



# Making Waves



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## Taking a Polar



## Plunge for Safety

By Jenna Merry



In late January, I was among four technicians who ventured north from the La

Crosse FWCO to the frozen shores of Lake Superior to take part in a Dive Rescue International Ice Rescue training course near Bayfield (WI).

This training had previously been available only to Department of the Interior employees who were certified boating safety instructors. But the course we attended, which was sponsored by the Service's Regional Watercraft Safety Program and hosted by the National Park Service, was open to other employees as well.

With the field season now spanning from March until December, our crews have greater chances than ever to encounter events that may require a rescue from freezing waters. Therefore, the opportunity to learn about proper cold-water gear and practice rescue techniques is a prudent safety precaution. Plus, who wouldn't jump at the chance to hop into Lake Superior in the winter and live to tell about it?

The one-day course included classroom instruction, as well as practical on-ice training. Topics covered during the morning session included determining ice conditions, hypothermia, ice formation, equipment and rescue techniques, as well as operational planning and scene evaluation.

This gave us a quick overview of what to expect should we need to rescue someone from freezing waters.

In the afternoon, everyone was outfitted with various types of dry-suits. These are different from the float suits we typically wear during cold-water work. Dry-suits allow a rescuer or crew member to jump into freezing water and stay completely dry. There are several types, with varying degrees of floatation and insulation.



I wore a Gumby suit, which makes the wearer look just like that silly, clay-formed character we all love from childhood.

While this suit is more cumbersome due to the enclosed feet and hands, I can definitely say that my extremities stayed warmer while in the water than those who wore other types of dry-suits with greater mobility.



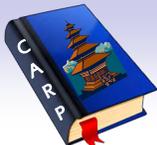
Once outfitted, we made our way to the frozen marina where several holes were created in the ice using aerators. Here we teamed with colleagues from the Carterville (IL) FWCO to practice and test techniques we learned that morning to get ourselves out of the water, as well as lead a team to retrieve a victim from the water. Such leadership requires assessing the safest and most effective way to rescue a victim using the Teach-Reach-Throw-Go approach.

Role playing as victim and rescuer, two participants are pulled to safety from the freezing waters of Lake Superior.



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# The Asian Carp Chronicle - 2014 UMR Update

By Kyle Mosel

The start of the 2014 field season kicked off with permit issues, presentations, and on-line meetings designed to increase collaboration with private clubs, states, and federal partners working on the Upper Mississippi River (UMR) to stop the spread of Asian carp. These collaborations have allowed us to work in five states and cover an expansive array on the Mississippi River. The La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office was involved in multiple Asian carp projects on the UMR during 2014. These included: juvenile and adult detection; acoustic telemetry; otolith microchemistry; and environmental DNA (e-DNA) surveillance. Each project plays an integral role in determining what can be done to stop these invasive species from expanding their range northward.

The acoustic telemetry project provided key information last year to understand movements of bighead and silver carp in the lower UMR pools in our region. We worked closely on this with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Missouri Department of Conservation to create an acoustic array of 130 telemetry receivers that spanned a range of nearly 1000 river miles from Minneapolis (MN) to Caruthersville (MO). This has allowed us to determine if and when movement is occurring upstream or downstream, in or out of backwaters, in or out of tributaries, and through lock chambers based on one-million detections recorded since 2013. To date, a total of 86 Asian carps (silver, bighead, and silver x bighead hybrids) have been surgically implanted with acoustic transmitters which we have been tracking by passive (deployed receivers) and active (manual tracking) methods from UMR Pool 16 to Pool 19. Each fish has been tagged with an acoustic transmitter weighing less than 2% of its body weight. Based on the size of a tag and how often it transmits data, each tag should function for two to four years. This ongoing project is planned to continue into 2018.



Kyle Mosel deploys a sonic receiver (inset) attached to a navigation buoy.



Trevor Cyphers holds an 80-pound bighead carp caught in a flooded backwater of UMR Pool 17.



Based on the size of a tag and how often it transmits data, each tag should function for two to four years. This ongoing project is planned to continue into 2018.

In 2015 we plan to: tag another 64 bighead and silver carp with acoustic transmitters; capture another 100 Asian carp for otolith microchemistry analyses; ramp-up juvenile detection efforts; collect more e-DNA samples; and manually track fish at least once a month. In addition, we are currently evaluating the 2014 performance of the acoustic array to assess whether its existing design can be improved. Based on last year's experience, we should also be more effective in capturing Asian carp from Pools 17 to 19 (and farther upstream) this year. By collaborating with other state and federal agencies, such insights will help to improve detection and control capabilities within the region and amongst all partners.

## Hail & Farewell

By Scott Yess



Long-time La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) administrative officer Nancy Christopherson retired after 25 years of federal service, all with the Department of the Interior, on December 31, 2014.

Nancy started her government career at the former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) National Fishery Research Laboratory in La Crosse (WI) where she worked as an assistant to Librarian Rosalie Schnick and as a receptionist. Then in 1995, while working here for the National Biological Service, Nancy was recruited by Pam Thiel to resume her FWS career at the La Crosse FWCO (known then as the La Crosse Fishery Resources Office) where she worked for nearly 20 years.

Nancy was a huge asset to our office, making purchase and personal actions efficiently while updating and tracking the budget in an exceptional manner. Nancy was also very concerned and caring in her approach to the staff.

Nancy's near-term goals include following her nephew's very successful basketball career and making plans for a relaxing trip to Ireland.

We will miss Nancy greatly and wish her all the best in retirement!



Best Wishes Nancy!



# Chilly Fishing & Warm Memories

By Jenna Merry



Several staff members and volunteers from the La Crosse FWCO headed south to the Genoa National Fish Hatchery (NFH) on February 7th to help at the annual Kid's Ice Fishing Clinic.



Doug Darelus

A Genoa NFH ice-hole party!

Bundled up and ready to face old man winter, a crowd of more than 450 attended the event to learn more about ice fishing and let the kids give it a try on a

frozen pond stocked with hungry rainbow trout. Young anglers hit the ice shortly after 9 a.m. and soon found that the fish were biting much better this year than last. By the time fishing wrapped up



D. Darelus

at noon, most participants went home refreshed with light lunch, a hot cup of cocoa, plenty of fresh air, and a mess of fish to clean for dinner!



D. Darelus

Sponsored by the Friends of the Upper Mississippi, a non-profit group that provides broad support for the work of several local Service offices, it was the seventh consecutive year the Genoa NFH hosted this family-focused event.



Temperatures were in the single digits as we arrived and made our way to the ice-covered pond where the event was held. However, bright sunshine and a lack of wind helped to compensate for the frosty air that morning.



# Cabin Fever Reliever

By Mark Steingraeber

Three Service offices (La Crosse Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, Genoa National Fish Hatchery, and La Crosse Fish Health Center-Whitney Genetics Laboratory) hosted more than 1,400 cabin-fever victims who visited the Service display booth during the 38<sup>th</sup>



USFWS

Many sport show visitors were unaware that most freshwater mussels depend upon native fish for their early life survival

An inviting arrangement of posters, maps, photos, brochures, watch cards, mussel shells, and an aquarium with live fish were prominently displayed near a main entrance to the exhibition hall.

Key topics of conversation included lake sturgeon restoration, surveillance for Asian carps, native mussel propagation, fish passage, and aquatic habitat restoration.

annual La Crosse Boat, Sports, Travel, & RV Show held February 12-15 at the La Crosse Center.

Staff from these offices and Service volunteers were here during the four-day event to greet visitors who sought relief from cold Arctic air and information on a variety of local/regional Service fishery programs and activities.

The opportunity to personally exchange natural resource information with the large, diverse audience that attends this annual mid-winter event makes Service participation here a valuable outreach tool for all area offices.



# A Polar Plunge

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Our instructors also challenged us with surprise scenarios that included victims who were uncooperative or unconscious and bystanders who became reckless. These scenarios illustrated that a leader and his/her team must be prepared for rapidly changing situations.

Each member of our group acted multiple times as a victim, a rescuer, a leader, and a team member during the course of the exercises. We ended the day by deliberately falling through thin ice (and maybe got in a cannon ball or two as well).



USFWS

Bill Lamoreux, Jenna Merry, Trevor Cyphers, and Kyle Mosel (left to right) enjoy a brief, frigid swim in Lake Superior.

Overall, the course was extremely helpful and a lot of fun. Not only is it applicable to our work environment, but also to our personal lives as we partake in our favorite winter activities like ice fishing and snowmobiling. Although it is training that we hope to never have to use, we can go into the field season with a little more security knowing our crew members are trained to respond if a cold water rescue situation does arise.

# Upcoming Events



Come celebrate with us!

Mark Your Calendar Now!

**FWCO Volunteer Dinner**  
March 20, 5:30 pm  
Boot Hill Pub, La Crosse

**Mississippi River Research Consortium**  
April 22 - 24  
Radisson Hotel, La Crosse

**La Crosse Earth Fair**  
April 26, 11 am - 5 pm  
Myrick Park, La Crosse

**Hope to See You!**

## What Others Say ...



### - Blue Crab Discovered a Long Way from Home\* -

A Chesapeake blue crab — native to the western Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico — somehow found its way into the cool, northern waters of the Mississippi River this fall.

Several University of Wisconsin-La Crosse students found the crab in mid-November on French Island while doing a video project for a science methods class.

The students: Abbey Johnson and Brittany Kujath, both senior education majors; and Katie Mabery, a graduate student in Therapeutic Recreation, were at Airport Beach on French Island when they spotted the crab moseying along the shoreline. They decided to name the crab "Brabbie," a combination of their names.

How the crab made it more than 1,000 miles through river dams well outside its native habitat is a bit of a mystery, says their instructor Carol Witt-Smith, academic instructional staff member in Educational Studies. Both she and her students agree the most likely scenario is that Brabbie hitched a ride north on a barge. It also could have been released as an unwanted pet.

Regardless of how it arrived, Witt-Smith is curious to know if others have spotted blue crabs in the area.

Brabbie was alive when the students found it. Not realizing the crab was so far from home, they left it and told Witt-Smith about it the next day. When she returned to the beach, the crab had not survived the night. Witt-Smith brought the crab to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge) where it is being held for further identification.



The Chesapeake blue crab produces a sweet, tender meat which makes it one of the most heavily harvested creatures on the planet, according to a National Geographic description. According to the website, many populations of Chesapeake blue crabs have experienced severe declines and over-harvesting has had a negative effect on the ecosystems where they live.

\*Originally published 11 Dec 2014 in the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse *Campus News* - <http://news.uwlax.edu/blue-crab-discovered-a-long-way-from-home/>; republished here with permission from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.



### - Recovery/Assessment Begins After Train Derailment\*\* -

DUBUQUE – A clean-up is slated to begin on Thursday (February 5) to recover ethanol on land and on the iced-covered surface of the Mississippi River following a train derailment that occurred Wednesday (February 4) north of Dubuque.

There was a fire associated with the derailment on Wednesday, but it has burned out. There are three of the rail tankers in the water and a total of eight of the cars lost at least some ethanol. It is believed that one may have still have been leaking as of Thursday afternoon.

Water sampling has also begun. The initial plan calls for the river to be sampled along the east side, the west side and in the middle, every 6,000 feet downstream from where the derailment occurred for approximately 10 miles. Additional water samples will be taken from 1,000 feet upstream from the incident site, as well as sampling from Mud Lake on the Iowa side of the river and Sunfish Lake on the Wisconsin side of the river. The water will be sampled for dissolved oxygen, ethanol and for petroleum products.



The primary concern associated with the spill is the threat to fish and other aquatic life. Ethanol in the water depletes oxygen. There are concerns about the potential impact to mussel beds along the river in the area where the spill occurred because mussels do not have the ability to easily move away when oxygen levels begin to sag. The segment of the river that has been impacted is within the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources plans to sample fish collected from fishermen to sample for any potential contaminants and ensure that fish caught from the river are safe to eat. Open water holes near the tips of wing dams and near the lock and dam will be monitored for signs of dead fish since significant portions of the river are currently iced over preventing fish mortality from being readily observed.

Offloading what is left in the derailed tank cars was scheduled to begin Thursday afternoon. Once the remaining material can be offloaded and accounted for, estimates of how much ethanol may have reached the river can be made.

There is approximately one-half of an acre of ethanol that pooled on the ground and froze on the land side of the track where the derailment occurred. It is estimated that approximately one acre of ice near the spill was covered. The plan is to use a stream sprayer to thaw the ethanol on the land side of the tracks and then vacuum the product into a tank. If the technique is successful, a similar attempt will be made on the ice to recover the ethanol there.

Assisting in response to the incident have been the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Dubuque County Conservation Board, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Sherrill Fire Department, the Dubuque Fire Department, the Dubuque County Sheriff's Department and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

\*\* This informational bulletin was released 5 Feb 2015 by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Environmental Services Division.

## What Others Say ...



### — *Railroad Settles Upper Mississippi River Oil Spill Claim* \*\*\* —

IOWA CITY, IOWA (AP) — A railroad has agreed to pay \$625,000 to settle allegations that it failed to adequately clean up a 2008 oil spill that damaged the shoreline and aquatic life in the Mississippi River between Iowa and Wisconsin.

The Dakota Minnesota and Eastern Railroad, a subsidiary of Canadian Pacific, would make the payment without admitting wrongdoing to resolve a civil complaint filed Tuesday by the state of Iowa and the U.S. government. The settlement, known as a consent decree, would cover the cost of assessing damage and pay for restoration activities. It's expected to go into effect after a 30-day public comment period.

The case stems from a derailment that happened July 9, 2008, when a boulder dislodged by heavy rains tore up a section of the track on the river near Guttenberg, Iowa. Four diesel locomotives crashed into the river and were submerged and leaked oil for several days. Two workers suffered minor injuries.

The complaint alleges that those engines leaked 4,400 gallons of diesel oil and other petroleum products, causing floating slicks of oil and oil sheen along a 10-mile stretch. The area of the river, known as the Bluff Slough, is across from Cassville, Wisconsin.

Few birds or fish died, but other slower-moving aquatic life that lived in or near shore habitats were affected by the floating oil. The spill, which came as the river was at flood stage, resulted in the loss of mussels that are considered endangered and threatened species and damage to mayflies, a rare mudpuppy and a water snake, the complaint says.

Much of the oil on the shoreline wasn't cleaned up, while some of it stuck to sediments that flowed downstream in the high and turbulent waters, the complaint said.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources spokesman Kevin Baskins said the restoration work will include re-establishing mussel beds

that were disturbed when the company built a platform to remove the locomotives. A damaged parking lot also will be repaired.

"We're glad to have the opportunity to restore a sensitive area of the river," he said. "Anytime we can make an effort to increase mussel survival and production, it's something that's real positive for the ecosystem as a whole."

After the derailment, state officials worried that the railroad took too long to remove the engines from the river and to respond to the environmental threat they posed.

Workers deployed booms to contain the discharged oil, used pads to absorb floating oil, removed oiled vegetation and eventually re-railed the locomotives and grain cars, the complaint said. However, the response "was not able to remediate the entire area affected by the discharge incident" and didn't address oil that sank in the river. The complaint alleged

a violation of the Oil Pollution Act.

Canadian Pacific spokesman Andy Cummings called the derailment an "unusual incident," saying the company is pleased to have the complaint resolved.

The consent decree says the payment would avoid complicated litigation and expedite restoration work. Government lawyers can withdraw the settlement if public comments "disclose facts or considerations" that show it to be inadequate.

Wally Taylor, a Cedar Rapids environmental attorney, said he will consider filing a comment on behalf of the Sierra Club.

"It sounds like it's not nearly enough," he said of the settlement. "I suspect the company probably resisted pretty strongly but that the government didn't want to really take them to court."



Train derailment near Guttenberg, IA - July 2008

\*\*\* Reprinted with permission of the Associated Press; originally published 10 Dec 2014.



## There'll be Days Like This!

By Mark Steingraeber



The lyrics of a song made popular in the 1960s by the Shirelles state "There'll be days like this." However, after almost three decades with the Service and the last two spent at the La Crosse FWCO, I'd never had a day like 9 February 2015 before. Yes, I'd previously handled large volumes of river sediment ... at times requiring chain-of custody protocols ... but never in the form of frozen slabs requiring a fork lift to safely move them!

Recovered by vigilant Iowa Department of Natural Resources employees at a derailment site near Dubuque (page 4), five slabs of frozen river sediments containing mussels impacted (literally) by rail cars were brought to our heated garage where the dimensions of each icy slab were measured and recorded.

Days later, mussel biologist Nathan Eckert (Genoa National Fish Hatchery) led a team of biologists and railway agents who sieved and meticulously inspected the sediments like forensic scientists to identify/enumerate fresh-dead mussels and remnant shells.

A total of 19 fresh-dead mussels (representing six species) were recovered in these efforts and 23 species were identified from relic shells. Based on these data, slab dimensions, and estimates of the mussel-bed area impacted by the rail cars and recovery operations, natural resource agencies are likely seek just compensation for the loss of these and other impacted trust resources.

Days like these we can do without; but we're prepared for them.



**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Volunteer & FUM**



**Let's Make  
Waves!**

**2015 Service  
Opportunities**



What	Where	Who	When
Pike & Walleye Spawning	Genoa NFH	Genoa NFH	April - May
Fish Health Assessments	Genoa NFH	LaX FHC	April - May
Mussel Propagation	Genoa NFH	Genoa NFH	April
Rod & Reel Repair	Genoa NFH	Genoa NFH	April 7
River Clean-Up Day	Miss. River-Pool 8	Genoa NFH	May 9
Friends Youth Fishing Day	Genoa NFH	LaX FWCO	May 9
River Education Days	Trempealeau NWR	LaX FWCO	May 12-13
Veterans Fishing Day	Tomah VA Hospital	LaX FWCO	May 20
Youth Outdoor Fest	Veterans Freedom Park	LaX FWCO	July 11
River Adventure Day	Miss. River-Pool 9	LaX FWCO	July 14
Trout Fest	Coon Valley	Genoa NFH	July 25
Mussel Surveys	Rivers in WI & IA	LaX FWCO	July - August
Sturgeon Tagging	Genoa NFH	LaX FHC	August
Wild Fish Health Surveys	Mississippi River	Genoa NFH	July - August
Juvenile Mussel Harvest	Genoa NFH	LaX FWCO	September
Electrofishing Surveys	Mississippi River	LaX FWCO	April - November
Data Entry	Onalaska	FWCO/NFH	Year Round
Maintenance	Onalaska / Genoa		Year Round



**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fishery Program Offices**

**Genoa National Fish Hatchery**  
55689 State Road 35  
Genoa, WI 54632  
(608) 689-2605

**La Crosse Fish Health Ctr**  
555 Lester Avenue  
Onalaska, WI 54650  
(608) 783-8451

**La Crosse Fish & Wild. Cons. Office**  
555 Lester Avenue  
Onalaska, WI 54650  
(608) 783-8434

**Friends of the Upper Mississippi**  
555 Lester Avenue  
Onalaska, WI 54650  
608-783-8417  
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