

Transcript for Audio Podcast - Orangeburg National Fish Hatchery, South Carolina

Valerie Fellows/FWS: Hi, my name is Valerie Fellows, and I work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Public Affairs. Today, we are celebrating the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fisheries Program 140th anniversary. And we're talking with Willie Booker, Hatchery Manager for the Orangeburg National Fish Hatchery, which is turning 100 and is having a big public celebration to invite people to celebrate the conservation history. Orangeburg Fish Hatchery is actually one of 70 national fish hatcheries across the country and can be found in most states. Hi Willie.

Willie Booker/ FWS:

Good morning, Valerie. How are you doing today?

Fellows/FWS: I'm well. I'm very excited that Orangeburg is turning 100. When was Orangeburg first established and why was it established?

Booker/FWS: It was established in 1911 for the purpose of producing fish-- what we call "warm water fish" which are largemouth bass, bluegill, redbreast sunfish, catfish— mainly for local farmers, pond owners and for stocking public waters. So, it was established to provide a source of fish for the community.

Fellows/FWS: And what kind of work does Orangeburg do today for fish production comparing the "then" and "now"?

Booker/FWS: Orangeburg Fish Hatchery is kind of a traditional fish hatchery that has evolved into working with some endangered species such as the short-nosed sturgeon. The short-nosed sturgeon is listed as endangered because of mainly habitat destruction. It is an "anadromous" fish that goes to saltwater but returns to freshwater for reproduction. Here at Orangeburg, we are doing trials such as identifying different diets, different types of spawning techniques, and those types of things that are used to produce fish at a production level.

We also work with another endangered species, the American wood stork, which is a bird. And this bird is normally a coastal bird that feeds in shallow, coastal waters and ponds and shallow lakes. What we do here at Orangeburg, we produce bluegill sunfish to stock in ponds on our national wildlife refuges, and private ponds that are owned by the Audubon Society. And this is an attempt to give those birds an opportunity to feed during their nesting cycle. Also to teach their young fledglings how to feed. And the survival rates by us stocking fish in these impoundments have increased the survival rate of this bird. And some of the colonies are showing a great recovery just because of what we're doing here at Orangeburg producing fish for them.

Another thing that we really stepped out of the box on is we're working with freshwater mussels. The Carolina heelsplitter, which is also listed as an endangered species, we're

working to identify culture techniques, we're working to improve habitat and different things that are required if we are to be successful in the recovery of this species.

Fellows/FWS: I know that you probably have a strong-knit community there. What kinds of programs or activities do you conduct for the public?

Booker/FWS: We take great pride in our outreach program. This is a public fish hatchery, a public operation. So, we always encourage the public to come out. And we have great partnerships with our school system—our secondary school system. And Orangeburg, we're fortunate enough to have two major universities in our city. So we work with South Carolina State University and Kraftland University, not only doing fish research, but we include them as part of our partnership for volunteers. We host special activity days—Kids Fishing Day during National Fishing and Boating Week. We have what we call our “Senior Citizens Day” where we invite senior citizens to come out and tour the hatchery. We provide a fishing pond for them because we realize that how important that is to work with our senior citizens because a lot of them cannot get out to traditional bodies of water to fish. And then we have a Special Needs Day where we invite individuals that may have special needs that need special assistance to get out and tour the facility and see what we're doing here.

Fellows/FWS: Very cool. So Orangeburg has really tied in with your local community. You must be having a positive economic impact as well?

Booker/FWS: The whole economic impact of producing recreational fishing at Orangeburg is more than \$13million. This was reported in a 2010 economic study. And of that, over 120 jobs are also created which bring in a wage pay to individual workers of over \$3 million. And so we feel that the investment of Orangeburg has a great return to the community, to the State, and to the Nation because of what we're doing. And this comes from individuals traveling to go fishing, buying fishing gear, buying fuel. So it's a snowball effect that goes up from the \$670,000 that we receive in our budget—to translate that into an over \$13 million generated funds is a great success. So, we feel that the investment made to Orangeburg is an investment that is multiplied many times and goes back out into the community and the economy.

Fellows/FWS: So Willie how long have you been at the Orangeburg National Fish Hatchery?

Booker/FWS: I was thinking about that the other day, and I was thinking about “wow, we're turning a 100 years old.” And I was thinking I've been here for 20 of those years. I just feel that I have spent a great deal of my career here and a great deal of the hatchery time I've been here.

Fellows/FWS: So what do you love most about Orangeburg or why is it so special for you?

Booker/FWS: Well, it became my home. Once I got here and the community, and the type of work we're doing is so rewarding. To work not only producing fish to stock out in public waters, but to have the opportunity to work with endangered species such as the short-nosed sturgeon. To cross over and provide fish for an endangered bird. There are not too many places where you have that opportunity to have so large an impact on so many species. And just recently we started working with freshwater mussels. I think Orangeburg has such diversity that it's so exciting to come to work each day because you know you're going to be doing something to help the natural resource.

Fellows/FWS: And Willie, you and Orangeburg will be celebrating your centennial celebration on Wednesday, September 28.

Booker/FWS: I would just like to invite everyone to come out and help us celebrate this momentous occasion--a 100 years. Not too many times do we get the opportunity to celebrate something that's 100 years. So if you're in the area, if you're traveling between Columbia, South Carolina, and Charleston, South Carolina, we're right in the middle. So come out and help us celebrate this time and also enjoy seeing what a national fish hatchery looks like. You might get a chance to see a big old bass or a big old catfish! So we just welcome the public to come out and celebrate.

Fellows/FWS: For more information about the Orangeburg National Fish Hatchery, please visit www.fws.gov/orangeburg. Again, my name is Valerie Fellows and I work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services' Office of Public Affairs. And we are celebrating the Fisheries Program 140 anniversary.