



# Fisheries Program

# Fish Lines

**Whittlesey Creek  
Salmonid Assessments**

**Sturgeon Become  
Marked for Life**

**Let's Go Fishing with Fishin'  
Buddies**

**Searching for a Rare  
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**School to Farm Program**





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

Conserving America's Fisheries

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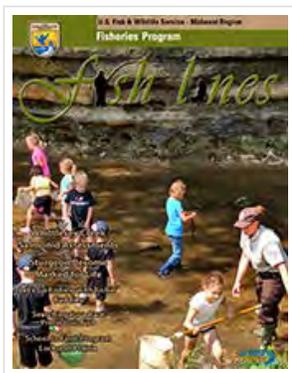
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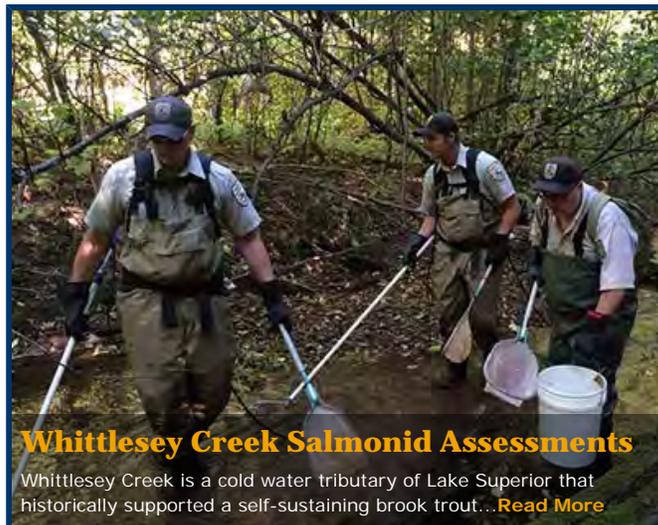
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Sep 15, 2016  
*In this Issue*



### Whittlesey Creek Salmonid Assessments

Whittlesey Creek is a cold water tributary of Lake Superior that historically supported a self-sustaining brook trout...[Read More](#)



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**Searching for a Rare Prehistoric Fish**



**School to Farm Program**

## 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: September 15, 2016



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

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### ***Data Analysis Provides Efficiency in Whittlesey Creek Salmonid Assessments***

BY JASON ROSS, ASHLAND FWCO

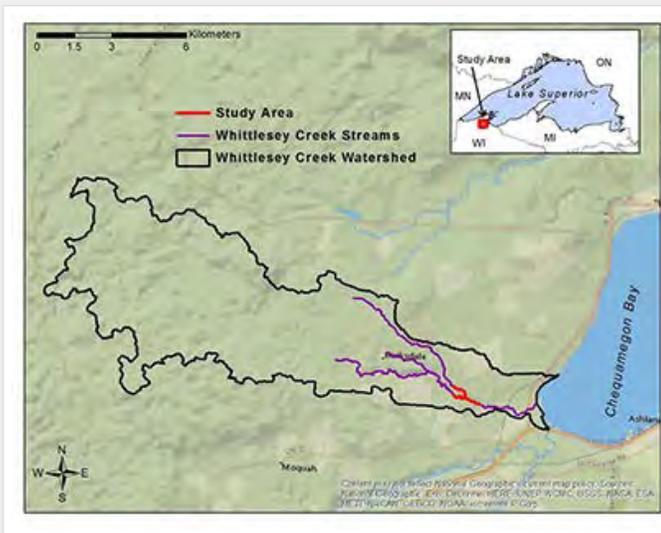


Crews sampling for Salmonids with backpack electrofishing units in Whittlesey Creek. Credit: Henry Quinlan, USFWS

Whittlesey Creek is a cold water tributary of Lake Superior that historically supported a self-sustaining brook trout population and migratory coaster brook trout. Since 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have annually monitored the brook trout population in Whittlesey Creek using mark-recapture techniques. The monitoring has been an important tool to assess the impacts of harvest regulation, habitat restoration, and brook trout stocking that occurred from 2003 to 2009. The annual mark-rapture studies require two passes through the survey segments, which takes a significant amount of effort and time.

During 2015, the Ashland Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) began investigating the relationships between first pass fish capture numbers and population estimates derived from a multiple pass survey. Relationships were significantly positive for all age groups of brook trout, coho salmon, rainbow trout, and brown trout. These findings were used to justify a reduction in effort to a single pass electrofishing survey for the 2015 assessment.

In September 2015, the USFWS Ashland FWCO led the annual Salmonid survey in Whittlesey Creek, Wisconsin. Staff from USFWS Iron River National Fish Hatchery, USFWS Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge, and University of Wisconsin Stevens Point Northern Aquaculture Demonstration Facility participated in the effort. As is always the case, most of the catch was made up of non-native coho and rainbow trout. A total of 13 brook trout were captured that consisted of one age-0, seven age-1, and five age-2 individuals. This was the lowest number of brook trout sampled since the survey effort began in 2001. In 2015, we were able to reduce the annual survey sampling effort by more than 50% and still provide an estimate of population size for all trout and salmon encountered. The time-savings will allow us the opportunity to monitor other measures of restoration success, such as redd (spawning nests made by trout and salmon) surveys and counts of spawning pairs of brook trout. In September of 2016 we will be moving forward with a second season of the single pass approach, which, is coming soon!!



Study area of the annual survey to estimate population abundances of Salmonids in Whittlesey Creek, Wisconsin. Credit: Jason Ross, USFWS



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### Tagging Season Begins! Sturgeon Become Marked for Life

BY DOUG ALOISI, GENOA NFH



Lake sturgeon receiving coded wire tag. Credit: USFWS

One important part of any successful aquatic species restoration program is assessing results and course correcting to maximize success. To successfully accomplish this, fish hatchery products must be recognizable from wild populations so that accurate survival estimates can be calculated.

They also can be marked to distinguish between different lots so they may be assessed as being reared in different locations and under different diet or temperature regimes. Now emerging technologies have given us tags that can actually differentiate between individual fish. These PIT tags (Passive Integrated Transponder) function much as the bar code and scanner at your local grocery store. Due to their increased cost for the tag and the tag reader, PIT tags have become popular for tagging smaller numbers of fish where individual recognition is valuable. For most of our purposes at the hatchery, our fish are tagged with coded wire micro-tags. This method can distinguish between different strains and lots of fish simply by changing the wire code in the tagging machine before starting a distinct lot or strain of fish.

At Genoa, we typically tag between 60-80,000 fingerling lake sturgeon in a summer, as well as 10-15,000 coaster brook trout for release in Lake Superior. To accomplish this task takes many people from all walks of life. We are extremely fortunate to have the tagging crew from our sister station, the Iron River National Fish Hatchery come down for a week to tag our coaster brook trout. This crew has a combined 50+ years of tagging experience with coded wire tagging machines. Then we also enlist the help of many of our Friends Group members, volunteers and local students for our lake sturgeon tagging. With the typical beginning tagger being able to do roughly 200 fish per hour, it is an estimated 10 week job for a typical 40 hour work week.

We can't thank our volunteers and Friends enough for the work that they help us to accomplish every summer. This allows the staff to focus on their fish culture activities at the busiest time of the production season. And it enables us to meet our marking goals and stock fish that can be distinguished as hatchery product, so that restoration goals can be met. To paraphrase a rock anthem, "To those about to tag, (and those who already have) we salute you!"



Friends group members coded wire tagging lake sturgeon.  
Credit: USFWS



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

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### Let's Go Fishing with Fishin' Buddies

BY JIMMIE GARTH, CARTERVILLE FWCO - WILMINGTON IL, SUBSTATION

Since 1991, Fishin' Buddies Inc. has been creating opportunities for urban students to learn about fishing and various other aspects of nature. Through field trips to wildlife refuges, forests, and lakes, the students have been afforded the opportunity to appreciate what the great outdoors and more importantly fishing has to offer. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been a proud partner with the Fishin' Buddies program for many years, however, this year marked the first time that the Carterville FWCO-Wilmington, Illinois Substation has been an active participant.

The students work hard all summer writing essays on their experiences and how they can impact current and future interests as they progress in life. However, they were not let off the hook that easily, their workload was about to increase. Students were then split into groups which were then responsible for completing a research project which had to include a skit, poster presentation, PowerPoint, and a game to convey their findings. Each group was required to choose from one of the following topics for their research; 1) species and the environment, 2) genetically modified foods and food travel, or 3) renewable energy sources.



YCC student describing the negative impacts of invasive species such as the Bighead and Silver carp on our native waterways like the Illinois and Mississippi River systems. Credit: Jimmie Garth, USFWS



Jimmie Garth, Biological Science Technician, providing feedback to YCC student while working on her group presentation on invasive species. Credit: USFWS

One group highlighted the effect human interactions have on the current status of both endangered and invasive species. To illustrate the impact invasive species have on their environment the group created a game very similar to "Let's Go Fishing". In their game there were 12 fish total, nine of the fish were large invasive species (Bighead or Silver Carp) while the three smaller fish were native species such as Largemouth Bass or Bluegill. Any invasive species (large fish) that were hooked were worth three points while native species (small fish) were only worth two points. Two competitors would face off and whoever had the largest catch, based on points, after a minute was declared the winner. As illustrated in the game, the effect that invasive species have on native fish is large, however, can be greatly reduced with the management tools we have today. With educational programs, such as Fishin' Buddies, to educate students as to why our natural resources, including endangered and invasive species, are so important we as a society are headed in the right direction.



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

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### Searching for a Rare Prehistoric Fish on the Mighty River

BY PRESTON FELTROP, CARTERVILLE FWCO



Fish Biologist, Jeff Stewart, pulls a trotline in while removing some Shovelnose Sturgeon. Credit: USFWS

Another brisk day begins as the sun breaks on the water's horizon. Six months of the year, for the last 3 years, you could find the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), Missouri Department of Conservation, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers employees on the Mississippi River with one goal. What we're after: a rare fish called the Pallid Sturgeon. Pallid Sturgeon are an endangered fish species that exist in the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. They are large river obligates with long slender bodies and bony plates giving them the appearance of prehistoric dinosaurs (the kind occurring in the Cretaceous period when Pallid Sturgeon came about). Their population is supplemented by hatchery programs due to their extremely low abundance and we continue to research Pallid Sturgeon with the goal to restore habitat and resources for a self-sustaining population.

To estimate their abundance and population trend, we fished for them using trotlines (a long line with evenly spaced hooks baited with earthworms) anchored to the bottom of the river (as opposed to normally using floats to keep them suspended).

Sturgeon have mouths on the bottom of their head and typically consume aquatic insects and small fish along the river bottom. Two teams each fished 10 trotlines/400 hooks per day. We covered almost the entire Mississippi River between the confluences of the Ohio and Missouri rivers and caught a total of 32,411 fish during the project.

After fishing for three years (3,203 sets over 356 days), we have caught 24 fish confirmed to be "true" Pallid Sturgeon. Pallid Sturgeon are closely related to Shovelnose; a similarly appearing common Mississippi River fish). For that reason, they commonly hybridize and can look like either species, which forces us to identify them based on genetics. The genetic samples for the last year have not yet been analyzed but the overall catch was lower than previous years due to usually high water from spring flooding and we expect the number of genetically identified Pallid Sturgeon to be lower as well.

Even with low numbers of Pallid Sturgeon, the Service is doing everything we can to prevent the jeopardy of the species. We have implemented a stocking program throughout the Missouri River and we are working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to restore habitat and mitigate the negative effects of river navigation. The species once swam alongside of dinosaurs and we are doing everything we can to ensure they are still here for future generations.



Donovan Henry, FWS Fish Biologist, counts fin rays along with numerous other morphometric measurements. Credit: USFWS



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

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### *School to Farm Program*

BY HEIDI KEULER, LA CROSSE FWCO

Most people are familiar with the "Farm to School Program" that brings local, tasty nutritious food to school cafeterias across the country, but how many students from city schools get to actually visit a real working farm that food comes from? Each spring, inner-city kindergarteners from Summit Elementary in La Crosse, Wisconsin, have the opportunity to visit a real farm and learn hands-on about the animals that live there. From touching the aquatic insects and fish in the healthy stream to the chickens, hogs and beef, children immerse themselves for a day in what it's like to live on a farm. Rod Ofte, Fishers & Farmers Chair, personally takes the kids on a hay ride to stations around the farm to plant in the garden, gather eggs from the chicken coop, pet the sheep, and much more. New this past year, was an aquatic invertebrate station where students literally got their feet wet learning how biologists sample streams for water quality. Because of good conservation practices like managed grazing on the Ofte farm, students learned that both streams and farms can be productive. Some of the kids had never dipped their toes in a stream before, so the learning opportunities in this event were as endless as the giggles heard on the farm that day.



Fishers & Farmers Coordinator, Heidi Keuler and Whitney Genetics Lab Biologist, Kyle Von Ruden teach students how to sample and identify aquatic invertebrates.  
Credit: Rod Ofte



USFWS Fishers and Farmers coordinator Heidi Keuler guides the students through the days activities on Rod Ofte's Farm.  
Credit: Rod Ofte

To learn more about the organization go to [fishersandfarmers.org](http://fishersandfarmers.org) or contact Service Fish Biologist, Heidi Keuler - Fishers and Farmers Program Coordinator at [Heidi\\_Keuler@fws.gov](mailto:Heidi_Keuler@fws.gov) or 608-783-8417

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SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS

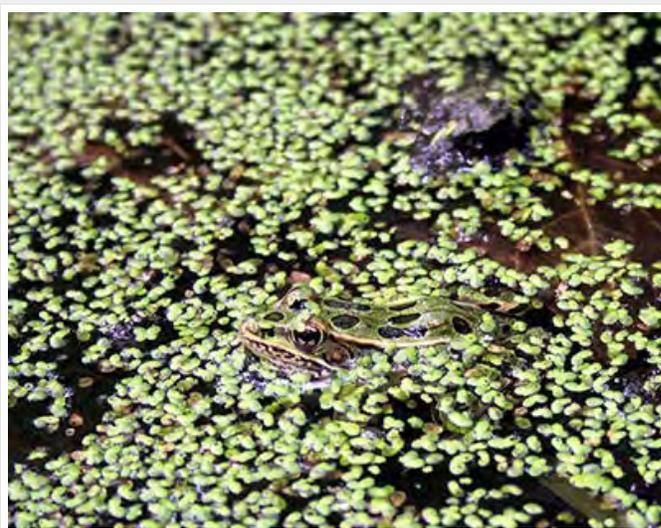


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## Fisheries, Midwest Region

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### La Crosse Fish Health Center Not Just for Fish Health Anymore



La Crosse FHC is working for the health of amphibian species like this Northern Leopard frog. Credit: Courtney Celley, USFWS

pathogen has been linked to mortality in both captive and wild salamander populations in Europe.

In January of 2016, fearing population effects similar to what was seen with Bd, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) issued a rule to protect salamanders in the United States, many of which are threatened or endangered. The rule was issued under the injurious wildlife provision of the Lacey Act, and restricting the importation of more than 200 species of salamanders into the United States, as well as limiting the interstate movement of the listed salamander species.

In addition to limiting the movement of potential vectors of invasive pathogens such as Bd and Bsal, monitoring plays an important role. Because many amphibians are threatened or endangered, a non-lethal screening method is important. Blooi et al. (2013, correction 2016) published a method for a duplex quantitative polymerase chain reaction (qPCR) assay for the detection of both Bd and Bsal. However, like any assay used for the detection of a pathogen, the Blooi qPCR protocol needed to be optimized and validated. To accomplish this task, the La Crosse FHC requested, and received, a Directorate Resource Assistant Fellow (DFP) for the summer of 2016. Spanning 12 weeks (1 week of orientation, 11 weeks on site), the DFP program places students currently seeking a graduate degree, or those that recently completed a graduate degree, with a Service office to complete a specified project.

BY KEN PHILLIPS, LA CROSSE FISH HEALTH CENTER

Initially focusing on controlling disease outbreaks in trout and salmon reared in hatcheries, the La Crosse Fish Health Center (FHC) has evolved over time to provide expertise in the prevention and monitoring for pathogenic organisms, not just in those species, but in warm and cool water fish, such as catfish, bass and walleye, unionid mussels, and the emerging field of amphibian health.

Many species of amphibians have gone extinct, with many more species of salamanders, toads and frogs threatened or endangered, either through habitat loss, or disease. Although numerous pathogens can cause disease in amphibians, *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*, or Bd, has been documented to have contributed to the extinction of entire amphibian species. Bd causes Cytridiomycosis, a deadly fungal disease that causes thickening of the skin, which makes it difficult for the amphibian to absorb water and salts. Eventually, the amphibian dies.

*Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans*, or Bsal, is a closely related pathogen that causes cytridmycosis in salamanders. Originating in Southeast Asia, the populations in Europe.



Isaac Standish, Directorate Fellow at the La Crosse FHC, collecting a non-lethal swab sample from a frog. Credit: USFWS



Close-up of non-lethal sampling of a frog. Credit: USFWS

Isaac Standish, who completed his Ph.D. in Pathobiology at Michigan State University in May of 2016, was selected for the DFP position at the La Crosse FHC. Over the 11-week period that Isaac was at the La Crosse FHC, he was able to not only optimize and validate the duplex PCR developed by Blooi et al., he was able to incorporate an assay for a third amphibian pathogen, ranavirus. Isaac's work at the La Crosse FHC resulted in the development of a Standard Operating Procedure for the multiplex qPCR, as well as a presentation to biologists at Service Fish Health Centers and Fish Technology Centers.

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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.

### Sea Lamprey Control Staff Attend Engineer's Day

BY PETE HRODEY, MARQUETTE BIOLOGICAL STATION

The Service's Sea Lamprey Control Program (Program) was once again invited to attend the Soo Locks Engineer's Day in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan in late June. Engineer's Day is an annual event that showcases the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lock facility located on the St. Marys River, which connects Lakes Superior and Huron. This year's open house festivities were highlighted by the ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of the MacArthur Lock Electrical Modernization project. For several years now, staff from the Marquette Biological Station have been invited to participate along with other government agencies to showcase the work they do in the local community. The Service's live sea lamprey tank and hands-on demonstrations are always a big attraction. This year the booth was staffed by biological science technicians Jason Pynnonen and Sara Tilton of the Adult Assessment Unit.

Visitor's reactions to seeing live sea lamprey ranged from fascination to outright fear (although, thankfully, no one cried this year). Some people were very excited to touch them, while others had to be persuaded by their friends and family. Many visitors returned multiple times to touch and get an up-close and personal look at the lamprey. In fact, one little boy came back to the booth at least ten times and was able to answer questions about sea lampreys by the end of the day.

Participating in outreach events like this serves many purposes, not the least of which is awareness and relationship building. It was surprising to learn how many people, both from Michigan and across the country, did not know what sea lamprey were or why they are harmful to the Great Lakes. Others thought that sea lamprey had already been eradicated and were no longer an issue.

The Program has been around for over 60 years and has reduced sea lamprey populations by 90% in most areas of the Great Lakes. Currently, sea lampreys are at a 30 year low in Lake Huron, a 20 year low in Lake Michigan and below the target level in Lake Ontario. Despite the Program's historical success and recent accomplishments, its team members and partners know that they must remain vigilant in the fight against controlling the invasive sea lamprey.



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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 &amp; Wildlife Service

# Fisheries, Midwest Region

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## Midwest Region Fisheries Contacts

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### Jordan River National Fish Hatchery

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### Neosho National Fish Hatchery

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