

# Community Fish Management

*Welaka NFH partners to connect urban youth with nature*

*For more than 10 years, Welaka National Fish Hatchery has partnered with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to provide quality fishing experiences to youth in urban areas.*



Credit: FWC

## Connecting Kids with Nature

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more than a century, the Service has provided access and opportunities to people who sought out nature experiences. Welaka National Fish Hatchery (NFH) has been an active supporter of this important work through annual fishing events, and its participation in Florida's Community Fish Management Program.

## Community Fish Management Program

For more than 10 years, Welaka NFH has partnered with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to provide quality fishing experiences to underprivileged youth in urban areas. The stocked ponds in this program provide year-round fishing opportunities, and receive approximately 2,000 hours of fishing per acre each year. They also support many outreach events. In 2007, more than 13,200 children participated in youth fishing activities at the places. The program has received national recognition for providing "close-to-home" fishing opportunities. The long-term benefits of this exposure to nature are tremendous.

## Important for the Health of Florida

Americans are spending less time outside. Research illustrates a dramatic and detrimental change in how children and their families interact with nature, especially among urban populations. A bounty of



Credit: FWC



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*Top: A fishing derby held at Ronnie Van Zant FMA during Florida's "Free Fishing Weekend."*

*Bottom: Summer Youth Fishing Clinic at Hanna Park FMA.*

research reveals that regular and sustained interactions with the outdoors fosters physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health (Louv 2005). It alleviates the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder, lowers the risks of obesity and diabetes, and can improve learning abilities.

## Florida's Changing Demographics

Florida is witnessing some important demographic changes:

- Florida is among the top ten states in population and growth rates.
- More than 85% of Florida's population lives in urban areas.
- The majority of Florida's children under age five are from minority groups.
- By 2030, more than 55% of all youth under age 18 will live in 10 states. Florida is among them.



(continued from front)

### Welaka NFH's Partnership Role

Welaka NFH proudly accepted a partnership role in this program when asked by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) for assistance. Because Welaka is within close proximity to the stocking sites, the hatchery works hand-in-hand with FWC to efficiently transport fish to these locations in the shortest time possible.



Credit: FWS

The state provides Welaka NFH with fingerling catfish in the spring, and Welaka NFH provides the facilities and labor to grow these fish to a catchable size. When fish are ready for harvest, the FWC and the hatchery work together on the harvest and transport of these fish to the stocking locations.



Credit: FWS

*Since 2000, more than 44,000 children have participated in fishing events directly related to the community managed ponds and the cooperative efforts between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.*



Credit: FWC

A "Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs" event at Huguenot Park FMA with the Jacksonville Beach Police.

### Community Ponds

Some of the parks that receive fish as part of the Community Fish Management Program include:

- St. Augustine Road
- Hanna Park
- Oceanway FMA
- Pope Duval FMA
- Huguenot FMA
- Bethesda FMA
- Crystal Springs

### For more information, contact:

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Welaka National Fish Hatchery annual kids fishing event.



Credit: FWS