

# Natchitoches

## National Fish Hatchery



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### Hatchery Facts

- Established: May 21, 1930, under the authority of the White Act, 46 Statute 371, to produce largemouth bass, redear sunfish, bluegill, and catfish for local public waters and farm ponds.
- Current production programs can be grouped into three categories: Recovery (pallid sturgeon, Louisiana pearlshell mussels), Restoration (striped bass, paddlefish, alligator snapping turtles), and Recreation (largemouth bass, bluegill, channel catfish).
- The hatchery will add alligator gar as a restoration species in 2009.
- Acres: 98 land acres; 46 surface acres for fish production (53 ponds).
- Only federal fish hatchery in the State of Louisiana.

### Hatchery Objectives

- Using radio telemetry, help determine the population status of pallid sturgeon at the Old River River Control Complex, Concordia Parish, LA.
- Restore depleted populations of paddlefish and striped bass.
- Help develop rearing techniques and restore depleted populations of alligator gar.
- Develop culture techniques for alligator snapping turtles.
- Develop holding and culture techniques for the Louisiana pearlshell mussel.
- Improve recreational fishing opportunities on federal lands.
- Develop environmental education programming that promotes the Service's natural resource mission and utilizes hatchery facilities as an outdoor classroom for all Natchitoches Parish schools.

- Develop cultural education programming and highlight the cultural and natural resource relationships between the Service and the Caddo Indian Nation.

### Management Tools

- Six intensive culture systems for spawning and holding species of special concern.
- Fifty-three ponds for extensive culture of a variety of species.
- Four in-pond raceways for the culture of anadromous and/or freshwater riverine species.
- Cooperative work efforts with the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership, the Pallid Sturgeon Recovery Team; USGS National Wetlands Research Center; and the natural resources divisions of the states of Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas.

### Hatchery Production (2008)

Paddlefish .....	6,920
Channel catfish .....	596,299
Bluegill .....	1,133,224
Largemouth bass .....	1,144,983
Total for FY08 .....	2,881,426

Every taxpayer \$1 turns into \$25 when it is invested in recreational fish production at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery. The \$147,500 dollars budgeted in 2008 for recreational fish resulted in 66,673 angler days and \$2,035,700 in revenue.

### Public Use Opportunities

- 5,000 visitors annually.
- 9,000 gallon, 16 tank public aquarium featuring live exhibits of native southeastern fish and reptiles as well as static displays honoring the site as a historical Caddo Indian village and linking the Service's commitment to cultural and environmental stewardship.
- K-12 environmental education programming using the hatchery as an outdoor classroom.

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

- Caddo Indian Memorial Plaza honoring the hatchery as a sacred site for the Caddo Indian Nation. This plaza is outdoors adjacent to the aquarium building and has benches for meditation and reflection.

- Birdwatching.

### Financial Impact of Hatchery

- Five-person staff.
- Current year budget (FY08) \$668,763.
- 25:1 ratio return on recreational dollars generated:invested on recreational species (\$2,035,700 generated:\$147,500 invested for FY08).

### Other

- F.I.S.H. – Friends in Support of the Hatchery, the Southeast Region's first fisheries friends group, was incorporated in 2000 and has worked hard ever since. The group has garnered over \$50,000 in grant money since 2000 and has hosted or helped host numerous events including the Annual Open House, the dedication of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge, the hatchery's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and the dedication of the Caddo Indian Memorial Plaza. The group is active in promoting the outdoors and fishing as wholesome, healthy recreation for young people and has provided fishing derby opportunities for over 1000 kids since 2000. For more information on F.I.S.H., contact Debbie Waskom, President, 318/357 1623.

- Fish CULTURE - Native American culture and fish culture at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery are woven together like the cordage of a net. When the hatchery was built in 1931, construction workers discovered over 100 Caddo Indian burials. Research verified that the hatchery grounds were part of the Natchitoches Indian village described by Henri de Tonti. The one-handed Italian-born French officer chronicled his experience with LaSalle in his storied 1690 journey through present-day Louisiana. The native Caddo people stewarded the land, relying on fish for food.

The importance of fishing and land stewardship are knotted together to this day. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service honors the hatchery grounds as an important Caddo site, and seeks to honor the cultural heritage of these great people. The hatchery does this through combined environmental, cultural, and heritage education programs. So whether it is the actual culturing of fish for conservation, or the use of fish as part of their cultural heritage, the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery continues to be a national leader in the fish culture arena. After all, the mission of the hatchery and the desires of the Caddo people are braided: to conserve and protect the land and its fisheries resources.

### Questions and Answers

#### *What is a fish hatchery?*

Federal fish hatcheries have been part of our nation's resource management efforts for more than 100 years. Hatcheries can be warm water, cool water or cold water facilities. Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery is a warm water station that spawns, hatches, and raises young fish to a size and age which provides them with the best chance of surviving in the wild. These fish are raised to help sustain populations in the wild until suitable habitat can be reestablished and the populations can sustain themselves.

#### *How do you feed the fish in the aquarium and what do they eat?*

The fish and reptiles in the aquarium are fed twice a week. The feed that the hatchery uses is called Mazuri© feed, which is a brand of Purina© feeds. The feed is specially made to have the best nutritional value for omnivores, herbivores, or reptiles and the various species are fed accordingly. The feed comes in a powder form and is mixed with water. It gels and is similar in consistency to a dense brownie. It is cut up and placed in the tanks by a hatchery worker or volunteer. Feed that is not eaten is removed the next day.

#### *Isn't the paddlefish a catfish?*

Because of their smooth skin paddlefish are often mistaken for a species of catfish. They are nicknamed spoonbill catfish even though they are not related to any catfish species.

#### *What do sturgeon eat?*

The pallid sturgeon prefers extremely turbid waters and strong currents where they feed on insects and small fish. The pallid is listed as an endangered species and faces many of the same problems as the paddlefish (another species raised at the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery). Those problems include contaminants from agricultural and industrial runoff and habitat destruction.

#### *How long do fish live?*

It depends on the species of fish. Some live less than a year and some live over 100 years. Largemouth bass can live up to 15 years. Based on age and growth studies done collaboratively with the hatchery, pallid sturgeon in the lower United States only live to be about 20 years whereas the pallid sturgeon in northern states live to around 60-70 years.

#### *What's the difference between an alligator snapping turtle and a common snapping turtle?*

There are five main ways to visibly tell the difference between a common and alligator snapping turtle.

#### **(1) Top view of the shell:**

Common - low ridges that follow the contour of the upper shell and the ridges become smoother as the turtle grows older.

Alligator - raised ridges that do not follow the contour of the upper shell and are in a straight line.

#### **(2) Top view of head:**

Common – eyes can be seen from above.

Alligator – eyes can't be seen from above.

#### **(3) Side view of the head:**

Common – smaller beak.

Alligator – larger beak.

#### **(4) Side view of upper shell:**

Common – single row of scales on side.

Alligator – extra row of scales on side.

#### **(5) View of tail:**

Common – raised sawtooth bumps.

Alligator – round bumps.