U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Big Rivers Fisheries

Region 3 - Great Lakes/Big Rivers

Leadership in Conserving, Enhancing, and Restoring Aquatic Ecosystems

Joanne Grady, Columbia Fishery Resources Office, holds a pallid sturgeon captured during a population assessment of this Federally Endangered species.

The Big Rivers Fisheries Program works to conserve nationally significant species in the Upper Mississippi, Lower Missouri, Ohio, and Red Rivers. We provide technical assistance and stock fish and mussels for restoration and recovery programs. We focus on restoring interjurisdictional fish, recovering of threatened and endangered fish and mussels, combating aquatic nuisance species, and restoring aquatic habitats. The program has accomplished great things with our partners.

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery

Pallid sturgeon – Each year the Fish and Wildlife Service stocks several thousand pallid sturgeon to help speed up recovery of this endangered species. We are also working to determine the population size of sturgeon in the Lower Missouri River and help guide habitat restoration projects conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Niangua darter – We are working with the State of Missouri to remove barriers to fish passage for this threatened darter to reconnect separated populations.

Topeka shiner – We are working with the States of Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri to learn more about this endangered species and implement recovery actions.

Higgins' eye pearlymussel – The Great Lakes/Big Rivers Region's program for culture of this endangered freshwater mussel is the largest such program in the United States. Last year, we stocked an estimated 522,000 mussels into the waters of four rivers in the Upper Mississippi River Basin.

Winged mapleleaf mussel – Last year, we helped determine the last piece of the puzzle for culturing this critically endangered mussel. Certain species of catfish were identified as host fish for this mussel, and we will build a similar program as we did for the Higgins' eye.

Higgins' eye pearlymussels are being cultured at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery as part of the recovery efforts for this native mussel.

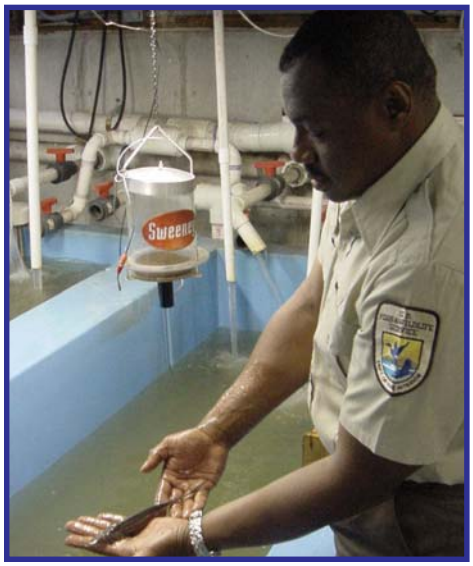
Restoring Interjurisdictional Fisheries

Paddlefish and sturgeon – With the help from the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resources Association (MICRA) and the States in the Mississippi River Basin, we developed a central tagging database to provide a large-scale stock assessment program for these highly migratory species.

Ann Runstrom, La Crosse Fishery Resources Office, holds a paddlefish caught during a large-scale, multi-agency stock assessment program.

Greg Conover, Carterville Fishery Resources Office, explains how this invasive silver carp competes with native river species.

Invasive zebra mussels attach to native mussels in numbers that result in death.



Rod May, Neosho National Fish Hatchery, displays an endangered pallid sturgeon raised as part of the Recovery Plan for the Missouri River.

Combating Aquatic Nuisance Species

Asian carp – The spread of two species of Asian carp, the silver and bighead, have quickly become one of the biggest problems for resource agencies in the Mississippi River Basin. In some habitats, Asian and common carp account for more than 95 percent of the fish. This year we will gather resource professionals to identify, prioritize, and coordinate actions to manage this invader.

Round goby – Gobies passed from the Great Lakes and beyond the site of an electrical barrier in the Illinois River in 1999, before the barrier was activated. We are monitoring the advance of this invasive species, trying to determine when it will enter into the Mississippi River.

Zebra mussels – Zebra mussels, which attach to hard surfaces, have devastated our native mussels. The St. Croix River represents the last stronghold for healthy mussel populations in the Upper Mississippi River, and we are working with many others to prevent the spread of zebra mussels into the St. Croix.

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Fish Passage Program – The Fish and Wildlife Service implemented the fish passage program in 1999 to address structures built on rivers and their effects on fish and other aquatic species. Some examples of improved fish passage include helping remove dams in the Red River Basin for lake sturgeon, replacing low-water car crossings for Niangua darters, and replacing culverts for alligator gar.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program – The Partners Program is a voluntary habitat restoration program for private landowners, Tribes, and other conservation partners that willingly restore fish and wildlife habitat on their property. We work closely with the Partners Program to identify and restore stream habitats.

Monitoring Big Rivers Habitat Restoration – The Fish and Wildlife Service works closely with the Army Corps of Engineers to monitor and evaluate their multi-million dollar habitat restoration projects in the Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers. Our fish response information helps the Corps improve their projects.

Public Use

Managing Fisheries on Federal Lands – National Wildlife Refuges in Region 3 are important to river fish. Fourteen refuges manage lands along 800 miles of river. We work with these refuges to help manage fishery resources.

Recreational Fishing – Each office and hatchery in the Big Rivers Program hosts an annual fishing day event during the National Fishing and Boating Week. We also work with Refuges, Department of Defense, States, and Tribes to improve fishing opportunities for the public.

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
http://www.fws.gov
-USFWS photos

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building
1 Federal Drive
Ft. Snelling, MN 55111

For more information please contact:
Michael Oetker; Fishery Program Supervisor
612/713-5209 or visit our website at:
http://midwest.fws.gov/Fisheries/