

# WELAKA NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY NEWS



Rainbow over the St. Johns River at Welaka, FL.

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# Welaka National Fish Hatchery Works with MacDill Air Force Base Under SIKES Act

Most Americans are familiar with or know of at least one military base located near them. What most Americans don't know is that US military bases are comprised of nearly 25 million acres of land that represent diverse habitat types and contain a wealth of plant and animal life. While the purpose of these bases is to support military operations to protect our country, these diverse habitats provide an opportunity for the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to work with the military to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Congress recognized in 1960 that our country's military bases provided this conservation opportunity and thus passed the Sikes Act. The Sikes Act requires that military bases write an Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan (INRMP) before Service offices can work on any base.

For the past three years, the Welaka National Fish Hatchery has been working with MacDill Air Force Base near Tampa, FL. The initial goal of the agreement between Welaka NFH and MacDill AFB was for the hatchery personnel

to manage and control aquatic vegetation so that the waters of MacDill AFB would have improved habitat for fish and wildlife, increased water access for people from shore and boats, and more outdoor recreational opportunities for Air Force staff and families. The waters and shorelines have also become much more aesthetically pleasing since inception of this agreement.

On August 22-23, aquatic vegetation control work continued in and around some of the base's Surface Water Improvement Management (SWIM) waterways. Allen Walker and Ken Blick spent most of their time treating cattails and hydrilla, but at one point had to rescue their Ford F250 from a tilapia bed. Fortunately, a kindly gentleman with a tractor showed up and helped recover the truck. Walker's and Blick's reputation (overlooking the truck) have gotten them named the "Cattail Kings." Their reputation has spread to other military facilities such as Avon Park Air Force Range near Avon Park, FL in which the hatchery is in talks with Avon Park personnel about controlling aquatic vegetation around the base.



Lewis Lake at MacDill Air Force Base looks good as the "Cattail Kings" have gotten the cattails under control.

Not the approved MOCC way to launch a boat... but effective none the less.





## Region 4 Dive Team Members Complete Mussel Survey on the Pearl River

The Pearl River is the southernmost border between Mississippi and Louisiana. In 2011, the Pearl River experienced a chemical spill from a paper mill located in Bogalusa, LA that killed tens of thousands of fish and mussels. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the US Fish and Wildlife Service has since been conducting surveys on the mussel populations to determine if there were any long term effects from the spill. This August, members of the Region 4 Dive Team from the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery and the Welaka National Fish Hatchery staged diving activities from the Region 4 Dive Trailer looking for freshwater mussels beneath the muddy waters of the Pearl River. The goal for this

year's diving was to conduct quantitative surveys to help get a handle of how many mussels call the Pearl River home. Divers dove side by side along a transect line that was 25 meters long and each diver collected mussels one meter out from his side of the transect line to make the area of each sample 50 square meters. The data from this survey has been compiled and sent to the Louisiana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in Baton Rouge, LA where the data will be used to determine population estimates in the Pearl River. Knowing the population of mussels in the river will allow conservation agencies to have a better idea of the number of animal affected by any future impacts to the Pearl River.



Region 4 Divers Grant Webber and Tony Brady head out to collect mussels on a transect line in the Pearl River, LA

# Archery Program Coming to Welaka National Fish Hatchery

As you may have read in last month's newsletter, Welaka NFH is planning on starting an archery program for youth at the hatchery. Our initial plans are to work with the Putnam County 4-H to develop the archery program. In order to start a 4-H archery club the instructor(s) needs to be certified through the Florida 4-H shooting sports by attending their day and a half training. In August, the hatchery's newest employee, Tony Brady and his daughter Jordan were able to attend this training that was hosted at Camp Cloverleaf in Lake Placid, FL. Tony is currently working with the Putnam County 4-H Extension Agent to make the archery club official and get it off and shooting. Jordan will be a member of the archery team as well as a Junior Instructor. When working with beginning archers, the

more instructors you have the better. Currently the hatchery will be using the limited equipment that the 4-H office currently has as we work to build up supplies to take beginning archers and develop them into shooters to ready for competition. Jordan and her two sisters who are experienced competition archers will help lead and be role models for these new archers. In order to prepare these kids for competition, the hatchery staff will work to develop the hatchery's old nature trail and fix it up to be both a nature trail and a 3-D archery course. Field archery will be held in a large fenced in field behind the hatchery quarters where Tony is currently living. Welaka NFH is uniquely suited to help connect kids with nature through this archery program.



Jordan removes arrows from the target during 4-H archery instructor training.

Tony and Jordan got to enjoy some Father/Daughter time at the 4-H archery training.

