

# Hatchery Highlights

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



**October – December 2013**

### Lake Sturgeon production news

Warm Springs NFH worked cooperatively with numerous state and federal partners to rear and distribute lake sturgeon. Warm Springs NFH working at the southern end of their historical range, also conducts habitat and population surveys on sections of the Lower French Broad River and Holston River in Tennessee to assess effectiveness of the stocking program. Assessment work also continued for a second year on sections of the Coosa River, assisting with surveys for lake sturgeon stocked by Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR).

The last of our FY 2013 year class lake sturgeon were distributed at Seven Islands Refuge Landing on the Lower French Broad River October 22, 2013. A total of 2,715 fish weighing 250.51 lbs., averaging 8.82 inches in length and marked by removing scute 7 and 8 on the right side of the body were distributed. Due to the government shutdown in October Lake Sturgeon Festival outreach event in Knoxville, TN was cancelled. The purpose of this event is to educate the public on our restoration efforts in the region, and to promote cooperative restoration efforts underway for lake sturgeon in the Southeast. However, a published article titled: Return of Lake Sturgeon, written by Stephen Lyn Bates in the Tennessee Conservationist, issue Nov/Dec 2013, highlights the cooperative efforts and partners working to restore lake sturgeon.

Warm Springs NFH continued work with our resource partners and members of the Southeast Lake Sturgeon Working Group conducting habitat and fish assessments using standardized protocols. Techniques are improving each year and lessons learned are being applied to new river systems. Work this year includes expanded use of radio telemetry to correlate fish movement and habitat utilization. In December, approval was received from Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (ADCNR), validating our staffs' applications for one year scientific collecting permits, necessary before any work can be conducted on the Coosa River in Alabama. Hatchery personnel worked two weeks in November conducting habitat and sturgeon assessment work in Tennessee and Georgia. The Warm Springs NFH staff returned to Tennessee in December for further work in the upper Tennessee River basin.

Boat crews from the Working Group undertook assessment work on the Upper Tennessee River between Knoxville to Chattanooga November 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> and again December 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup>. Boat crews consisting of staff and volunteers from Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA), Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), University of Tennessee (UT), Tennessee Aquarium, FWS personnel from Warm Springs, Mammoth Springs, Orangeburg NFH's and Warm Springs Fish Health Center, participated in this work. Coordination and valued assistance was provided by Mark Cantrell, ES Ashville. Endoscope techniques were utilized to attempt sex identification. A total of 42 lake sturgeon were surgically implanted with acoustic transmitters in order to correlate movement with habitat utilization. Acoustic receivers used to track these tagged fish were placed in the river earlier in August. Data also included substrate and habitat information at the collection sites. Tissue samples for genetic analyses were collected and all fish were scanned for or tagged with Passive Integrated Transponders (PIT) tags



(L) The boat crews assemble for the assessment work. (R) Mark Cantrell and his crew on a rainy day.



(L) Kathlina with a lake sturgeon. (R) WSNFH volunteer Cameron McPherson on the Coosa River.



(L) Carlos, Brian, and UT student conducting endoscopy. (R) Kathlina Alford and Carlos implanting acoustic tags on collected lake sturgeon. Sturgeon are under anesthesia during these procedures.

WSNFH staff and volunteers conducted assessment work on the Coosa River between Rome, GA and Weiss Lake, November 18<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup>. Four lake sturgeon were collected. Data on location was assessed at the collection points.

Other lake sturgeon work underway during the Quarter included data analysis and work on the annual production report for work on the upper TN River and also preparing for the Working Group's meeting scheduled for Feb. 2014. Cameron is working on sample data assembled from hatchery production, stocking records and assessment forms.

## **Invasive Species Work**

On November 17<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup>, Bill Bouthillier participated with other Fisheries staff and Refuge Staff on a fish invasive species inventory on the Savannah River National Wildlife Refuge. This was an effort to identify and quantify invasive aquatic species using electric shocking techniques (shocking boats). Each species caught was identified, weighed, measured, and tally counted, targeted species were fin clipped for DNA analysis

## **Sicklefin Redhorse**

Our work with Sicklefin redhorse represents a cooperative effort by the Warm Springs NFH, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, FWS Ecological Services, Ashville, NC, Conservation Fisheries Inc. and others to rear fingerling sicklefin redhorse for tagging, assessment & other studies developing under the research goals developed by members of the Sicklefin Redhorse Research Partnership.

Sicklefin redhorse are redhorse sucker in the *Moxostoma* genus, their status as a distinct species is currently under review.

The fish on hand at Warm Springs NFH are averaging near 4 inches in length and have been moved to a rectangular current tank with natural gravel substrate. They are being reared for use in a future tagging study using experimental micro-PIT tags. On December 17<sup>th</sup> staff participated in a Webinar coordinated by Athens ES office and presented by Tom Czapla, USFWS Region 6, on Razorback sucker ecology and management efforts. Useful information was gained in management approaches for Sicklefin and Robust redhorse populations in the Southeast.

## **Maintenance and Operations**

Carlos and Chad Shirey worked the Station during the shutdown Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> -16<sup>th</sup>. After all staff returned, vehicles, off road equipment, ponds and culture systems were winterized or readied for use next Spring. This ongoing work included winterizing the lake sturgeon building and draining all striped bass production ponds. Our staff also constructed new trotlines and repaired others for use with lake sturgeon assessment work. Landscaping, leaf removal, road maintenance and other such activities were also undertaken.

Several goldfish forage ponds were harvested to obtain forage for fish stocks in our display pool and aquarium displays and also to setup forage production for our upcoming alligator gar program in 2014.

## **Administrative**

Considerable effort was applied towards meeting year end requirements for personnel actions, budgeting and annual reporting requirements. Updates for staff EPAP's were completed. Staff continued efforts to integrate FBMS guidelines into daily operations. A 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter and annual report for FY 2013 was



submitted. Environmental Management records, Pesticide Usage for 2013 and Proposals for 2014 were prepared. Annual energy use was evaluated; Safety plans are currently under review and updating. Staff participated in various meetings to plan and review work activities and schedules, funding and research opportunities for FY2014. Staff took “use or lose” vacation time during the Quarter. Hatchery Manager Carlos Echevarria participated in the Annual Project Leaders meeting in Biloxi, MS December 9<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup>.

## **Lawrence Ford says Goodbye to FWS**

After serving over 40 years of federal service, our valued coworker Lawrence tells his friends and colleagues goodbye. Lawrence served 6 years in the U.S. military and 36 years with the FWS, starting here Warm Springs back in March 8, 1993. He was the Administrative Officer in charge of budgets and procurement. Lawrence has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Accounting from Troy State University which helped him in performing many of his duties as a Contracting Officer for the FWS. In his spare time Lawrence enjoys playing tennis and improving his math and computer skills and spending time with his family. Lawrence tells his friends he may be retired but not dead and plans on volunteering some time to help here at WS with FMBS and try to find a part time job teaching accounting at night at a local school. Lawrence will be missed by all. Take care old friend and good luck in retirement.



Lawrence is never short on words as he says thanks for the years and friends at Warm Springs.

## **Outreach**

The Hatchery Annual Open House, scheduled for the community on Saturday, October 12<sup>th</sup> was canceled due to the government shutdown. Two scheduled tours were provided by staff on Nov. 15 and Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>.



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