

Welaka

National Fish Hatchery



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Station Facts

- Established: 1938.
- Number of staff: six full-time permanent.
- Acres of water: 54.
- Annual budget (FY 06) \$560,513.

Geographic Area Covered

- Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River System—Florida and Georgia (interjurisdictional restoration)—striped bass.
- St. Johns River—Florida (interjurisdictional restoration)—striped bass.
- Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi (interjurisdictional restoration)—striped bass.
- Suwannee River—Florida (recovery)—Gulf of Mexico sturgeon.
- St. Johns River—Florida (recovery)—shortnose sturgeon.

Station Goals

- Provide interjurisdictional fish restoration (striped bass) for the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River System and the St. Johns River.
- Provide striped bass to six southeastern states to support interjurisdictional fish restoration (striped bass).
- Provide technical assistance to aid in the recovery of the threatened Gulf of Mexico sturgeon.
- Provide technical assistance to aid in the recovery of the endangered shortnose sturgeon.
- Provide environmental education.
- Provide public outreach opportunities to visitors.

Fish Species and Capability

- Gulf Coast Striped Bass (interjurisdictional restoration) - 7,000,000 fry; 750,000 Phase I fingerlings; 100,000 Phase II sub-adults.
- Atlantic Coast Striped Bass (interjurisdictional restoration) - 2,000,000 fry; 400,000 Phase I fingerlings.
- Gulf of Mexico sturgeon.
- Shortnose sturgeon.

Public Use Opportunities

- 35,000+ visitors annually.
- 25 tank public aquarium (fresh and saltwater).
- Portable aquarium and endangered species display for off-site presentations.
- Wildlife observation tower and picnic area.
- Nature trail - 3/4 mile.
- Outdoor fish display pool (in development).

Calendar of Events

April: Annual Catfish Parade and Festival. Participates in annual events for town of Welaka.

June: Annual Fishing Rodeo and Hatchery Open House.

July: Annual 4th of July Parade and Festival.

Questions and Answers

What kind of fish do you raise?
Welaka National Fish Hatchery is a warmwater fish hatchery which means we raise fish that do best in water temperatures above 65 degrees. Current species in production at this facility include striped bass, largemouth bass, and the threatened Gulf of Mexico sturgeon.

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Where do you stock your fish? Do you only stock fish in Florida?

Although our primary area focuses on river and lake systems in Florida, Welaka NFH provides fish to six southeastern states to aid in their fish restoration efforts.

How do you get the eggs from the fish?

Personnel from Welaka NFH, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, and Georgia Department of Natural Resources collect adult “broodfish” from the wild during spawning runs. These adult fish are transported to Welaka NFH and monitored for gamete maturation. When gametes are viable, eggs are manually stripped into a bowl, sperm is added and the eggs are fertilized. These eggs are hatched and then either stocked in grow-out ponds or shipped to other facilities.

Do you provide fish to private individuals?

Although once a function of the national fish hatchery system, “farm pond” stocking is not considered a Federal responsibility and fish are no longer provided to individuals. All fish raised at this facility are stocked into public waters.

Do you give tours of the hatchery?

Welaka National Fish Hatchery has an active public use program. The hatchery maintains a 25-tank public aquarium, a nature observation tower, and a 3/4-mile nature trail. All facilities are open to the public for self-guided tours. Large groups are given tours by station personnel if arrangements are made in advance.