

Natchitoches

National Fish Hatchery



photo: USFWS



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Jan Dean, Assistant Hatchery Manager
 615 South Drive
 Natchitoches, LA 71457
 Phone: 318/352 5324
 Fax: 318/352 8082
www.fws.gov/natchitoches
www.facebook.com/natchitochesNFH

Hatchery Facts

- Established: May 21, 1930, under the authority of the White Act, 46 Statute 371, to produce largemouth bass, redear sunfish, bluegill, and catfish for local public waters and farm ponds.
- Current production programs can be grouped into three categories: Recovery (Louisiana pearlshell mussels), Restoration (alligator gar and alligator snapping turtles), and Recreation (largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish).
- Acres: 98 land acres; 46 surface acres for fish production (53 ponds).
- Only federal fish hatchery in the State of Louisiana.

Hatchery Objectives

- Help develop rearing techniques and restore depleted populations of alligator gar.
- Develop culture techniques for alligator snapping turtles.
- Develop spawning and culture techniques for the Louisiana pearlshell mussel.
- Improve recreational fishing opportunities on federal lands.
- Develop environmental education programming that promotes the Service's natural resource mission and utilizes hatchery facilities as an outdoor classroom for all Natchitoches Parish schools.
- Develop cultural education programming and highlight the cultural and natural resource relationships between the Service and the Caddo Indian Nation.

Management Tools

- Four intensive culture systems for spawning and holding species of special concern.
- Fifty-three ponds for extensive culture of a variety of species.
- Four in-pond raceways for the culture of anadromous and/or freshwater riverine species.
- Cooperative work efforts with the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership, USGS National Wetlands Research Center, various universities, Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center, Gulf Coastal Plains/Ozarks Landscape Conservation Cooperative, and the natural resources divisions of the states of Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Hatchery Production (2010)

Species	Total number	Total wt. (lbs.)
Alligator Gar	985	101.0
Alligator Snapping Turtle	101	13.0
Bluegill	680,706	1748.4
Channel Catfish	100,791	1622.5
Largemouth Bass	391,170	648.0
Redear Sunfish	79,038	142.5
Grand total	1,252,791	4275.3

An Assessment of Economic Contributions from Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Conservation (Drs. Caudill and Charbonneau, 2010) documented that recreational angling for fish produced by the Natchitoches NFH results in considerable expenditures of recreation-related good and services. The document showed that for every \$1 invested in the hatchery, there was a \$3.60 return. In 2010 the hatchery raised 1.2 million recreational fish resulting in 26 jobs generated and a total economic output of \$2,368,764.

Public Use Opportunities

- 5,000 visitors annually.
- 9,000 gallon, 16 tank public aquarium featuring live exhibits of native southeastern fish and reptiles as well as static displays honoring the site as a historical Caddo Indian village and linking the Service's commitment to cultural and environmental stewardship.
- K-12 environmental education programming using the hatchery as an outdoor classroom.
- Caddo Indian Memorial Plaza honoring the hatchery as a sacred site for the Caddo Indian Nation. This plaza is outdoors adjacent to the aquarium building and has benches for meditation and reflection.
- Birdwatching.

Financial Impact of Hatchery

- Six-person staff.
- Current year budget (FY10) \$658,340.
- 3.6:1 ratio return on recreational dollars generated:invested on recreations species. FY10: \$2,368,764 total economic output; 26 jobs generated; 1.2 million fish stocked.

Other

- F.I.S.H. – Friends in Support of the Hatchery, the Southeast Region's first fisheries friends group, was incorporated in 2000 and has worked hard ever since. The group has garnered over \$50,000 in grant money since 2000 and has hosted or helped host numerous events including the Annual Open House, the dedication of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge, the hatchery's 75th Anniversary, and the dedication of the Caddo Indian Memorial Plaza. The group is active in promoting the outdoors and fishing as wholesome, healthy recreation for young people and has provided fishing derby opportunities for kids since 2000. For more information on F.I.S.H., contact Debbie Waskom, President, 318/357 1623.
- Fish CULTURE - Native American culture and fish culture at Natchitoches National Fish



Louisiana pearlshell mussel bed.
Credit: Tony Brady/USFWS



Louisiana pearlshell mussel adult and sub-adult. Credit: Ted Soileau/USFS

Hatchery are woven together like the cordage of a net. When the hatchery was built in 1931, construction workers discovered over 100 Caddo Indian burials. Research verified that the hatchery grounds were part of the Natchitoches Indian village described by Henri de Tonti. The one-handed Italian-born French officer chronicled his experience with LaSalle in his storied 1690 journey through present-day Louisiana. The native Caddo people stewarded the land, relying on fish for food.

The importance of fishing and land stewardship are knotted together to this day. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service honors the hatchery grounds as a sacred Caddo site, and seeks to honor the cultural heritage of these great people. The hatchery does this through combined environmental, cultural, and heritage education programs. So whether it is the actual culturing of fish for conservation, or the use of fish as part of their cultural heritage, the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery continues to be a national leader in the fish culture arena.

Questions and Answers

What is a fish hatchery?

Federal fish hatcheries have been part of our nation's resource management efforts for more than 100 years. In addition to fish, most federal hatcheries are now working with other aquatic species besides fish. These can include reptiles, amphibians, mussels and even plants. Hatcheries can be warm water, cool water, or cold water facilities. Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery is a warm water station currently involved in spawning, hatching, and rearing young fish (fingerlings), turtles, and mussels. The various species are raised to a size and age which provide them with the best chance of surviving in the wild. The hatchery is also involved in research projects for these various species including tagging and monitoring for tracking the species in the wild, fish feed trials, and culture and spawning techniques. Resource managers nationwide acknowledge hatcheries as a valuable tool for the preservation of our nation's aquatic resources.

How do you feed the fish in the aquarium and what do they eat?

The fish and reptiles in the aquarium are fed twice a week. The feed that the hatchery uses is called Mazuri® feed, which is a brand of Purina® feeds. The feed is specially made to have the best nutritional value for omnivores, herbivores, or reptiles and the various species are fed accordingly. The feed comes in a powder form and is mixed with water. It gels and is similar in consistency to a dense brownie. It is cut up and placed in the tanks by a hatchery worker or volunteer. Feed that is not eaten is removed the next day.

How long do the species that Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery works with live?

The lifespan of the various species are all different. Largemouth bass can live up to 15 years. Alligator gar can live to 50 years of age. It is believed that the alligator snapping turtle can live up to 150 years, but 50-80 years is much more likely. The Louisiana pearlshell mussel actually has not been investigated long enough to determine an actual life span but biologists provide an educated guess of at least 50 years...and probably longer based on similar species in the same family.