



# *Uvalde National Fish Hatchery* **Monthly Activity Report** *February 2014*

## Staff

**Project Leader**  
● Grant Webber

**Engineering  
Equipment  
Operator**  
● Cirilo Alonzo

**Maintenance  
Worker**  
● Rene Guerra

**Fish Biologist**  
● Rick Echols

**Administrative  
Technician**  
● Sandra  
Castañeda

**Animal  
Caretaker**  
● Vacant

**Volunteers'**  
● Thomas  
Jetzer &  
● Patricia  
Schenk

## **Partnerships and Accountability**

*"The station received its first Devils River minnow individuals this month."*

As identified in approved Recovery Plans, refugia efforts continue for the Texas Wild-rice, Fountain Darter, Comanche Springs Pupfish, and San Marcos salamander. All species continue to be performing well. The station continues

to maintain communications with the San Marcos Aquatic Resource Center and Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program for existing and upcoming refugia activities of threatened and endangered species native to the Edwards Aquifer system. The station has been working with the Edwards Aquifer Authority to

establish an access agreement that will allow the EAA to monitor the stations Burket Well, which is an Edwards Aquifer water source. The well is no longer used by the hatchery for fish production but allows a unique opportunity for monitoring the critically important aquifer.

## **Workforce Management**

Sandra participated in a Regional Office Pivot table's webinar for the Administrative and budget staff. She also completed utilization reporting for fleet, heavy equipment, and miscellaneous small equipment.

Volunteers Thomas Jetzer and Patricia Schenk continued with their normal maintenance activities of endangered Texas wild-rice, as well as collection of vegetative

material for the amphipod separator. The volunteers have also completed the installation of three salamander holding systems.

Grant Webber and Rene Guerra drove to Temple, Texas to pick up and reapply for their government identification cards. The 4-hour drive, one-way, was the closest location to the hatchery that processes Department of Interior ID cards.

We were recently contacted by an individual from Camping World that will be writing a story about our winter volunteers, Thomas Jetzer and Patricia Schenk. The article will be published in the Eddies magazine.

Cirilo Alonzo spent two weeks at the Southwestern Native Aquatic Resource and Recovery Center assisting them with earthwork activities.

## Aquatic Species Activities



Devils River minnow tank

*“Approximately 43,000 Comanche Springs pupfish were harvested this month”*

A second Comanche Springs pupfish pond was harvested this month. The pond yielded over 43,000 pupfish. Similar to the pond that was harvested last month, the heavy vegetation greatly benefitted the species by providing sufficient cover and food availability. The fish were transferred into three available ponds. No crayfish were observed in the pond. Based on the large numbers harvested in the 1-acre ponds this winter, it is apparent that the management techniques for the species are highly successful. The station currently has three 1-acre refugia ponds for Comanche Springs pupfish and estimates the hatchery’s total population to be over 100,000 individuals.

We are in the process of determining a quantitative method for accurately estimating pupfish numbers in ponds. Last fall, we used unbaited minnow traps to capture and move 3,345 Comanche Springs pupfish to a new pond. This was an extremely

successful (and less stressful) method of passively capturing fish. We will attempt to predict pond populations by setting minnow traps just prior to harvest. A ratio of fish trapped to actual fish harvested will allow us to predict standing populations in the future.

We continue to spawn fountain darters for the life history studies. The larger fry were moved to aquaria to make room for several hundred younger, smaller fry. The splitting of fry will minimize competition and potential predation. These fish will be delivered to the San Marcos Aquatic Resource Center (SMARC) when they are three to four months of age. The fish will be used for life history studies.

Adjustments were made to water quality controls in the new salamander set-ups. Water quality readings are being taken daily to fine tune the total dissolved gas levels. Efforts have resulted in gas levels lowering to tolerable levels for the San Marcos salamander. We wish to thank Valentin Cantu at SMARC for providing the gas reduction valve design to

Uvalde. High dissolved gas levels are lethal to the San Marcos salamander.

Staff has nearly completed 8 recirculating raceway setups for Devils River minnow. Two setups are complete. The other six will be completed as funding is available for recirculation pumps.

On February 6, 2014, the station received its first Devils River minnow. Fifty-nine F1 individuals were received from SMARC to test the hatchery’s new systems. Upon a successful test, additional individuals will be received to increase the captive numbers to promote species recovery.

Grant Webber and Rick Echols met with Michelle Crawford again this month to discuss additional specific needs of her study. Rick provided Michelle with guidance on captive propagation of the plants. The hatchery will be setting up several raceways inside and out. Plants will be grown from seeds outdoors and later relocated indoors to better control the light intensities.



Devils River Minnow tanks

## Facility Maintenance

Maintenance staff continued to retrofit the recently acquired Ford F-450 truck with an existing aluminum flatbed. The flatbed will allow flexible uses for the truck. The first use for the truck will be hauling a viewable distribution tank with fish to a nearby elementary school to connect youth to the outdoors. The aluminum flatbed was already property of the hatchery since it was removed over two years ago from a truck that was auctioned off by GSA. The station incurred very minimal cost to install the multipurpose use aluminum flatbed to the F-450 truck.

The new PVC drainline has been in full use this month with all of the tankhouse discharges draining into the east wildlife pond. Numerous species of waterfowl have been observed foraging and loafing in the newly filled pond.

Routine maintenance activities dominated most of the month. Due to extreme cold temperatures, most of the maintenance activities were completed indoors.



F-450 truck-surplus acquisition



F-450 truck with aluminum flatbed

## Additional Facility Activities

Efforts continue for fertilization of ponds to promote zooplankton growth for endangered and threatened species. The varied diet promotes more healthy and robust fish. The new micron net pens are used to collect the zooplankton.



Micro-net pens

The hatchery staff celebrated 30 years of service with Cirilo Alonzo. Not only has Cirilo put in 30 years with the Fish and Wildlife Service, he has spent his entire career at the Uvalde NFH. To celebrate this momentous occasion, a lunch party was held in his honor to show our thanks and appreciation for his hard work and dedication. We were accompanied by his wife, Ana Alonzo, and retired Uvalde NFH employee, Olivia Castillo.



Cirilo and wife, Ana.



## Recycling Efforts

Staff recycled approximately 15 pounds of cardboard, 20 pounds of paper, 20 pounds of glass, and 15 pounds of plastic this month.



## Facility Visitors

The hatchery was visited by 20 individuals this month for bird watching and photography activities.



## Weather

February's air temperatures ranged from a low of 30°F to a high of 93°F. Overall, high and low temperatures were below normal, with temperatures being very extreme from one day to the next. Measurable rainfall accumulated only 0.32 inches total for the month. According to The Weather Underground, the monthly precipitation average for Uvalde in February is 1.08 inches. Even though last year's precipitation total was at the 100 year average (23.97"), drought conditions persist. The Edwards Aquifer/Uvalde pool (measured in Uvalde) 10-day average is at 834.7'. Since the water level is lower than 840 feet below sea level, users of the Uvalde pool water remain at stage 5 pumping restrictions. The water level was measured at the station's Wilson Well this month by Edwards Aquifer Authority. The water level measured 81 feet below the ground level. This was a drop of approximately five feet since the last reading was taken in August 2013.

### Uvalde National Fish Hatchery

754 County Road 203  
Uvalde, Texas 78801

PHONE:  
(830) 278-2419

FAX:  
(830) 278-6042

E-MAIL:  
fw2\_fr\_uvalde@fws.gov



*"February's weather was somewhat unusual, hot one day, freezing the next"*



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