



VHS in the Great Lakes

Quick Facts

This is the first time a virus has affected so many different fish species from so many fish families in the Great Lakes.

VHS may have come in with migrating fish from the Atlantic Coast or may have hitchhiked in ballast water from ships.

VHS was first known as a disease of farmed rainbow trout in Europe as early as the 1930s. In 1963, scientists confirmed the disease was caused by a virus.

In 1988-89, VHS was detected in wild herring and cod from the Pacific Coast. Since then, the virus has been confirmed in several species on the Atlantic Coast and in Japan.

The virus can survive in water for at least 14 days.

Fish can be infected when they eat an infected fish.

-information from the Wisconsin DNR's VHS Web site, <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/pages/vhs.html>

The Fish and Wildlife Service's **La Crosse Fish Health Center** is one of nine such facilities nationwide.

The center provides fishery assistance for disease inspection of lake sturgeon, lake trout, brook trout, pallid sturgeon, largemouth and smallmouth bass; conducts wild fish health surveys across the region; and maintains partnerships with state, federal, tribal, and local management agencies.

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia virus, or VHS, is an internationally reportable pathogen with the OIE, the World Organization for Animal Health.

Until spring 2007, the occurrence of the virus in the Great Lakes had been limited to lakes Huron, Erie, and Ontario, as well as Lake St. Claire, the St. Lawrence River, and New York's Conesus Lake.

During spring monitoring in 2007, the VHS virus was found in Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan, near Sturgeon Bay; in the Lake Winnebago system of inland Wisconsin; and in Bud Lake, an inland lake in Claire County, Mich.

As part of our scientific mission to conserve the nation's fish and wildlife resources, the Service has long been concerned with fish disease and preventing its spread.

Our La Crosse, Wis., Fish Health Center provides fish health inspection services to six national and four tribal fish hatcheries in the Midwest to minimize the risk of introducing disease agents into the wild.

The center also assists state and private fish hatcheries in diagnosing and controlling infectious disease agents, and provides technical assistance regarding fish health and propagation.

The La Crosse FHC also participates each year in the National Wild Fish Health Survey, along with states, tribes and the aquaculture industry, to collect data on fish disease and pathogens.

In response to VHS, the Service has increased disease monitoring as part of the National Wild Fish Health Survey,



USFWS image/Robert Hines

Smallmouth bass are one of the fish species considered susceptible to VHS.

and the La Crosse FHC has received fish from several states and the Chippewa-Ottawa Resource authority for analysis.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's fish health centers contribute to health, survival, restoration and enhancement of fish and other aquatic species in support of national, regional, federal and state priorities. They also support national, state, private and tribal fish hatchery operations to provide quality fish, and foster a proactive and cooperative approach to comprehensive fish health to prevent catastrophic losses to the resource.

Fish health centers can assist states in developing management strategies through assessment and applied research to support the protection of wild stocks and restoration of threatened and endangered species.