U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

June 2008 Station Activities

The Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) is located in Alpena, Michigan and works to meet the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fishery and Ecosystem goals within Lake Huron, Western Lake Erie, and connecting waters of the St. Marys River, St. Clair River, and Detroit River. Activities include Aquatic Species Conservation and Management, Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management, Aquatic Invasive Species, Cooperation with Native Americans, Leadership in Science and Technology, Partnerships and Accountability, Public Use, and Workforce Management – all of which are conducted in alignment with the Service Fisheries Program's Vision for the Future. The station is one of many field offices located within Region 3, the Midwest Region.

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Alpena NFWCO Conducts Assessments at Michigan Islands National Wildlife Refuge

Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist

In June, Fishery Biologists Scott Koproski, Adam Kowalski, and Andrea Ania conducted an electro-fishing survey funded through the Service's Challenge Grant Program to collect fishery data surrounding the islands located in Lake Huron's Thunder Bay. This was a cooperative project between the Michigan DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service).

The project involved electro-fishing the perimeter of four of the islands located within Thunder Bay. The targeted islands included: Thunder Bay Island, Scarecrow Island, Sulphur Island, and Grass Island. Effort was measured in ten minute intervals, and fish were processed after each shocking interval. Lengths were recorded for all fish encountered, and weights and scale samples were taken for sport fish.

Two of the four islands where the electro-fishing survey was conducted are owned by the Service as part of the Michigan Islands National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)—Thunder Bay Island and Scarecrow Island. However, all four islands provide important feeding, spawning, and nursery habitat to the coastal fish species that reside in Thunder Bay, and they also provide fishing opportunities for recreational anglers in the community. Very little is known regarding fish community assemblages

and the status of fish populations in Thunder Bay. The importance of obtaining this fishery data is to provide managers with the necessary information to monitor the possible effects that habitat alteration, exotic species, and cormorant predation may be having on these populations.

In addition to the islands, the shoreline of Thunder Bay from Bare Point to the Thunder Bay River mouth was also sampled. Data collected during the survey is still being analyzed, but this marks the first year that survey crews were able to electro-fish around Thunder Bay Island and Scarecrow Island. Sampling at both islands in recent years has been problematic due their long distance (> 8 miles) from a suitable launch site. Data analysis and final reporting for this project will be completed this fall.

This work is another example of the Alpena NFWCO's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision Priorities: "Partnerships and Accountability," "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management," and "Public Use."

Partnerships and Accountability

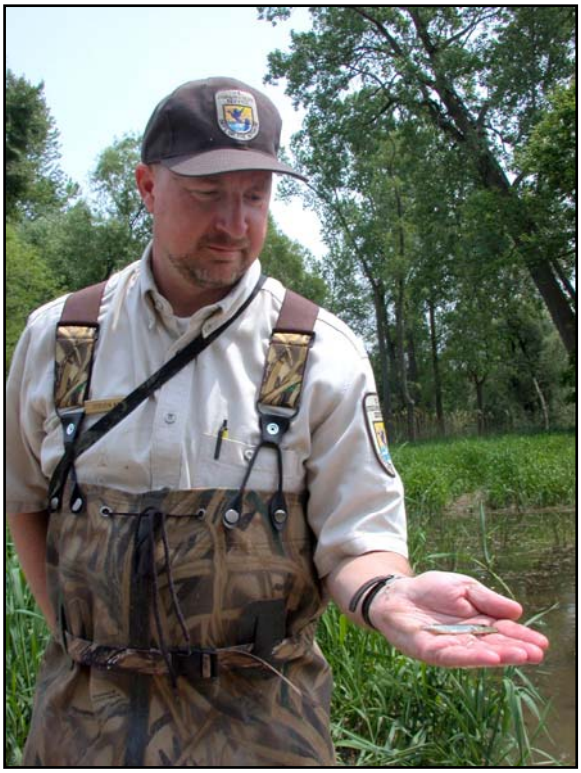
Northern Pike Survey Conducted at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Submitted by Anjanette Bowen
Fishery Biologist

The Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO), in cooperation with volunteers, conducted a northern pike (pike) survey on the Shiawassee NWR in Saginaw, Michigan. Pike is an interjurisdictional, native species that is dependent on wetland vegetation for spawning and nursery habitat. Wetland habitat has been declining around the Great Lakes due to dredging, filling, draining, and industrial use to the detriment of pike.

Due to the abundance of wetland habitat and the convergence of four rivers (Cass, Flint, Tittabawassee, Shiawassee) within the refuge, the Shiawassee NWR makes an ideal area to study pike. Recently, a spillway was built on the refuge to replace a breach in the dike along the Cass River.

According to a survey we conducted prior to the dike restoration, the breached area provided pike access to the wetland above the dike during high



Shiawassee NWR Manager Steve Kahl holds a young-of-the-year northern pike captured from the refuge during June. Photo by Anjanette Bowen, USFWS

water, and fish were using the area for spawning and as a nursery. We were curious to know if the new spillway would continue to provide pike access to the wetland.

Surveys were conducted in April, May, and June to document the presence of spawning and young-of-the-year pike at key locations on the refuge. High water events were frequent this spring, and due to safety concerns and the ability to effectively sample, sampling was limited to four events from late March to early June. Trap nets were used to assess spawning northern pike (late March to late April), and a seine was used to assess young-of-the-year (April and early June). Before returning pike to the water, we measured length and weight, took scales for aging, and noted the sex of the fish.

We found that pike continued to access the upland wetland near the Cass River after the construction of the spillway. Adult spawning phase northern pike were captured at the spillway during the spawning season (late March and early April), and young-of-the-year were captured upstream of the spillway in the pool near the marsh in June. Other areas of the refuge that are only connected to river waters during flood events were also found to have pike. The high water likely provides pike access to these closed areas from the river.

Native species, including pike, and their habitats are integral parts of the Great Lakes aquatic ecosystem. This monitoring effort is an important priority of the “Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", “Partnerships and Accountability”, and "Public Use" components of the Fisheries Program's Vision for the Future.

Alpena NFWCO Visits Bingham Arts Academy

Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist

On June 9, Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski visited the kindergarten classroom at Bingham Arts Academy located in Alpena, Michigan. Mr. Koproski brought along some animal skulls, animal skins, fossils, and bird nests that the Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) uses in their “Children in Nature” program. There were 18 students in Mrs. Koproski’s kindergarten classroom. The students really enjoyed being able to touch the animal skulls and skins, and it triggered numerous stories from the children. All of the animal skins and skulls presented were from the local area, and many students had viewed these animals in the wild. The interaction allowed the students to connect with their surroundings and even sparked an interest in natural resources for some individuals.

One student was particularly interested in all the “cool” (as he put it) stuff that Fishery Biologist Koproski brought to the class. A follow up conversation with his teacher, Mrs. Koproski, indicated that the student’s mother was amazed at the sudden interest her son had developed for animals. His mother stated that every time she takes her son to the library, he only wants to check out non-fiction books related to animals. This exemplifies the importance of the Alpena NFWCO’s outreach activities, especially with young children.

This work is another example of the Alpena NFWCO's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision Priorities: "Partnerships and Accountability" and "Public Use."

Alpena NFWCO Assists with Habitat Day at the 4-H Great Lakes Aquatic Academy

Submitted by Anjanette Bowen
Fishery Biologist

Huron Pines Resource Conservation and Development (RC & D), the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Committee, and the Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) were invited to participate in the 4-H Great Lakes Aquatic Academy's habitat educational day on June 24. The event was hosted by Michigan Sea Grant and held at the Duck Park in Alpena, Michigan. Students learned about habitat types found in the area, shoreline erosion processes and what is being done to curb erosion, aquatic invasive species and their impacts on habitat and ecosystems, aquatic macroinvertebrates and the habitats they occupy, aquatic plants and their habitat requirements, and water quality and its impact on providing suitable habitat for aquatic organisms. Throughout the day students experienced canoeing and hiking, which allowed them to view various habitat types from different perspectives.

Habitat education was just one of a set of week long topics for students during the Academy. Other topics included maritime history and shipwrecks, geology and sink holes, and fisheries. Numerous partners participated throughout the week to increase the diversity of the experience for students.

This effort is an important priority of the "Partnerships and Accountability," "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management," "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management," and "Public Use" components of the Fisheries Program's Vision for the Future.

Inland Lake Community Schools Tour the M/V Spencer F. Baird

Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist

On May 29, the Inland Lake Community Schools of Indian River, Michigan visited the Cheboygan Vessel base to tour the *M/V Spencer F. Baird*. In addition, students also toured two USGS vessels—the *R/V Grayling* and the *R/V Sturgeon*. Dr. Ed Roseman guided tours of the USGS vessels, and Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski of the Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) led tours of the *M/V Baird*. *M/V Baird* Captain Mike Perry and deckhand Dave Bohn also participated in the event.

While onboard the *M/V Baird*, biologist Koproski informed students about the Service's lake trout rehabilitation efforts. Sea lamprey invasion and control, hatchery lake trout production, and lake trout research and management were also discussed during the tour. Obviously, the *M/V Baird* stole the show. Students learned about the *M/V Baird's* primary mission—lake trout stocking—but also gained an understanding of the research capabilities of this unique vessel. Students toured the wet-lab, saw where gill nets are retrieved and fish are processed during assessment cruises, and entered the pilot house. They seemed most interested in the pilot house and all the neat electronic equipment it contains. Captain Perry fielded several questions related to all the monitors, controls, and additional electronics that are located in the pilot house. A total of 45 students and 10 adults participated in the tour.

This work is another example of the Alpena NFWCO's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision Priorities: "Partnerships and Accountability" and "Public Use."

Aquatic Invasive Species

Alpena NFWCO Participates in Michigan Sea Grant Sponsored Fun Day for Alcona Community Schools

Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist

Michigan Sea Grant sponsored a workshop for the 4th graders of Alcona Community Schools at the Sturgeon Point Lighthouse in Harrisville, Michigan on May 28. Fishery Biologist Scott Koproski of the Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) participated in the event, and his presentation focused on Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in Lake Huron. Biologist Koproski used visual aids to show students the differences between native species and the various AIS that have invaded the Great Lakes. Round goby, Eurasian ruffe, zebra mussels, and sea lamprey were just a few species that were discussed. Students were quite interested in the plasto-mounts and specimens preserved in alcohol jars. Students were very inquisitive regarding how invasive species entered the Great Lakes, and biologist Koproski gave them suggestions on how to prevent the unintentional spread of these animals. Koproski explained how important it is for recreational fishermen not to release unused minnows (i.e. bait bucket transfer) and how proper boat cleaning can prevent the spread of AIS. A total of 75 students and 16 adults visited the Alpena NFWCO presentation.

This work is another example of the Alpena NFWCO's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision Priorities: "Partnerships and Accountability", "Aquatic Invasive Species" and "Public Use."

Public Use

Friday Night Downtown! in Alpena

Submitted by Aaron Woldt
Fishery Biologist

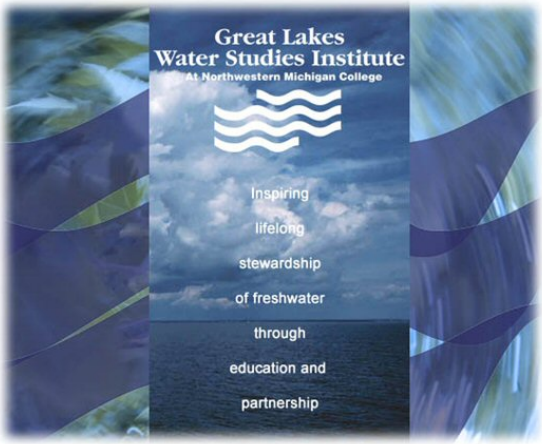
On June 27, Fishery Biologists Aaron Woldt and Adam Kowalski of the Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) staffed a Service information booth at the Alpena Friday Night Downtown! festival. Friday Night Downtown! is a city sponsored family event held every Friday night in late June and July in the downtown city streets of Alpena, Michigan. Each Friday combines a different mix of live musical entertainment, kid's games and activities, food booths, public safety demonstrations by local law enforcement and emergency services agencies, and informational booths by local businesses, civic groups, and governmental agencies. Woldt and Kowalski distributed Service pamphlets and children's coloring pages and spoke with over 200 visitors to explain the role of the Service and the Alpena NFWCO in conserving natural resources. Topics discussed included lake trout rehabilitation, lake trout stocking, aquatic invasive species, sea lamprey control, the National Fish Hatchery program, fish passage, endangered species, Michigan mammals, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, lake sturgeon tagging and tracking, lake whitefish population viability, and lake trout movement patterns. Many visitors expressed thanks for the high quality of information provided.

Alpena Friday Night Downtown! is a large outreach event that allows Alpena NFWCO staff to meet and interact with large numbers of local community members to provide information about Service programs. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of implementing educational and outreach activities to educate public regarding Service activities under the "Public Use" and "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" priorities of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Workforce Management

First Coastal Environments Workshop Held at Great Lakes Water Studies Institute

Submitted by Andrea Ania
Fishery Biologist



Northwestern Michigan College's Great Lakes Water Studies Institute held their first *Legal Tools to Protect Coastal Environments Workshop* from June 18 to 20 in Traverse City, Michigan. Alpena NFWCO Biologist Andrea Ania attended the workshop, which provided useful information on legal tools related to Great Lakes coastal environments and the architecture

of environmental statutes. Presenters used court cases to illustrate decision outcomes related to legal directives, and the influence of precedent on future court rulings. The workshop was well attended with participants from Michigan Sea Grant, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Huron Pines, assorted universities, and local governments, among others. The workshop also provided networking opportunities, case study site-visits, and exposure to the Inland Seas Education Association. Protection and restoration of Michigan's critical dune and coastal habitats is important, as population and development pressures continue to grow and invasive species continue to spread.

Service participation in the Legal Tools to Protect Coastal Environments Workshop is consistent with the "Workforce Management" priority of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Biologist Attends Project Leader Academy

Submitted by Aaron Woldt
Fishery Biologist

From June 2 to 13, Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena NFWCO attended the *Project Leader Academy* at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The primary goal of this academy was to address the general knowledge and skills needed for Service Project Leaders to be successful. The academy focused on topics as varied as effective leadership and interpersonal skills, supervising others, understanding the environment in which the Project Leader functions, strategic planning and visioning, training and development, team building, motivating staff, leading change, budget and finance, decision making, partnerships, leveraging resources, and working with Congress and media. The course was team taught by members of the NCTC branch of Leadership and Employee Development and was attended by 23 students from Refuges, Fisheries, ES, and LE from around the country.

Continued educational opportunities are consistent with the Service's goal of providing employees with opportunities to maintain competencies and improve opportunities for professional achievement under the "Workforce Management" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

For more information about Alpena NFWCO programs and activities contact us at:

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