

# Missouri River FWCO

## Bismarck, ND

### November/December, 2019 MONTHLY ACTIVITIES

#### Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment Program summary

November is typically a month of winding down the field season and staff beginning to partake in the annual ritual of hunting and holidays. This year, despite a widespread blizzard in October that left over two feet of snow behind, pallid sturgeon crews were able to complete the annual assessment work. This was the first year of conducting sampling strategies developed under the Pallid Sturgeon Population Assessment Program 2.0 revision.

Fork lengths for the hatchery origin pallid sturgeon (HOPS) ranged from 408 to 1012 mm with an average length of 550 mm. Pallids from 13 of the 19 year classes that were stocked in RPMA 2 were captured. Ninety-seven shovelnose sturgeon were captured, marked and released with only one being recaptured. A total of 182 age-0 sturgeon were captured in segment 4 (downstream of Yellowstone River). There were 247 telemetry relocations of 84 individual radioed HOPS. We were able to recapture and assess reproductive condition on 18 HOPS.

Spring broodstock collection efforts resulted in the crews successful in capturing, assessing and hauling five wild adults to GDNFH during the spring. Three of the fish were suspected to be ripe females and two were males that had not contributed to the propagation program. Unfortunately, after further assessment at the hatchery, it was determine one of the females had immature eggs and she was returned to



*Kate Huber releasing a recaptured pallid sturgeon resulting from the Conservation Stocking Program.*



*Ryan Wilson releasing a recaptured pallid sturgeon resulting from the Conservation Stocking Program*

the river. Our office spent nearly two days with two boats trying to capture this individual female by drifting trammel nets over 8,000 meters.

## **Native Species Restoration**



*Fishing for burbot broodstock in Garrison Dam Tailrace in December.*

Attempts to collect burbot for the Garrison Dam NFH were unsuccessful during the first attempt. Additional broodstock are needed for maintaining genetic integrity of the brood fish. Even a FWS Retiree, Al Sapa; aka “the Ling King” was brought in for his expertise. Staff from the FWCO and NFH braved the elements to give it a college try.

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*Attempting to collect burbot below Garrison Dam*

## **Sikes Act**



*Crew responsible for clearing 78 tons of Russian Olive trees. Clearing and hauling branches to the chipper for disposal.*

Approximately 157,240 lbs (78.6 tons) of Russian olive trees were removed from grasslands that covered about 22 ½ acres during August. That was about 25 dump trailer loads to the landfill and removed from the prairie. Work was accomplished by Fire crews from Ellsworth AFB and MRFWCO crews.



The mammal study was reinitiated for the fall and into the winter months utilizing camera traps at Minot AFB. The purpose is to document species that are utilizing habitats on the base.



*Trail camera image from mammal study.*

## **Aquatic Invasive Species**

### **Missouri River Watershed Asian Carp**

A cross regional meeting was held in Bloomington, MN to inform cross regional partners of progress to date and the status of the Asian Carp Program and incorporate feedback. The desired outcome was to develop a uniform understanding of the role for USFWS coordinators and Big River FWCOs for coordinating and implementing a comprehensive population assessment program that serves as basis for implementation the National Plan for coordinated Asian Carp Management and Control. Representatives from Regions 3, 4, 5, and 7 were present to discuss implementation of the plan.

## **Fish Passage**

Staff with the North Dakota Water Commission has shared with us a reference map they generated for low-head (L-H) dam hazard exposure for the Governor and the SWC. They are looking to trade data back and forth so that fish barriers that also are L-H dams can be included in their inventory for future mitigation and their L-H dam inventory can supplement our findings.

Completion of the final report on the fish barrier assessment for the Sheyenne River watershed and the data has started to be analyzed for the Little Missouri River watershed from the 2019 assessment.

## **Great Plains FHP**

We have incorporated updated information into the draft strategic plan to update information, goals and objectives for aquatic habitat conservation. Expected to be completed in December, a draft will be circulated to incorporate our partners input and move toward finalizing the document. Yvette Converse (SA) has been a tremendous help in providing significant input and revisions. In addition, the website has been updated and a new webmaster has joined the team. Mary McFadzen from Montana State University has provided her skills to greatly improve the web presence of the Great Plains FHP. Yvette Converse has been a tremendous help on the update of the strategic plan. Thanks Mary and Yvette!

[www.prairiefish.org](http://www.prairiefish.org)

## **Bio-monitoring Populations on Great Plains National Wildlife Refuges**

Field work is completed and data and reports are being compiled.

## **Tribal Natural Resource Technical Assistance**

No work activities this period.

## **Outreach Activities**

No activities this period.

## **Staffing**

Bethany Davies began work on December 2nd and by December 4<sup>th</sup> was in the field becoming familiar with the ongoing projects on the Minot AFB and becoming familiarized with the work she'll be involved with in the next field season. Welcome aboard Beth!

All seasonal staff completed ongoing fieldwork and were dismissed for the season in early November. I am confident that their energy, passion, and enthusiasm will be missed during the winter months. Their accomplishments throughout the summer were tremendous and despite their initial lack of familiarity with the projects, they excelled.

A new administrative assistant will be joining the Ecological Services and Fisheries and Aquatic Conservation office in Bismarck. Stephanie Hauge comes with a great deal of experience most recently serving in a support role in the governor's office. Drew and I were both very impressed by her experiences to date and think she will be a great fit for our teams. She will be starting on December 23rd. Welcome aboard Stephanie!

