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Conserving America's Fisheries

Feb 9, 2017

this Ossue



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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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Conserving America's Fisheries

A Bit of Local History is Unearthed at Genoa NFH

BY DOUG ALOISI, GENOA NFH



The Steamboat J.S. which burned and sank adjacent to Genoa NFH location in 1910. Credit: Photo courtesy of La Crosse Public Library

touring/excursion boat caught fire and sank just outside the hatchery exterior dikes. The steamboat J.S. was returning from La Crosse to its destination of Lansing Iowa on June 25th, 1910 with over 1000 passengers. The ship departed at 6 p.m. from La Crosse, and was almost directly adjacent to Bad Axe Island when fire broke out. This location is just south of the hatchery exterior dikes.

After some quick thinking by the captain and crew, the boat made shore on Bad Axe Island to offload its passengers. Most made it off by the gangplank; however about two-three hundred passengers had to jump in the river from the upper deck as the first deck was totally engulfed in flames. The evacuation resulted in at least one tragic death, a young married woman that was pregnant with the couple's first child. The only other casualty was a male passenger that purportedly was under arrest for drunkenness in the hold, and may have allegedly been responsible for starting the blaze by careless smoking. Once the passengers disembarked, the captain and a skeleton crew directed the burning ship back into the channel to get it away from the passengers on the island and One of the great things about being located in a small community (where everyone knows your name), is that good people are always interested in the programs and activities of the local community, including our station. One of the big interests currently is the Great River Road Interpretive Center that is being constructed this winter at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH). Even though the project seems to be taking a long time to complete, many people still mention that they are very anxious to see the completed project. Others, hearing that there will be a local history exhibit in the building, have also volunteered sources and other historical items of local interest to be included in the project.

Historians and local authors have also reached out to share their wealth of knowledge in order to interpret the breadth of history that we are blessed with in the local area. One such historian, William Burke, stopped in to check on how the building was coming along. He also passed along a very interesting piece of history that we were unaware of. In 1910, a paddlewheel steamboat that was used as a



Wreckage of the Steamboat J.S. Credit: Photo Courtesy La Crosse Public Library

it floated directly downstream and sunk burning to the waterline. Passengers spent the better part of the night marooned on Bad Axe Island, being rescued by local boats that wrapped up the rescue mission by 3:30 a.m. that morning. We are looking forward to telling this story as part of local history very soon when the Interpretive Center makes its grand opening. Fisheries | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Midwest Region



Salvagers diving on the J.S. Wreck. Credit: Photo Courtesy La Crosse Public Library



Swamp Fish

Fish are cool! I was reminded of that this past fall when we had the opportunity to sample the lowland swamp habitats of southern Illinois. Although many swamps and wetlands have been drained, southern Illinois contains some remnants which still support interesting native lowland fish communities. Many of the species found in swamps are not found in other habitat types and may not frequently turn up in fishery samples or an angler's creel. For me personally, it had been more than a decade since I had sampled lowland swamp habitats, so I was excited to see some old friends. Species in our samples included: Bantam Sunfish, Pirate Perch, Slough Darter, Central Mudminnow, Flier and Banded Pygmy Sunfish. Some of these species are relatively rare in Illinois. The Bantam Sunfish is listed as Threatened in Illinois and has been extirpated from areas of Illinois as a result of habitat alteration. The Banded Pygmy Sunfish's range within Illinois is restricted to the southernmost portion of the state and the Pirate Perch, Slough Darter and Central Mudminnow have all experienced extirpations from portions of their ranges within Illinois.

BY COLBY WRASSE, CARTERVILLE FWCO

A bantam sunfish collected during seining survey. Credit: USFWS



Although the main purpose of our sampling was to monitor for invasive species, there was the added benefit of taking a snapshot of the fish community from locations that are not often sampled. These interesting fish species are a testament to the amazing diversity of fish and demonstrate the importance of conserving and restoring swamp ecosystems.

A Grass Pickerel another "Cool Fish" collected during seining survey. Credit: USFWS



Conserving America's Fisheries

Return of Lake Trout Heralds the Cisco Comeback

BY KATIE STEIGER MEISTER, REGIONAL OFFICE - EXTERNAL AFFAIRS



Adult lake trout. Credit: Katie Steiger-Meister, USFWS

Lake trout are starting to make a comeback! Anglers and biologists are finding unclipped wild lake trout with more frequency, indicating that lake trout are successfully reproducing. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has played a key role in lake trout restoration efforts by supporting increases in the quality and quantity of stocked lake trout. Additional funding has also provided opportunities for more intensive assessment and evaluation of lake trout populations and restoration strategies. With lake trout populations on the rise, and with changes in available prey, there is a need for more forage species, such as coregonids. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding is supporting ground breaking coregonid restoration work starting with the deepwater cisco, commonly referred to as bloaters. In the winter of 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service collected a record-setting two million deepwater cisco eggs from Lake Michigan. The eggs were delivered to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and U.S. Geological Survey facilities to help meet fish stocking goals for restoration in Lake

Ontario. Another major step was taken at a recent Department of Interior coregonid workshop where the Service and U.S. Geological Survey identified key science needs and capabilities to support basin-wide restoration of coregonid species across the Great Lakes.

Cisco restoration is also coming home to our Midwest hatcheries as we begin to develop our capacity to raise ciscoes. This fall we had crews from Jordan River National Fish Hatchery in Michigan working on Lake Huron to collect eggs for our new rearing programs. Once the eggs are collected, they are sent to Genoa National Fish Hatchery in Wisconsin. With wild lake trout populations on the rise, the time of the cisco has arrived!



A deepwater cisco, commonly referred to as a bloater, collected in Lake Michigan during winter spawning efforts. Credit: Katie Steiger-Meister, USFWS



Conserving America's Fisheries

Acoustic Tracking of Stocked Lake Sturgeon in Lake Superior

BY SHARON RAYFORD, ASHLAND FWCO

One of five hundred lake sturgeon raised in the streamside rearing trailer. Credit: USFWS

In 2013, the USFWS, in partnership with Michigan DNR, Ottawa National Forest, Upper Peninsula Power Company, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Michigan Technological University, with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, began operating a Lake Sturgeon streamside rearing trailer on the Ontonagon River, a tributary to Lake Superior located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The purpose of the rearing trailer is to restore a lake sturgeon population to the Ontonagon River while increasing the likelihood of stocked fish imprinting on the Ontonagon River.

This past fall 25 of the largest lake sturgeon (average length 8.8 inches) reared in the trailer were tagged with small acoustic transmitters. Over 500 lake sturgeon, including the 25 with transmitters, were released at two locations within the Ontonagon River (20 and 24 miles from Lake Superior). The objective was to examine the survival, movement, and distribution of lake sturgeon reared in the Ontonagon River trailer. Acoustic receivers were deployed at ten locations throughout the river to detect the "ping" from tagged lake sturgeon if they swam past.

In addition to stationary receivers, biologists used active manual tracking by canoe on eight occasions to locate tagged fish residing between the receivers. Manual tracking allowed us to acquire an idea of how quickly fish were moving downstream without having to retrieve, download and redeploy receivers, to determine general habitat usage, and to detect shed tags/deceased fish. We were also able to range test each receiver, which revealed that receivers' detection range fully covered the width of the river.



Acoustic tag implanted into raised lake sturgeon (VEMCO) Credit: Sharon Rayford, USFWS

All 25 tagged fish have been detected through a combination of stationary receivers and active tracking. Nine fish were detected at the river's mouth within a week (as early as two days poststocking) and five more between 14 and 43 days post-stocking. Seven fish remained upriver for the duration of this study, displaying longer river residency. Only one fish moved upstream but it receded back downstream after two days, eventually entering Lake Superior nine days post-stocking. Active tracking demonstrated that tagged fish did not congregate at specific areas or habitats. Habitat variables collected at time of nearest detection indicated that fish were in water two feet deep and greater, with dominant substrate types being gravel and cobble. Few fish were detected over sandy substrate, and no fish were detected over bedrock. A majority of the fish detections occurred in run or pool habitats, though the lack of detection in riffles could have been caused by the turbulent riffle environment. Four transmitters have not moved since initial detection and we presume the tags have been shed or the fish have died.

We were able to observe movement and distribution of stocked young-of-year sturgeon in the Ontonagon River. More than half the fish swam downstream, exiting the river into Lake Superior within 30 days of stocking, while about 30 percent of the stocked fish remained in the river for at least a month. Assuming that tagged fish survived at an equal or lesser rate than other stocked fish, survival is assessed to be at a minimum 84 percent. Armed with knowledge that we can successfully tag and track youngof-the-year lake sturgeon, future tagging and tracking efforts are anticipated.



Conserving America's Fisheries

The Shutter Closes on 2016: Field Photo Highlights from the Mussel Program

BY MEGAN BRADLEY, GENOA NFH



Driving the mussel boat to the Mississippi River Museum, A flock of gulls disturbed by the boat, Plain pocketbook mussels sieved from their summer home in the cages. Credit: USFWS

Many people look back at the past year, while planning for the year ahead. Freshwater mussel biologists are no different, we spend our time looking back to see what went well, what needs a tweak and what goes on the 'let's not try that again' lists. Best of all are the photos from the year because they capture the big and the small moments. This year was a special one because Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) acquired a new mussel biologist, Megan Bradley, and we bought a GoPro camera, one that will safely weather a dive in the Mississippi or an hour or two on the deck of the mussel boat. We've also got a jump on the year and already produced more than 50,000 endangered Winged mapleleaf mussel juveniles and have a system full of mussels ready to grow out for the summer. Take a minute and enjoy the photos that tell the other story of our year in the field. In July the mussel team met up with colleagues from other field offices and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and checked on the status of Sheepnose mussels on the Chippewa River. The water was flowing fast but it's a beautiful, wild stretch of river.



Divers completing quadrats in Chippewa River, Young of year bass gathered around dive platform rail, Largemouth bass on quarry shelf. Credit: USFWS

In mid-August the two Genoa NFH mussel biologists along with several other US. Fish and Wildlife Service divers, took dive rescue training, to improve their ability to respond if there were an accident in the field. Training culminated in a day of diving in Lake Wazee, a very deep quarry near Black River Falls, Wisconsin. The divers had a chance to let down their hair after hours of towing fellow divers and hauling gear and appreciate the biology of the quarry.

October was a busy month of field work for mussels and thankfully was a month of beautiful weather. Two days were spent in Dubuque, Iowa at the Mississippi River museum collecting mussels that grew in cages there for the summer. At this site, biologists boat in from a ramp upstream and use the boat as a floating platform for processing mussels. In addition to the mussels raised here, plenty of other wildlife abounds on the river, even in the busiest ports.



USFWS Midwest dive team members after rescue diver course, White heelsplitter siphoning at surface, Mucket burrowed into substrate with siphons visible. Credit: USFWS



Conserving America's Fisheries

Meeting for Pallids



Pallid sturgeon at Neosho NFH. Credit: USFWS

BY BRUCE HALLMAN, NEOSHO NFH

Twice a year, a veritable Who's Who of pallid sturgeon experts assembles in Blue Springs, Missouri to talk shop. The latest meeting was the last week of January, and the Neosho National Fish Hatchery (NFH) was represented by hatchery manager Roderick May and lead biologist Jaime Pacheco. I was invited to tag along as well.

Meeting as they always do at the Burr Oak Woods Conservation Nature Center (a very nice place to visit, by the way), about 35 came from all directions – some many hours distant. At least five states were represented in this assemblage, with others invited but absent. No less than a dozen organizations (federal, state and others) and three fish hatcheries were a part of this vital interaction.

We depend a great deal on the discussions and decisions made by this team to guide and direct our operations here in the southwest corner of the state. The home of the pallid sturgeon is mainly the Missouri River – the longest body of water in the United States and the fourth longest in the whole

world (when measured down to the ocean). This massive river winds more than 2300 miles from the high mountains of Montana until it empties into the Mississippi at St Louis.

This ancient creature (some have nicknamed it the "dinosaur fish") has withstood many millions of years of variable conditions and yet survived. So many other species have gone extinct over those same millennia. Population numbers indicate that whatever is going on now is likely its toughest challenge yet. While never super abundant along its range, there are perhaps less than 1000 mature pallid sturgeon adults in the lower 800 miles. Despite having many thousands of hatchery-raised young for the past 15+ years from Neosho NFH alone, there is a struggle for "recruitment" or establishment in the population from many new fish at all.

So these meetings of minds look to address current problems (lack of suitable habitat for feeding or spawning, changes in water flow, pollution, channel dredging, illegal harvest, etc.) and present findings towards solutions. We heard from several different crews that work the river and search for adult sturgeon. From Nebraska and Missouri reports, the same grim results resounded – they just aren't seeing many fish out there. One Missouri Department of Conservation team works the 200 mile stretch of the Mississippi between the Missouri and Ohio Rivers. Detailing their three year effort to locate adult sturgeon, using over 130,000 baited hooks left overnight in the water, they were only able to catch 34 pallids in total. In three years! While not quite as foreboding, the other crews from upstream echoed these dismal findings.

Another important avenue of sturgeon study concerns genetics. Using samples taken from many fish over many years and many miles of river, a disturbing trend has surfaced. Genetic analysis has found that the more downstream a fish is, the more likely it is



Neosho NFH Project Leader Rod May during meeting presentation. Credit: Bruce Hallman, USFWS

to be a hybrid. This means that it has mixed heritage – somewhere in its history there is another species (in this case, shovelnose sturgeon) that has crossbred with a pallid to produce it. For recovery purposes, the production hatcheries such as Neosho NFH will never want hybrid fish to spawn and raise. To keep a species going, purebred adults are needed for breeding and transmitting their genes to future generations. Alarmingly, pallids caught below St Louis were found to be almost 99% hybrids. Fortunately, higher upstream the genetics show more hope.

More developments that may affect us at Neosho NFH concern population demographics in the river; in particular, a fish called a chub. Various species live in the Missouri River and due to their smaller size; they are a food source for sturgeon and other

larger fish. There have been some experimental moves toward breeding them for captive food sources as well as for release into the river. Other smaller fish might work as well for these purposes.

Another concern that was raised involved the alarming population shift away from sturgeon as top predator and toward large catfish and Asian carp. These fish will be competing for food with the pallids. Evidence that this is the case comes from the scrawny condition of most adults when captured. Neosho has proven to be a good holding station for these emaciated individuals as all our fish gain significant weight during their stay. We are currently feeding them live trout and they do quite well under our watchful care.

Finally, the complex situation in such a gigantic river isn't figured out easily, quickly or cheaply. Already many millions of dollars have been funneled into this effort to save this beautiful fish, and more will definitely be needed. Talk of flow rate, sediment release, sandbar formation, interception zones, bedform examination, reproductive readiness, laser ray analysis and other topics all are aimed at this one goal. Let's hope that Neosho NFH can continue to be involved for the duration and that a strong species rebound can come soon for our beloved dinosaur fish!

We are progressing in our sturgeon program here, working to make things even more productive for our goals. On tap are UV treatment, filters and chillers to get our facility equipped for better water handling. As for our other programs, all is well with our rainbow trout program. We are still producing 230,000 10-inch fish for mitigation efforts at Lake Taneycomo in Branson, Missouri. We are moving toward our third year working to breed endangered Topeka shiner minnows. Still in progress is our desire to move into endangered freshwater mussels, particularly the Neosho mucket. And we always want to see what else we can do to conserve, protect and enhance for our country!

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Conserving America's Fisheries



The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge along with the International Wildlife Refuge Alliance and DTE Energy of Southeast Michigan hosted the 7th annual Eagle Tour at the DTE Monroe Power plant on January 28, 2017. This annual event has become so popular that a lottery takes place to give visitors a fair chance to win a spot. With over 1,900 groups that applied, only 60 people were chosen to join the tour.

The popularity of viewing eagles is likely due to the fact that for many decades the Bald Eagle was an extremely rare site in the lower 48. The Eagle has made an incredible comeback since the banning of DDT (a pesticide that was sprayed on crops and got into the food web of the bald eagle and other species) and the protection of critical habitat. Many of the participants on the tour had never seen an eagle in their life and left in awe and gratitude. For others, taking photos and seeking eagles has become a hobby for which the eagle tour was just another fun eagle outing. One thing all participants had in common, they felt incredibly lucky to get to experience the eagle tour and share this memory with others.

So what exactly is this annual eagle tour? And why do we anticipate large numbers of eagles in one spot? That's where the partnership between the refuge and DTE comes into place. The DTE Energy Power Plant located on Lake Erie produces a warm water discharge. This creates a refuge for eagles as well as other species to come and enjoy a non-frozen buffet when Lake Erie has iced over for the season. The warm water attracts eagles to fish for shad and other fish. During especially frigid years the numbers of eagles increase. This year we have had some mild weeks leading up to the tour and there was some concern that the eagle numbers would be low. Even still with less ice out on the lake we saw around 50 to 60 eagles on each tour.

Naturalist and volunteer Dorothy McLeer has been a part of the tour since the beginning. She always starts off the tour by teaching participants just how cool these magnificent birds are. When McLeer was asked about her experience being a part of this special event she responded, "My first reflection over the past seven years is that every participant, nearly to a person, no matter their place of residence, social standing, or political point of view, is happy to be there--and after the year that Americas has been through, that's saying something! This is an equal opportunity event that becomes a bonding experience. They are being catered to and made to feel special, thanks to the efforts of each agency and each person involved in this program. In the early years, they were happy to get on the list, and now they're happy to be chosen out of the thousands of people in the lottery; they're happy that they're going to be treated to a unique experience, and happy that the unique experience is watching the symbol of our nation in a form of its habitat, albeit a massive power plant, behaving in a natural, wild way. It's an eye opening experience and helps people look at nature and wildlife as they interface with industry, revealing a potential coexistence between the two. It reconnects people with where they live, which is the main focus of my job! "

If you didn't make it into the tour this year you can always apply next year. The eagle tour lottery registration opens each Thanksgiving week and remains open until the first week of January. This gives people plenty of time to register.

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Fisheries, Midwest Region

Conserving America's Fisheries

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.



Conserving America's Fisheries

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