

Connecting Children and Nature

The Southeast Region Fisheries Program

A Critical Connection

Ever wonder why some people feel a deep connection with the out-of-doors, while others are content to spend every day inside? Or why some people take a strong interest in natural resource issues, while others remain disengaged? A growing body of research shows a link between the attitudes and behaviors of adults toward nature and their direct interaction with nature as children. Today, children are more disconnected from nature than ever before. If this trend continues, it could have profound impacts on the health and well-being of our nation's children and our natural resources. Fortunately, growing alarm about children's health and an emerging movement to reconnect children to nature offer hope.

Unique Opportunities to Connect

The conservation of fish and aquatic resources is one of the highest priorities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our National Fish Hatcheries provide a place for visitors to get a close look at fish and other aquatic species and to witness first-hand the wonder of nature's cycle of life. With fourteen National Fish Hatcheries in the Southeast United States, there are many opportunities to connect to nature. At these places, bubbling springs, mountain streams and rippling ponds bring to life millions of fish

hatched from tiny eggs every year. Their return to waters across the Southeast offers children the possibility to become a participant in an outdoor activity to bring them in touch with nature: fishing. According to the 2006 *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, one-third of Americans enjoy fishing and watching wildlife. The Fisheries Program works to ensure that opportunity exists for everyone. Fisheries Program employees are passionate about their work and have the expertise and the desire to share their knowledge with visitors.

Making the Connection

The Southeast Region has made connecting people with nature a priority. Special events that highlight the recreational, economic, health, and quality-of-life benefits of fishing; a new environmental education program; a wealth of volunteer opportunities; and staff that vigorously support these programs all work together to provide families and children the chance for a hands-on experience that will deepen their appreciation of our aquatic resources.



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Fishing Events

From Arkansas to Florida, Louisiana to Kentucky, over 10,000 anglers participate in special events at National Fish Hatcheries every year. Most of the participants are young, and many have the profound experience of catching their very first fish. Fish and Wildlife Service partners and volunteers mobilize to make these events a big success.



Visitor Facilities

The nation's first Visitor and Environmental Education Center at a National Fish Hatchery opened at Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery in Kentucky in 2006. The Center hosts more than 100,000 school children and other visitors each year. Other hatcheries across the Region offer public aquariums, environmental education classrooms, visitor contact stations, and interpretive kiosks. A second Visitor and Environmental Education Center at Mammoth Spring National Fish Hatchery in Arkansas is expected to open in 2009.



Environmental Education

Last year, Congress passed the National Fish Hatchery System Volunteer Act of 2006, which calls for the development of environmental education programs for all National Fish Hatcheries. The Southeast Region Fisheries Program is leading the way by working with State and local education authorities and partner organizations, and will soon launch the first hatchery environmental education curriculum. It will build upon the many educational activities already underway at Southeast hatcheries and takes advantage of on-site resources and expertise, while following national education guidelines. It will allow students to increase their knowledge and awareness of aquatic resources through hands-on experience with fish and fish habitats in an outdoor classroom.



Public Use and Visitation

National Fish Hatcheries in the Southeast Region are host to more than three-quarters of a million visitors every year. Our National Fish Hatcheries and their nearby waterways offer many opportunities for the public to enjoy and learn more about our nation's natural resources through wildlife viewing, picnicking, hiking, special events, interpretive exhibits, and, of course, fishing!



Volunteer Opportunities

Five hatcheries in the Southeast Region now have Friends Groups, and more are being developed. Volunteers contribute more than 30,000 hours to National Fish Hatcheries every year. From coordinating special events to tagging fish, there are many ways citizens can join the Fisheries Program in conservation activities. Fisheries internship opportunities also exist for students throughout the Region.

For more information, contact:

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