



Making Waves



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International Efforts Return Sturgeon to Tribal Waters



By Scott Yess



Lake sturgeon are primitive fish that historically inhabited many of Minnesota's large rivers and lakes associated with these rivers.



In northwest Minnesota, native Americans came to depend on the seasonal availability of lake sturgeon, particularly in the spring when tribal villages were often located near waters where these fish spawned. Likewise, early European settlements on the Lake of the Woods were established to commercially harvest this species whose caviar and fine flesh were sought worldwide.



The White Earth Indian Reservation in northwestern Minnesota lies within the drainage basin of the Red River, a stream that flows north into Canada.

By the end of the 19th century however, lake sturgeon populations were in decline here due to over harvest, pollution, and water development projects. This pattern continued throughout most of the 20th century. For example, the last record of a lake sturgeon near the White Earth Indian Reservation was from Lake Lida in 1957.



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To reverse this trend and return the species to a portion of its historic range, the White Earth Natural Resources Department (NRD), the Minnesota Department of Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Rainy River First Nations of Canada entered into a management agreement in 1997 to restore lake sturgeon in White Earth

Lake and Round Lake on the White Earth Reservation.

Management plan quotas call for the annual rearing and stocking of 8,000 fingerlings in White Earth Lake and 5,000 fingerlings in Round Lake. The lakes will receive about half these amounts in 2012. Remaining fish will be stocked in the Wild Rice River, a nearby tributary of the Red River.



Significant team efforts take place prior to stocking. One huge hurdle is to test the spawning sturgeon for viral pathogens prior to shipping their eggs from Canada to the U.S. Members of this assessment team included: Scott Yess (La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conserva-

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Outreach Season in Full Swing

By Nicholas Bloomfield



Spring brings a flood of field work and, perhaps more importantly, outreach events. At the La Crosse FWCO, we strive to partake in as many of these activities as our schedules will allow. This year has been no different, with several of our staff taking time to visit schools, prepare booth displays, and of course go fishing! The events have included:

April 13 - Heidi Keuler and I visited Sparta. As luck would have it, a trout stream runs through school property. This presented us with a terrific opportunity to provide the kids with some unique hands on experience.

We scraped together every boot and wader we could and allowed the kids to sample for aquatic invertebrates in the stream. I think the day will be remem-

Aquatic inverts exert a magnetic draw on students



bered by all for a long time, especially the ones who ended up wet!

April 21, 26 - Heidi made two trips to Bangor Elementary in April. A carnival was held the first date as she ran minnow races and backyard bass, a tall task. Luckily, husband Matt was on hand to help out. She returned a second time with a tub of live fish. A new crop of fish experts are in the works at Bangor.

April 22 - Pam Thiel and I manned a display booth prepared by Mark Steingraeber for Earth Day at Myrick Hixon Ecopark. Perfect weather brought hundreds of visitors who stopped to learn what we as citizens can do to improve our environment.

April 27 - Heidi, Heather Rodriguez, and I travelled to Trempealeau Elementary Environmental Awareness Day. I had several species of fish on hand to learn about. Heidi and Heather had the invertebrate duties. This event is quickly becoming one of my favorite. The kids are



The great outdoors provide a scenic classroom for Nick to teach students about fish

very enthusiastic and we receive an environmentally themed t-shirt designed by a student. The thank you cards they later send us never cease to entertain either.

May 12 - The annual, ever popular, Kids Fishing Day at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery was once again a huge success. Around 200 kids and their families showed up to learn about fish anatomy and cleaning, archery, water safety, and of course fishing. Mark, Katie Holland, Heather, and I

were joined by many friends and volunteers who helped the Genoa staff with learning stations, baiting hooks, and all the other good stuff that happens when 200 hooks are flying around. The action was constant and hopefully we were able to hook a few kids into becoming lifetime anglers. As usual, the staff at Genoa did a great job of making this event one that families around the region look forward to.



Hooked on Fishing!

May 15, 16 - Mark and Ann Runstrom headed up two stations at Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge's annual River Education Days. Ann showcased some of the fish found on site, while Mark had a variety of invertebrates found in our region. Meanwhile Heidi, Katie, and Heather were in Tomah for the annual fishing day at the Veterans Administration facility here. Staff from Genoa NFH had the pond well stocked and provided a seemingly unending supply

of delicious fried catfish. Meanwhile, local kids helped veterans in need land their fish. The day is rewarding for all involved.



Tomah VA Fishing Day

May 18 - To round things out Heather, Heidi, and I went to Perrot Park for an event with Montessori schools and Northside Elementary. Heather and I discussed backpack electrofishing and provided a demonstration while Heidi showcased invertebrates. At lunch, we were even treated to an exciting juggling act complete with knives, unicycles, and fire!

At the La Crosse FWCO, we obviously take outreach very seriously. We spend a lot of time and resources to educate the public about our aquatic natural resources. After all, people don't care about what they don't know about. Getting more people to feel an attachment to the natural world can go a long way towards conserving our resources.

Upcoming Events



Mark Your Calendars Now!

Kids Fishing Day & Derby
June 2, 9 am - 2 pm
Necedah National Wildlife Refuge
Necedah, WI

Coon Creek TroutFest
June 16, 10 am - 11 pm
Coon Valley, WI

Hope to See You!

Asian Carps Search Resumes

By Nicholas Bloomfield

It was that time of year ... again.

Besides filing tax returns in April, we also completed the first two rounds of Asian carp sampling for 2012 in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) and in the upper Des Plaines River. Our mission was to sample for Asian carps that may have breached the electric dispersal barrier in the CAWS or migrated to the upper Des Plaines River (adjacent to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal - CSSC).

The week of April 16, Katie Holland, Mark Steingraeber, and I were tasked with completing ten 15-minute electrofishing runs per day. A new twist in the sampling protocol this year meant fewer (but more widely scattered) sites to sample throughout the CAWS.

Fixed sites remained the same as the past year (i.e., Lake Calumet, Little Calumet River, South Chicago River, North Chicago River, North Shore Channel) while random sites filled in gaps between the fixed sites, as well as downstream in the Cal-Sag Channel and the CSSC.

We collected a total of 2,348 fish in four days, representing 36 species and one hybrid group. The lone Asian carp we encountered was a large grass carp, a species previously known to inhabit the CAWS. Meanwhile, bighead and silver carp were neither seen nor captured.



Nick has his hands full with a grass carp captured in the Cal-Sag Channel

Two weeks later, recent FWCO addition Heather Rodriguez and I returned to sample in the upper Des Plaines River. Asian carp have free access to the upper Des Plaines River via the Illinois River. Above the confluence of the Des Plaines River and the CSSC, the two water bodies run parallel to one another for several miles.

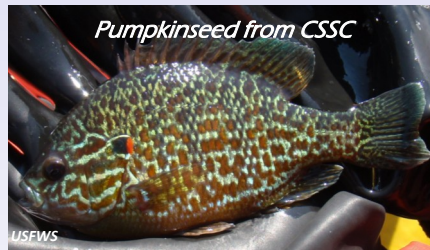
The presence of adult Asian carp in the upper Des Plaines River would be alarming. While a chain link barrier fence that separates the water bodies would likely stop all adult fish, any fry they produce

could have access to the CSSC above the dispersal barrier during a flood event.



Des Plaines River floodwaters flow into the CSSC upstream of the electrical barriers (September 2008)

With assistance from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, we netted and electrofished at three sites in search of Asian carps. On this trip, we captured a total of 1,395 fish representing 36 species and two hybrid groups. As in 2011, no Asian carps were seen or captured here.



Pumpkinseed from CSSC

Return trips are planned in June for both of these projects, so stay tuned!

Sturgeon Return

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tion Office) who traveled to Baudette (MN) to collect tissue samples from 25 lake sturgeon; this was accomplished with assistance from Tom Heinrich (MN DNR). The samples were delivered to Dr. Becky Lasee (La Crosse Fish Health Center) on April 30th. Viral tests later proved negative, permitting the international shipment of fertilized eggs from these fish to the Genoa (WI) National Fish Hatchery.



Thus on May 6, Randy Zortman and Jerald Roberts (White Earth NRD) assisted Joe Hunter (Rainy River First Nations) and his staff spawn three female lake sturgeon.



Joe Hunter adjusts the flow of water to incubations jars containing lake sturgeon eggs at the First Nations hatchery

Yess subsequently delivered nearly 95,000 eggs on May 10th to Genoa National Fish Hatchery. The staff at Genoa did a fantastic job preparing the facility to receive the eggs. In late summer the sturgeon will be tagged and then transported to the White Earth and Red Lake Reservations along with selected locations that Minnesota DNR stocks. This was an incredible team effort ... thanks to all who participated!

Welcome Aboard!



by Mark Steingraeber



Heather Rodriguez joined the La Crosse FWCO staff in April where she serves as a biological science technician. Heather graduated from Texas A & M University in December 2009 with a degree in Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences. A few months later, her husband received orders to report for duty at Fort McCoy, and they moved to Tomah (WI) in May 2010.



Heather displays a new friend found while sampling in the Des Plaines River

Prior to accepting her job with the Service, Heather worked at Fort McCoy where she became friends with Vicki, who has been teaching her about taxidermy – very different than the museum-style of stuffing she learned in school! In her off time, Heather enjoys doing a variety of crafts and training her “highly food-motivated” cat to do tricks.

WELCOME ABOARD HEATHER!



A Mystery Fish

By Mark Steingraeber

It's not unusual for La Crosse FWCO staff to receive a phone call, e-mail, or photo concerning an unusual looking fish caught in the Upper Mississippi River (UMR). In recent years, many of these fish have been exotic species of pet fish that outgrew their aquarium and were illegally released into the wild by their owners. Reports like these from anglers are important, often providing authorities with the first indication of a new and perhaps invasive species.

But when I recently received a photo (right) of an unusual looking fish caught in Pool 8 by an angler who also fishes the UMR commercially, it gave me and other FWCO staff reason to pause. While appearing much like a native bowfin (*Amia calva*), its mottled golden coloration, apparent forked tail, and missing caudal eyespot indicated there was more to this fish than what met our collective eyes.



Therefore, we consulted with other ichthyologists (fish scientists) at Chicago's Shedd Aquarium and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. While authorities here think the fish was a bowfin too, Dr. John Lyons (Adjunct Curator of Fishes at the University of Wisconsin Zoological Museum in Madison) added this insight into its strange appearance:

"It's a melanistic form, hence the odd coloration of the body. I've seen patterns like this on other melanistic fish species, although I've never seen a melanistic bowfin before. It's definitely weird looking. However, the green ventral fins, the long dorsal fin coupled with the short anal fin, and the head and mouth shape/morphology are diagnostic for a bowfin. It's definitely not a snakehead or anything like that. The maxillary doesn't look particularly odd to me for a bowfin. The lack of the caudal eye spot isn't necessarily odd either as the spot disappears in larger bowfin and this fish is around the size where I see it beginning to be lost in some fish. And given the other unusual pigmentation aspects, maybe this fish never had an ocellus (eye spot). The forked tail is indeed odd, but it seems like it might be damaged - perhaps it's missing a gouge out of middle rather than being truly forked.



Color illustration of a more typical looking bowfin (*Amia calva*)

Always something new to see coming out of the Mississippi River. Thanks for sharing."

If you should catch something unusual here or in any other body of water, bring it (or a photo) to the attention of state or federal natural resource agency personnel ... with teamwork, we should be able to solve your next aquatic mystery.



Our Team, Here to Serve,
Remembers Those Who
Have Served
Have a Safe
Memorial
Weekend!



Q: What is so rare as a day in spring?

A: Having all our staff in the office at once!

It's not an illusion and it wasn't Photoshop ...
we *were* all here (briefly) on Monday, May 21st.



Pictured (left to right) are: Mark Steingraeber, Dave Wedan, Heidi Keuler, Nancy Christopherson, Heather Rodriguez, Ann Runstrom, Scott Yess (front row); Katie Holland, Pam Thiel, Louise Mauldin, Nick Bloomfield, and Jenna Merry (back row).