Hatchery Highlights

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Warm Springs NFH
News and Updates

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POND 43 GETS A FACELIFT !!!

It took several days, 80 tons of sand and 178 tons of pea gravel, but an impressive looking pond finally emerged from the mud and muck. The process took over a week in early December, but all the hard work was well worth it. The gravel bottom will help with several water quality issues in the pond. A liner was laid down on the bottom and sides of the pond, followed by several inches of sand and then 4-5 inches of gravel to minimize the suspended sedimentation that was a problem in the past. The hatchery decided to rehab the pond bottom to minimize the workload of sand filters used to filter out suspended sedimentation before the water was pumped into the mussel building. This pond is exclusively used as a water source for the mussel building. Water quality will be monitored on a weekly basis and compared to a second clay-bottom pond also used as a water source for the mussel building. Hopefully, all of these renovations will improve the water quality that will be supplied to the mussels held in refugia at the hatchery.



A NEW LOOK FOR THE FRESHWATER MUSSEL BUILDING

The freshwater mussel building at Warm Springs Hatchery was recently renovated. Captive refugia mussels were previously held in 16 tanks that were set on cinder blocks. Our growing mussel program needed more tank capacity to handle the expanding workload of conducting research with several mussel species. Chad Shirey, electrician, built 3 wooden frames that hold 6 tanks each. He also built walkways between each frame to allow staff to reach the upper rows. Carlos Echevarria, hatchery manager, set-up the tanks with new water and air supply lines. We now have a total 26 tanks that will be used for holding captive refugia and mussel specimens for research.



JACI ATTENDS REGIONAL BIOLOGIST CONFERENCE

Jaci Zelko, Fish Biologist, attended the Southeast Region Biologists' Conference was held at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia on February 23-27, 2009. This first-ever Biologists' conference provided the region with a major opportunity to use staff expertise and skills to move the region forward in implementing the Strategic Habitat Conservation (SHC) for landscape conservation. The activities in the conference were designed to let participants identify important conservation needs, barriers, and potential opportunities, and to provide to recommendations for priority actions. The conference marked a critical step in the effort to begin the region's implementation process. The conference set the stage for us to engage our partners to develop appropriate goals, design and deliver conservation actions, and evaluate the region's effectiveness and progress. The conference provided a forum for exchange of information and experiences involving resource management and conservation across the Southeast.

ANOTHER SUCCESFUL TRIP TO WISCONSIN

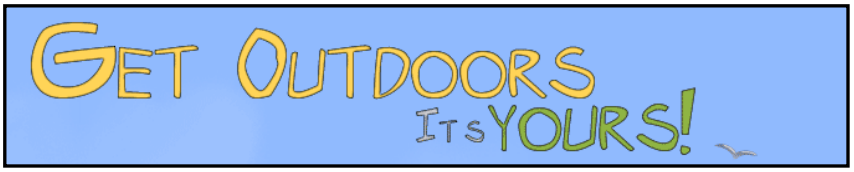
Staff members Carlos Echevarria, Chad Shirey, and Jaci Zelko, traveled to Wisconsin to spawn lake sturgeon in the Wolf River. This is the ninth year that we traveled way up north to collect eggs and bring them back to the hatchery.

Over 137,000 eggs from seven females were collected and fertilized over three days in April. The weather was exceptionally wet this year, and we wore our rain gear throughout the entire trip. The camaraderie between Wisconsin DNR personnel and our own biologists has grown over our yearly adventures, so we don't really mind driving all that way to do a little fish work because we know we are going to have a great time.

Even though the quick trip is exhausting and we encounter several small problems along the way, the extraordinary effort will produce lake sturgeon fingerlings that will be stocked at the Lower French Broad in the Upper Tennessee River, Cumberland River in Tennessee, and the Coosa River, Georgia. On our return trip, we stopped and distributed a batch of 56,000 eggs to Summerville SFH, Georgia DNR. They raise their fish to be stocked in the Coosa River as part of their restoration efforts. Fish that are brought to our facility are hatched after about 7 days, and raised until they are about 30 days. The fish are then divided up between our hatchery and Mammoth Spring, Orangeburg, Private John Allen NFH's, and Summerville and Cohutta state hatcheries. These preservation and recovery efforts are part of collaborations with the Wisconsin DNR, Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency, Tennessee Valley Authority, Georgia DNR, the Service, and 12 other agencies to begin restoring this species in portions of its historic range in the Southeast.

"GET OUTDOORS, IT'S YOURS!" GETS KIDS OFF THE COUCH

A new campaign by the Department of the Interior, titled "Get Outdoors, It's Yours!", encourages children, educators and families to experience nature firsthand. The program will provide more information for America's young people about opportunities to get outdoors on national wildlife refuges as well as national parks, national forests and other public lands. "There is a crisis in America in which our kids are increasingly disconnected from nature," said Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne. "We must get children off the couch and outdoors. We must get them to turn off the computers and televisions and turn on to the power of wild places and wild creatures to lift them up – to rejuvenate body, soul and spirit." For more information on the new program, go to www.getoutdoorsitsyours.gov. The web site provides lists of places for all sorts of outdoor activities from biking to wildlife viewing, links to agency web sites for youth, games and other useful materials.



STRIPED BASS CULTURE

Warm Springs NFH cooperates with regional and national efforts to restore Gulf strain striped bass populations throughout the southeast. During 2009, WSNFH participated in regional efforts to meet tasks as identified in several plans. Those tasks include annual broodstock collections, evaluating stocking effectiveness of hatchery reared fish, sample collections for genetic evaluations, care and propagation of wild and or hatchery reared broodfish. The culture, management, harvest, inventory, marking and distribution of striped bass to meet stocking goals at locations designated by the Striped Bass committee for the purpose of restoring striped bass populations is also a goal of the National Fish Hatchery. In April, over 1 million fry were received from Marion State Fish Hatchery in Marion, AL and Warm Spring Fish Technology Center.

The fry were stocked into 15 ponds over a 14-day period. The fry were stocked using a new method. In past years, bags of fry were floated in each pond and slowly hand tempered. This method was very time-consuming especially when only one staff member was doing the stocking at night. This year, we deployed the use of a tempering can. We modified a large plastic garbage can by drilling three holes into the bottom of the can. The holes are covered with duct tape. The can is attached to a pvc pipe. When it is time to stock the fry, the pvc pipe is slid onto a rebar that is pushed into the bottom of the pond. A couple gallons of water are added to the can and then the fry are dumped in. One piece of tape is removed and water is allowed to slowly seep in. The other two pieces of tape are pulled and it takes a few hours for the can to fill up. Once the water starts to overflow, the fry can swim out into the pond. This method is much easier and will be used for all future fry stocking.

Over 150,000 Phase I fingerlings were harvested over three days in May. Each batch of fish were marked by OTC using an immersion bath. The 136,357 fingerlings were divided and stocked into 9 locations. The remaining fish were held back at Warm Springs for Phase II production. The fish were also marked with OTC and then stocked back into 6 ponds. These fish are growing up big and will be harvested in October and November.

WARM SPRINGS STAFF ASSISTS WITH ALLIGATOR GAR SPAWNING AT TWO FACILITIES THIS YEAR

In May, our hatchery staff, assisted several partners during the spawning of alligator gar at Private John Allen NFH, Tupelo, MS. We have assisted in development of protocols for the collection of eggs and sperm from brooders for the past couple of spawning seasons. Jaci Zelko, fish biologist, has worked on developing protocols for storing alligator gar sperm for short time periods (up to 10 days). The amount of sperm collected from the males was not enough to conduct the study, but was plentiful to fertilize all the eggs collected. Information gathered from this year's spawning effort will be incorporated into the alligator gar spawning protocols.

Our staff also traveled to Marion AL to assist with the spawning of alligator gar at Marion Fish Hatchery. Alabama DCNR personnel have begun a propagation program for alligator gar restoration in the Mobile River, AL. Our hatchery is developing appropriate culture techniques for rearing early life stages to assist Alabama DNR's program.

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