

Adopt-a-Salmon Family Program Receives Award

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Adopt-a-Salmon Family Program was recognized by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Commission, receiving the Conservation Organization Award of Excellence. Each year the Adopt-a-Salmon Family Program reaches hundreds of middle school students, as well as their teachers, in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Through the program students experience and learn first hand about salmon restoration and other aspects of wildlife biology and conservation. The program gets students outdoors and teaches them stewardship in protecting natural resources.

The 2009 school year marked the seventeenth year in which the Adopt-A-Salmon Family Program has been providing outreach and education to school groups in support of Atlantic salmon recovery and restoration efforts. The program is administered by the Service's Central New England Field Office with support from the NNFH, the Amoskeag Fishways, and a corps of very dedicated volunteers and Student Conservation Association interns. Participating schools implement the program throughout the school year, which includes a 90 minute educational visit to NNFH in November and incubating salmon eggs in classrooms beginning in January/February for release as fry into the watershed in the late Spring. In February 2009, 34 schools received 12,320 eggs to be reared in classroom incubators. Throughout the winter and spring, eggs were monitored by students until they hatched. In late Spring, fry were released into the Merrimack River watershed. In November 2009, 1,325 students and 148 teachers and parents from 18 schools throughout central New England participated in the educational program at NNFH. During the visit, participants learned about the effects of human impacts on migratory fish and other aquatic species and observed Atlantic salmon spawning demonstrations.

The success of the program is in large part due to the leadership of Service biologist Doug Smithwood and retired teacher George May, volunteer coordinator. In an interview with a local newspaper Smithwood states, "To have a program that connects children with nature, you have to make it a hands-on, intimate experience. That's what we're able to offer through the Adopt-a-Salmon program."