



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE COLUMBIA FISHERY RESOURCES OFFICE ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT

...Dedicated to Conserving Big River Ecosystems in America's Heartland.

Partnerships and Accountability

Mitigation Cooperative with MDC

In July Columbia FRO was visited by Missouri Department of Conservation Research Scientist Matt Engel and Research Science Assistant Darrick Garner. Matt and Darrick represent MDC's on the Mitigation Project, a cooperative effort involving Columbia FRO, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the states of Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri aimed at improving lost habitat on the lower Missouri River. Matt and Darrick were recently hired to fill these vacancies with MDC and are touring other agencies mitigation sites to get an idea of how to best sample their assigned sites. They spent the last week of July running hoop nets, mini fyke nets, trawling and electrofishing with us at two of our three sites; the Overton Chute and Tate Island complex. Matt and Darrick are extremely enthusiastic and eager to learn what methods have been tried and established at our station. They are anxious to begin sampling their four chutes in August.

The cooperative efforts of the multi-state/multi-agency Mitigation program and the communication between MDC and Columbia FRO fulfill the Partnership Goal of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future by establishing open and interactive communication with our partners.

Jeff M. Finley





Plenary Group Meeting for a 2006 Spring Rise on the Missouri River

Project Leader Tracy Hill traveled to Omaha, NE on 25 July to attend the third meeting of the Missouri River Spring Rise Plenary Group. The Plenary group is composed of representatives of federal, tribal, state and municipal governments and diverse interest groups from across the Missouri River Basin. A Spring Rise on the Missouri River would be a significant increase in water flows designed to accomplish specific goals such as shifting sedimentation to create new sandbars and islands, providing habitat for pallid sturgeon, and providing and transporting nutrients. The goal of the Plenary Group meeting was to develop a proposal that complies with the Biological Opinion of the US Fish and Wildlife Service for recovering pallid sturgeon, least terns and piping plovers, while limiting negative effects on both upstream and downstream river users. Once developed and agreed upon by the group the proposal will be submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their consideration and implementation. Due to additional concerns from both upstream and downstream interest groups and the need to evaluate these concerns and determine if they could be adjusted to allow for acceptable spring rises an additional meeting has been planned for late August.

Branch Chief Wyatt Doyle and Project Leader Tracy Hill served on the Pallid Sturgeon Technical Committee for the 2006 Missouri River spring rise. Wyatt and Tracy were part of a group of biologists chosen from State, University and Federal offices involved with the Missouri River. These biologists, provide the insight and expertise required to develop the magnitude, duration and peak of a spring rise that will likely occur next year. There were four committees including; cultural resources, hydrology and economic experts that were given the challenge of coming up with a plan that stake-holders could agree upon. This long over-due implementation is hoped to provide a spawning cue, condition spawning habitat and disperse pallid larvae throughout the lower 850 miles of river. Understanding the many needs of the stake-holder groups along the Missouri River, biologists were compromising in developing their plan and felt that what was put forward to the Plenary group was the minimum necessary to meet the needs of the pallids sturgeon. Columbia Fishery Resources Office has been involved in the recovery of the pallid sturgeon for over six years. Collaboration with private stake-holders and other government agencies is a necessary goal to restoring this species' natural habitat. Providing leadership in science, protecting trust resources, creating partnerships and developing working relationships with stake-holders are goals being achieved on the Missouri River.

Involvement in this multi-partnered collaborative effort is another example of Columbia FRO's commitment to the following Fisheries Vision Priorities of "Partnerships and Accountability" and "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management".

Tracy D. Hill, Wyatt J. Doyle



Specimen Collection for MU Ichthyology Class

Fishery Biologist Jennifer Johnson collected specimens for the University of Missouri-Columbia's Ichthyology course. Dr. Douglas Noltie identified a shortage of some riverine species used in the course. Jennifer collected fish from this list during routine sampling of mitigation sites throughout the month of July. The fish collected include: shovelnose sturgeon, river carpsucker, freshwater drum, skipjack herring, bighead carp and flathead catfish. These specimens will be added to the University's reference collection and used during the practical application laboratory portion of the class which focuses on identifying the fishes of Missouri.



Assisting with specimen collection for the University fulfills the "Partnerships and Accountability" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future. Cooperating with the University of Missouri's School of Natural Resources provides the Columbia FRO with many opportunities to contribute to the education of future fisheries professionals.

Jennifer L. Johnson

Building Partnerships at Meramec Watershed Celebration

On July 23rd, Columbia FRO staff attended the 9th annual Meramec Watershed Celebration held at Meramec State Park in Sullivan, Missouri. This event is annually sponsored by the Missouri Stream Teams, Northern Ozark Partnership, and Open Spaces Council and is an opportunity for the community to enjoy recreational and educational activities on the beautiful Meramec River. Columbia FRO attended this event to build partnerships in the Meramec River basin to aid in development of a National Fish Habitat Initiative watershed plan. The day consisted of many activities where Columbia FRO staff interacted with the public as well as with local non-profit organizations. In the morning participants enjoyed a naturalist program, tube float, and invertebrate exhibit. In the afternoon there was a naturalist program for kids and canoe races for adults. For lunch, everybody enjoyed a BBQ potluck lunch while listening to a live bluegrass band. Even though it was a hot day, there were plenty of activities in and around the Meramec River making it enjoyable for all.



Increased cooperation and participation with local groups and activities will help Columbia FRO forge new partnerships and increase the success of programs such as the National Fish Habitat Initiative, supporting the "Partnerships and Accountability" goal of the "Fisheries Program Vision for the Future".

Nicholas J. Utrup



Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Columbia FRO prepares to take lead on MICRA paddlefish project

The Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA) paddlefish stock assessment project is a multi-state cooperative study designed to assess the distribution and movement of paddlefish in the Mississippi River basin. Twenty-two state agencies, four fishery resources offices, and eight national fish hatcheries are involved in the stocking, tagging, release, and recapture of these paddlefish. Commercial and sport anglers also lend a hand by returning rostrums and capture location information to their local fish and game office.

Presently, all tags and rostrum samples are mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Carterville Fishery Resources Office for processing and archiving. After the tag numbers have been read and recorded, the data sheets are sent to the Columbia FRO. Joanne Grady has been charged with maintaining the Access database for this project.

This design has served the MICRA project for the past eight years; however, storing the database and archived tags in separate locations has made it difficult to resolve tag code errors in the database. Thus, fisheries biologists Joanne Grady, Nick Utrup, and fisheries technician Casey Bergthold are preparing to travel to the Carterville FRO for training to properly read, process, and archive the coded wire tags used to track paddlefish. After this training is complete the archived files will be moved to the Columbia FRO to be centrally stored with the database.

These efforts fall under the Fish and Wildlife Service's goal to "provide service, perspective, and assistance in the conservation, restoration, and management of interjurisdictional Missouri and Mississippi river fish and their habitats."

Casey L. Bergthold

Public Use

Diana Bend and Overton Bottom Scour Basins at Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

There are three large scour holes on the Diana Bend and Overton Bottom Units of the Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The scours were created by the Missouri river during the flood of 1993 and have since served as a home for a variety of river fish species. Every few years high water levels reconnect the scour holes to the river providing an exchange of fish and nutrients. This may help productivity yet makes managing these fish populations a greater challenge.



A crew of fishery biologists lead by Cliff Wilson from Columbia FRO surveyed these three scour holes in July. The survey was conducted to determine species richness, diversity, abundance and condition. Electrofishing and a suite of net types were used to collect game, non-game, and nuisance fish species in each scour hole. The survey produced 3,519 fish including 36 different species from the three ponds. Some of the most interesting fish observed in the scour holes included smallmouth

and spotted bass which are species almost never seen in the Missouri river or in scour holes. Other species of interest included: sauger, adult paddlefish and both juvenile and adult bighead and silver carp.

Resource users have an interest in establishing healthy recreational fisheries in these scour holes. Some of the ideas being considered include sealing them off from their flood plains to prevent fish from being lost to flooding, adding additional vegetation to create better habitat for the fish, and having the states conservation department stock catfish.

Earlier this year Friends of the Big Muddy, a refuge volunteer group, sank Christmas trees in the scour holes to create fisheries habitat. This spring, Columbia FRO stocked adult largemouth bass and redear sunfish, donated to the Service from an overpopulated private pond, into the scours to boost sport fish populations. Since this stocking, high river levels in June reconnected the scours to the river. It is suspected that this July survey will give biologist an opportunity to determine if some of these fish were lost during the flooding events. Knowing if fish will be lost during these events will be valuable information when stocking is considered.

Columbia FRO will continue to monitor these scour holes and provide management recommendations to refuge managers to be used to develop management ideas and regulations that will aid in establishing a healthy sport fish population for the benefit of recreational anglers at the refuge. This effort supports the Partnerships and Accountability and Public Use goals of the Fisheries Programs Vision for the Future.

Cliff D. Wilson



Leadership in Science and Technology

New Trawl Boat Comes On Line

Columbia FRO took possession of a new and improved stern trawl boat from Clark Boats of Bellevue, Iowa. This will complement the offices' current stern trawling efforts. Changes have been made to the design of this boat to improve boat stability, ergonomics and safety. The original hull design for the Missouri River stern trawlers came from a boat used by Nebraska Game and Fish Commission. These boats were primarily used for working on lakes. Though the overall layout of the new boat is relatively the same, the new hull has less rise (a flatter bottom) making the boat more stable by reducing roll, pitch and yaw. Other modifications were made to improve functioning of work stations. Additional floatation material was also added to the back half of the boat to provide greater buoyancy.



New stern trawler sitting in the Clark Boats shop.

Columbia FRO has been on the leading edge of stern trawling in the Missouri river for the past 5 years. Improvements in trawling net design and the reduction of labor resulting from stern trawling have enabled us to access habitats that have not been sampled effectively with traditional sampling gears.

Final equipment and rigging on the new boat should be completed by the end of August. The new trawl boat will help improve our knowledge of Missouri River fish communities beginning in September. This boat keeps Columbia FRO on the cutting edge of Scientific and Technological breakthroughs in big river science and provides the staff of Columbia FRO a tool to effectively, efficiently and safely perform their jobs as outlined in objective 7.3 of the Workforce Management goal of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Andrew B. Starostka

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Fish Community Season Begins

July marks the beginning of the pallid sturgeon "Associated Fish Community Project". As the month of June came to a close, so did the Sturgeon Season of the Pallid Sturgeon and Associated Fish Community Project. The Fish Community Season then kicks off on July 1st, signaling a change in some gear types used during sampling. New gears used



during Fish Community Season include bag seines and minifyke nets to focus is on catching smaller fish such as minnows and young of year fish, while also attempting to continue to catch adult sturgeon and other target species of the project. The endangered pallid sturgeon are still captured during Community Season, however the capture rate declines along with other sturgeon catch rates. While July is just the beginning of Fish Community Season, it lasts until the end of October so we have only just begun.

Corey W. Lee

Workforce Management

“A Boat without a Name is Bad Luck”

The Columbia Fishery Resource Office has played a large part in the protection and management of the Missouri River system since its establishment in 1991. We have also



The electrofishing boat “Louweeza” with Station identification.

developed a number of partners throughout the years including the U.S. Geological Survey and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

These agencies have well established roots in Missouri and have become a fixture in the public eye with the USFWS and the Columbia FRO often viewed as being homogenous with these other agencies. Attempts have been made over the years to establish the Columbia FRO as a separate entity along the Missouri River corridor with the most recent campaign taking place during July of 2005. During a previous outreach event at Southern Boone County School, students were asked to help the name their boats. They were given information to assist in the naming process. Winning

suggestions included the Phoenix, Big John, S.S. Milligan, Louweeza, R/V Pedro, Shallow Water Shark and Jen-nay. The appointed names are now fixed upon the stern, bow and port sides of each boat along with a Columbia Fishery Resources Office and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decal which will hopefully increase awareness in the public eye of who we are and what we are trying to accomplish.

Along with increasing morale and accountability, this exercise helps crew leaders to schedule boat use, organize maintenance and provide a clear safety float plan to managers. This effort helps Columbia FRO to fill the workforce management goal, objective 7.3: Provide employees with access to facilities and equipment needed to effectively, efficiently and safely perform their jobs.

W. Geno Adams



First Responders Train Fishery Biologists in CPR and First Aid

Fishery Biologists at Columbia FRO updated their American Heartsaver CPR and First Aid Certification on July 29th with staff from Conceptual Training Concepts (CTC). CTC is a group of professional emergency responders dedicated to providing practical and realistic first aid training. Their training approach incorporates the common sense, knowledge, and experience of the participants. The instructors provide information relevant to the needs of the trainees. Deputy Sheriff Adam Burks, an experienced first responder, specifically addressed issues we may experience on boats in remote locations. He is also helping us to develop waterproof first aid kits with the appropriate materials we might find necessary in remote aquatic environments.

This training meets the Fisheries Strategic Vision goal of providing our employees with access to facilities and equipment needed to effectively, efficiently and safely perform their jobs.

Joanne M. Grady

Columbia FRO Staff

Tracy D. Hill – Project Leader
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