A five-student team of UWL biology majors led by graduate student Kristina Morben were joined by South Dakota biologists to search state river waters for two elusive fish.

BIOLOGICAL BONDS

Students hunt at-risk fish in the Black Hills, building connections

Graduate student Kristina Morben spent last summer searching for two 'lost' fish in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

The graduate student in biology-aquatic science is trying to better understand the distributions and habitat needs of two elusive stream fish: Longnose Sucker (*Catostomus catostomus*) and Lake Chub (*Couesius plumbeus*).

Morben led a team of three undergraduate students from the Biology Department: biology majors Joe Mickelson and Katie Klak (Biology), and biology aquatic science major Zach Hanson. They spent three months sampling more than 60 stream segments the fish historically inhabited.

The UWL team worked alongside biologists from the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks agency to 'electrofish' these streams and describe the habitats the fish rely on.

That's right — they used low-voltage, direct-current electricity to temporarily immobilize the fish and capture them. Eventually, they caught 139 Longnose Sucker and 252 Lake Chub.

The capture of that many Lake Chub was a milestone in its own. That's more Lake Chub than the total number caught in the state since they were first encountered in 1893.

The UWL biologists also found five populations of these species previously unknown in South Dakota.

The newly discovered populations of Lake Chub and Longnose Sucker were not the only excitement of the summer. The students also encountered a lot of wildlife, including six snake species, several big-game animals, and many unfamiliar western birds.

During their free time, they enjoyed outdoor recreational activities unique to the Black Hills and even visited national parks.

Collaborations with South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks biologists provided the students a unique opportunity to learn new field techniques, create professional relationships, and discover a different part of the country.

Article by Assistant Professor David Schumann, Biology