ohio River basin. The Cartersville FWCO Habitat Team is working with the National Fish Passage Program (NFPP), the Ohio River Basin Fish Habitat Partnership (ORBFHP), and associated partners to improve conditions for fish and aquatic organisms throughout the drainage. This diverse suite of 2015 projects will open nearly 400 stream miles through the removal or bypass of six barriers previously hindering passage for aquatic organisms! Water quality and habitat conditions will be monitored, assessed, and improved using innovative solutions in farm drainage and dam operation techniques. Over 90 miles of riverine and riparian habitat will be improved or restored, and six aquatic populations will be assessed and on their way to recovering.

Among these recovering populations are two species of endangered freshwater mussels: the northern riffleshell and the clubshell. These two species were previously extirpated from much of their native range in the Ohio River Basin. A bridge removal project on the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania is providing adult mussels to be relocated to back to these in Indiana. In addition to the relocation effort, propagation and host fish inoculation techniques will be used to provide additional mussels for each site. This project is on the heels of the successful removal of two Eel River dams, which has substantially increased habitat suitability for the clubshell, greatly improving the chances of successful mussel reintroduction. Thanks to the comprehensive approach on this project, these two species will finally be calling the Tippecanoe and Eel River watersheds home.



Northern riffleshell mussels like these will be transported from the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania to their new home in Northern Indiana. Credit: USFWS



The Mexico Dam on the Eel River in Indiana will be removed this year. Credit: Philip Rogers, USFWS

passage on the Eel River which also poses a safety threat to humans. Removal of the dam will reconnect 349 miles of previously impeded river! This action will benefit many species of fish and mussels, specifically smallmouth bass and greater redhorse, both surrogate species, and the endangered clubshell. Additionally, the project incorporates invaluable opportunities for student education and research and local community involvement. The Eel River is a high quality stream rehabilitated by many dam removals and habitat projects over the past decade. Eel River is a testament to the transformation that can occur in a watershed; the result of a focused regimen of projects aimed at habitat improvement and stream connectivity. One other important NFPP bridge replacement project will start this year in Ohio on Crabapple Creek. This structure, consisting of perched pipes embedded in concrete, poses a significant barrier to fish passage. The existing structure will be replaced with a recessed or open-bottomed box culvert, allowing fish to pass and also facilitating the downstream passage of debris during high flows, helping to reduce clogging issues. Species benefitted include the mottled sculpin and the hellbender.

Another exciting project in the Wabash drainage is the construction of a two stage ditch which will replace the traditional trapezoidal drainage on one landowner's farm field. The design incorporates a floodplain zone of grass benches which allows the water to spread out during a flood event. This decreases the velocity of the water, not only improving water quality, but also riparian habitat, bank stability, and natural riffle-run-pool structure in the project area. Manchester University will be measuring changes in habitat, water quality, and biotic diversity in a paired watershed study to determine project efficacy. Two stage ditches, along with cover crop use, represent a potentially widespread approach to reducing nutrient input and sediment load in streams while increasing riparian and in-stream habitat. This, plus potentially increased yield/reduced fertilizer costs to the farmer makes it a true win-win!

Manchester University will also be partnering with the NFPP this summer to remove the Mexico Dam, a critical barrier to fish

In an effort to improve water quality and restore a more natural flow regime, the ORBFHP is working with partners to develop a consensus of technically feasible operational and structural changes for a network of more than 20 dams in the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MCWD). This research will investigate methods for restoring key flow components and improving dissolved oxygen levels in the watershed. Project outcomes will be: 1) flow alterations due to project operation, 2) changes in water quality and flow velocity determined from “tweaks” in release rates, and 3) developing implementable solutions for overall river quality improvements.

Overall, the suite of projects in the Ohio River basin represents a diverse array of both traditional and emerging methods of aquatic organism passage, restoration, and habitat improvement. A robust monitoring program for each site will provide opportunities for community involvement, educational outreach, and research. The data pertaining to project efficacy, biotic and habitat quality change, and financial benefits to landowners will be made available to various entities and state partners, FHP's, federal agencies, and special interest groups in hopes that successful methods are repeated. The goal is many more positive changes in affected watersheds across the landscape - beyond the Ohio River basin!



A site visit on a low water crossing over Crabapple Creek in Washington County, which will be replaced with a passage-friendly bridge. From left to right: Kim Brewster with Belmont SWCD, Lori Stevenson and Chris Greene, USFWS Partners biologists, and Brian Bartos, USFWS fish biologist. Credit: Philip Rogers, USFWS



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5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival

BY JUSTIN CHIOTTI, ALPENA FWCO - WATERFORD, MICHIGAN SUBSTATION

The weather cleared up for the 5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival held at Milliken State Park and Harbor along the Detroit River Walk. This summer's event was held during Michigan's Free Fishing Weekend. Fish biologists from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Waterford Substation and staff from the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge were present to introduce children and adults in the Detroit Metropolitan Area to fishing and to promote aquatic stewardship. Over the past three years nearly 2,000 children have fished along the Detroit River during this event.

The stormy weather in the morning did not deter the nearly 300 participants this year who were taught "fishing basics" by instructors from the Michigan State Parks Explorers Program, boating safety by the United States Coast Guard, and educated about aquatic invasive species by the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. This year a trophy was given out to the largest fish captured in both girl and boy divisions. Fishing poles, tackle, and other prizes were also raffled off throughout the day.



A family preparing to fish during the 5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival. Credit: Keith Tolman, Detroit RiverFront Conservancy



A lucky angler with a rock bass caught in the Detroit River during the 5th Annual Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival. Credit: Keith Tolman, Detroit RiverFront Conservancy

The Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival gives the youth in the Detroit Metropolitan Area an opportunity to connect with the outdoors. The list of volunteers and supporters for the event grows each year and it's not hard to understand why after seeing the joyful smile of a child catching a fish for the first time. The Detroit River is designated as an Area of Concern in the Great Lakes, but is undergoing a transformation before our eyes. Funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is restoring fish and wildlife habitat all along the Detroit River and the children attending the Detroit River Kids Fishing Festival are reaping the benefits.

This year the event was presented by Detroit Riverfront Conservancy in support with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Rivertown Detroit Association, Concentra, Wayne County Parks, Sierra Club, Concentra, Friends of the Detroit River, Michigan State University Extension, and Michigan Sea Grant.



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

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Where Do Young Lake Sturgeon Go After They Hatch? A Close Inspection of River Habitat

BY DARIN SIMPKINS, GREEN BAY FWCO



MTU students Anthony Hebert (left) and Brian Doughty (right) prepare to set a drift net to collect lake sturgeon larvae. Credit: Nancy Auer, Michigan Technological University

Lake sturgeon are a native species found throughout the Great Lakes and their tributaries. Each spring, adults migrate upstream to spawn in turbulent areas of rapids. Eggs are adhesive and roll onto undersides of rocks and into gravel. After eight to ten days, the young hatch, snuggle into the spaces between gravel, and live off a yolk-sac. When the yolk is depleted, the young begin to drift downstream, mostly at night.

Dams constructed for power or mills became barriers to natural movements of sturgeons worldwide and populations declined. In partnership with Michigan Technological University, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, a team of researchers has been searching for young sturgeon and mapping habitats in sections of the Sturgeon River, Houghton and Baraga Counties, Michigan.

The Sturgeon River is about 70 kilometers (km) or 43 miles in length and is one of few in the Lake Superior drainage that has a self-sustaining population; so conditions must be good for this population to persist. Researchers have been

sampling, and returning live, newly drifting sturgeon along sections of the river to determine duration and extent of drift and at the same time sampling for co-occurring prey and mapping bathymetry and substrates type. While sampling for these young sturgeon at night can be difficult, new sonar technologies have allowed us to better describe large portions of the riverbed where young are found.

In spring in 2013, 2014 and 2015 we sampled and released 1316 drifting larvae and mapped six km of river. In 2016, we hope to use what knowledge we gained on the Sturgeon River and transfer it to the Cedar River in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where lake sturgeon are being re-introduced.

For more information, contact: Dr. Nancy Auer, Professor, Michigan Technological University naauer@mtu.edu



A juvenile lake sturgeon measuring 1.75 inches collected over sandy substrate June of 2015. Credit: Nancy Auer, Michigan Technological University



MTU students Emily Bouckaert (left), Doug Rombach (middle) and Anthony Hebert (right) taking flow readings during a net set for drifting larvae. Credit: Nancy Auer, Michigan Technological University



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Asian Carp eDNA: New Places and New Faces

BY OLIVEA MENDENHALL AND KJETIL HENDERSON, CARTERVILLE FWCO

The Asian Carp Early Detection and Monitoring Program has grown substantially in the last couple years. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) fisheries professionals have recently put on a new hat in order to track the leading edge of the Asian Carp invasion in various waterways. Resource professionals use this genetic surveillance method for early detection and monitoring programs to reduce the ecological damages caused by invasive species, and for making subsequent control programs more effective. This environmental DNA (eDNA) program has been effective for indicating potential Asian Carp invasion in specific locations, and many states have requested the assistance of the USFWS for monitoring invasive species within their waters.

Personnel at the Carterville Fish and Wildlife Conservation (FWCO) have accomplished a good portion of the impressive 2015 sampling regime. Our mobile eDNA trailer has been through a dozen states and covered over 8,000 miles! To date, we have collaborated with seven state agencies: Alabama, Kansas, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia. These efforts would be impossible without the help of many gracious state employees.



Jenna Merry, USFWS fish biologist, is packaging eDNA samples to be sent to Whitney Genetics Lab to be processed. Credit: Olivea Mendenhall, USFWS



Allison Lenaerts with Carterville FWCO and Katie Zipfel with West Virginia DNR prepare samples to be processed in eDNA mobile lab. Credit: Olivea Mendenhall, USFWS

More than ten staff members working at the Carterville FWCO or Wilmington Illinois Substation have been involved in the 2015 eDNA sampling effort. Of these, most did not have eDNA experience prior to this sampling year. After specialized training in eDNA methodology (outlined in the [2015 Quality Assurance Project Plan](#)), we were able to overcome equipment, navigation, and processing challenges to execute the eDNA sampling process.

The Carterville FWCO staff and partnering agencies have collected and processed over 2,000 water samples across the Great Lakes, Ohio River, and Mississippi River basins as part of the entire eDNA program. During this field season we have improved our processing efficiency by trial and error, gained experience dealing with challenges of learning a complex sampling procedure, and improved our capabilities as a team. We are currently making eDNA trailer improvements and maintenance as we look forward to the 2016 sampling year. The eDNA Early Detection and Monitoring Program is providing valuable information to state agencies for reducing the impact of Asian Carp in our waterways.



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2015 a Productive Year at the Ontonagon River Streamside Rearing Trailer

BY HENRY QUINLAN AND GLENN MILLER, ASHLAND FWCO



A young lake sturgeon (surrounded by its food, bloodworms) that was raised in the streamside unit located on the Ontonagon River in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.
Credit: USFWS

This past summer proved to be productive for the Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) in regards to the Streamside Rearing Trailer (SRT) on the West Branch of the Ontonagon River, Houghton County, Michigan. Located at the outlet of Lake Gogebic near Bergland, this was the third year the SRT was in place. Unlike the previous two years, when large volumes of spring run-off made egg collection on the nearby Sturgeon River near impossible, conditions in 2015 were favorable for egg collection. In two days, biologists from Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Ashland FWCO, Ottawa National Forest and the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians (FDL) were able to collect eggs from 8 females and milt from 32 males.

Following genetic guidelines for rearing and stocking sturgeon in the Great Lakes basin (<http://www.gfrc.org/pubs/SpecialPubs/2010-01.pdf>), eggs and milt from lake sturgeon in the Sturgeon River were collected and combined to form 32 families. The fertilized eggs from each female are transported to the Ontonagon River SRT and placed into their own hatching jar. Ontonagon River water

flows through the jars to gently tumble the eggs. The eggs and fish will imprint to this river water and seek to return to the Ontonagon River in the future. After a week the eggs hatch into tiny tadpole like sturgeon fry and shortly thereafter mini-lake sturgeon can be seen swimming in the tanks that will be their home for the next four months.



Streamside Rearing Trailer: This was the summer home of some 819 lake sturgeon that were PIT tagged and released into the Ontonagon River in August of 2015. Credit: USFWS

During the early days of life, the baby sturgeons are fed brine shrimp raised at the SRT. In three to four weeks, they reach about two inches in length and biologists begin to add shaved bloodworms for feed along with the brine shrimp. Eventually, the young sturgeons are converted to an all bloodworm diet.

During years like 2015, when eggs are plentiful and hatch rate is high, the number of fry and then fingerlings need to be "thinned out" to allow maximum growth in the tanks. In June about 8,500 fry were provided to FDL for release into the upper St Louis River by Brookston, Minnesota. This release is part of an ongoing restoration project to reintroduce sturgeon in this area. By mid-July, the fingerlings were three to four inches long and another 1,500 were provided to FDL.

After the final thinning, the remaining fingerlings are reared in the SRT until they are large enough to be marked internally with a tag the size of a grain of rice. These, Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags have a unique identifier code which will allow for future study on the growth, movement, and survival of the stocked fish. This year, when stocking time approached, fish biologists from Ashland FWCO and ONF tagged 819 sturgeons composed of fish from each of the 32 families founded in May. On August 24th the SRT rearing season came to a close, with the seven to nine inch long fingerlings being released at two different locations on the main stem of the Ontonagon River, to help restore a genetically diverse lake sturgeon population in that river system.

The successful partnership among Tribal, State and Federal agencies and the Upper Peninsula Power Company is committed to a restoration effort on the Ontonagon River scheduled to last 15 – 20 years.

Over this time period eggs from up to 200 females could contribute to restoring a healthy lake sturgeon population in the Ontonagon River. Stay tuned for more!



(From left to right) John Pagel, Ottawa National Forest, Henry Quinlan, Ashland FWCO and Dr. Ed Baker, Michigan DNR Marquette Fishery Research Station, stocking lake sturgeon in the Ontonagon River north of Bruce Crossing, MI. Credit: USFWS



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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.

Alpena FWCO Completes 2015 Fishery Independent Lake Whitefish Survey in Northern Lake Huron

BY ADAM KOWALSKI, ALPENA FWCO

During July and August, staff from the Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) and volunteers conducted the annual fishery independent lake whitefish survey in 1836 Treaty waters of northern Lake Huron. The purpose of this survey is to collect fishery independent abundance and biological data on lake whitefish stocks in treaty waters for use in statistical catch-at-age population models that are updated annually to determine harvest regulations for commercial fisheries in 1836 Treaty waters of the Great Lakes.

During the survey, 24 variable mesh gill nets (two to six inch) were set at randomly selected sites in lake whitefish management unit WFH 04 (Hammond Bay to Presque Isle) and lake whitefish management unit WFH 05 (Presque Isle to Alpena). All whitefish and lake trout collected were measured, weighed, sexed, assessed for maturity and visceral fat content, and checked for sea lamprey wounds, fin clips, and tags. Scales and otoliths were collected for age determination. Similar biological data were collected from non-target species. Four lake whitefish were collected from unit WFH04 and one was collected from unit WFH05.



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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