



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office

November/December 2008 Station Activities

The Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) is located in Alpena, Michigan and works to meet the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fishery and Ecosystem goals within Lake Huron, Western Lake Erie, and connecting waters of the St. Marys River, St. Clair River, and Detroit River. Activities include Aquatic Species Conservation and Management, Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management, Aquatic Invasive Species, Cooperation with Native Americans, Leadership in Science and Technology, Partnerships and Accountability, Public Use, and Workforce Management – all of which are conducted in alignment with the Service Fisheries Program's Vision for the Future. The station is one of many field offices located within Region 3, the Midwest Region.

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Alpena NFWCO Conducts Fall Lake Trout Assessment at Yankee Reef



*Submitted by Scott Koproski
Fishery Biologist*

Alpena National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (NFWCO) has been conducting fall lake trout spawning surveys at two offshore reefs since 1993: Six Fathom Bank and Yankee Reef. Both of these reefs are located in the central part of Lake Huron and have the preferred habitat, honeycomb limestone rock, of spawning lake trout. Alpena NFWCO attempts to conduct a spawning survey annually at both reefs. However, the weather during the fall can be quite challenging with gale force winds and high seas, which may not provide an opportunity for Alpena NFWCO to sample one or both reefs. As a result, each year the priority reef alternates in the event that two fall cruises are not possible.

Alpena NFWCO Biologists Woldt and Kowalski prepare to set nets during a lake trout spawning survey at Yankee Reef in Lake Huron. Photo: Scott Koproski.

This year survey efforts proved to be quite challenging due to weather. The priority reef in 2008 was Yankee Reef, which is located about 20 miles offshore of Tawas, Michigan. The *M/V Spencer F. Baird* arrived in Alpena on October 15th. Due to consecutive days of gale force winds and high seas, the staff from Alpena NFWCO waited until the end of the allocated three week period to conduct the lake trout spawning survey. On November 3rd the *M/V Baird* cast lines and departed for Yankee Reef. On board the *M/V Baird* was the vessel crew, which consisted of Captain Michael Perry, Marine Engineer Robert Bergstrum, and Seamen Fishermen David Bohn and the assessment crew, which consisted of Aaron Woldt, Scott Koproski, and Adam Kowalski.

Two 400' gangs of gill nets were deployed on Yankee Reef. Each gang consisted of one 100' panel of 4.5", 5.0", 5.5", and 6.0" stretch mesh and was fished for one night. The effort and sites have been standardized at Yankee Reef since the inception of this survey in 1993. In total 95 lake trout were captured between the two sites, marking the third highest catch since implementing this survey. More notable is that over 23% (22 wild fish) of the total lake trout catch were un-clipped fish (presumably wild), nearly doubling the previous record set in 2004 consisting of 13% (13 wild fish) of the catch. This year had the combined highest percentage and number of wild lake trout we have sampled since 1993. The increase in wild fish encourages staff and further justifies the Services efforts to rehabilitate and restore lake trout in Lake Huron.

Fall lake trout spawning surveys are another example of the Alpena NFWCO's commitment to the following Fisheries Program Vision Priorities: "Partnerships and Accountability", "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management", and "Public Use."

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Huron Pines Technical Committee Meeting



Alpena NFWCO Biologists Andrea Ania and Heather Rawlings attended the Huron Pines technical committee, the Resource Advisory Group, in Grayling, Michigan on November 6, 2008. Image: Huron Pines

*Submitted by Heather Rawlings
Fish and Wildlife Biologist*

Alpena NFWCO Biologists Andrea Ania and Heather Rawlings attended the Huron Pines technical committee, the Resource Advisory Group, in Grayling, Michigan on November 6, 2008. This committee consists of natural resource professionals from state and federal agencies that review habitat restoration projects submitted to Huron Pines for funding and/or technical assistance. Due to its nature as a technical committee, decisions

rendered by this committee are taken into consideration by the Huron Pines Board of Directors, but are not necessarily the final decision regarding the involvement of Huron Pines in a project. The committee is often used to brainstorm restoration options, and any committee member may bring a project to the meeting for discussion. Members include staff from the Michigan Department of Natural

Resources (Forestry, Fisheries and Wildlife Divisions), Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and USFWS.

Three proposals were reviewed at this meeting: a volunteer water quality monitoring project on the Upper Manistee River, a large stream bank erosion site on the Thunder Bay River, and the responsibilities of the new Huron Pines AmeriCorps Member that will be focusing on invasive species locations, mapping, and control on the coastline of NE Michigan. The water quality monitoring project and AmeriCorps position responsibilities were approved quickly by the technical committee; however, following a short debate, the stream bank erosion site was not approved due to the nature of the project. Aerial photos indicate the river will soon change course and create an oxbow lake or backwater at the erosion sites in question, the location of the erosion is near the mouth of the river, and landowners have exacerbated the erosion by their land use practices. The next technical committee meeting is scheduled for February 3rd in Grayling.

Two new projects were recommended to the Huron Pines Board of Directors through the Resource Advisory Group. Planning of aquatic habitat restoration projects contributes toward the “Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management” priority of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Drummond Island Fish Passage Project Complete



*Submitted by Andrea Ania
Fishery Biologist*

This fall on Drummond Island (Michigan) the Chippewa County Road Commission installed two 8-foot diameter culverts at the Maxton Road crossing on McCormick Creek and the adjoining marsh complex. These culverts replaced two perched, undersized (3-foot corrugated metal) pipes at the road-stream crossing and one undersized (2-foot corrugated metal) pipe at the marsh overflow. This project restored fish access to 1.5 miles of upstream habitat and 150 acres of prime coastal wetland habitat for native northern pike and walleye populations in Potagannissing Bay, while improving hydrologic connectivity within the marsh.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted design work for this project and plans to construct a cross vane fish structure downstream of the new McCormick Creek culvert after the 2009

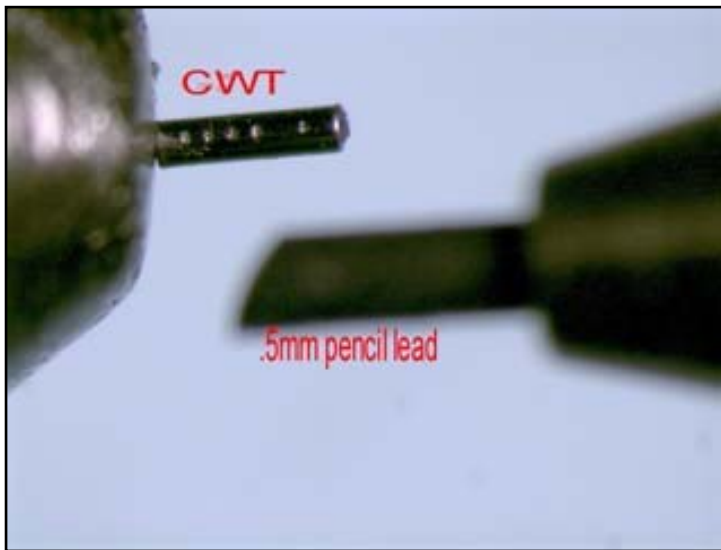
Before: Perched twin culverts on Maxton road crossing of McCormick Creek. Photo: Neal Godby, MDNR. After: The twin culverts were removed and replaced by a single 32-foot long, 8-foot diameter culvert. Photo: Andrea Ania, USFWS.

spring runoff. Water temperature, stream velocity, and stream survey data were collected prior to construction, and post-construction monitoring is planned to measure the fishery benefits of the new culverts. Partners for this project include Michigan DNR, the Drummond Island Sportsman's Club, and the Chippewa County Road Commission.

Completion of fish passage projects contributes to the "Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management" component of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Partnerships and Accountability

Lake Trout Coded-Wire-Tag Recovery



*Submitted by Adam Kowalski
Fishery Biologist*

During the month of November, Fishery Biologist Adam Kowalski extracted and read coded-wire-tags (CWTs) from lake trout. CWTs are microscopic metal tags placed in the snouts of juvenile lake trout at the hatchery. Kowalski looked at Alpena NFWCO lake trout caught during the lake whitefish fishery independent survey and fall lake trout assessment in Lake Huron. Kowalski also removed tags from lake trout sampled by Michigan DNR creel clerks.

In November, Alpena NFWCO Biologist Kowalski extracted and read CWTs from lake trout captured in Lake Huron. CWTs are microscopic metal tags that are placed in juvenile lake trout at the hatchery prior to stocking. Photo: USFWS.

CWTs are extracted by cutting lake trout snouts into smaller and smaller pieces until the tag can be seen and removed, then read under a microscope. Each tag's unique number can then be compared to stocking records to yield information such as stocking location, stocking date, fish age, fish strain, and hatchery of origin.

In total, Kowalski removed and read 200 tags from approximately 210 heads. Not all adipose clipped lake trout contain CWTs because some lake trout shed their tag and others experience fin regeneration that masks original multiple clip sequences. Additional lake trout heads will be received from Bay Mills Indian Community (BMIC) and the Michigan DNR creel program. These heads will be processed when received.

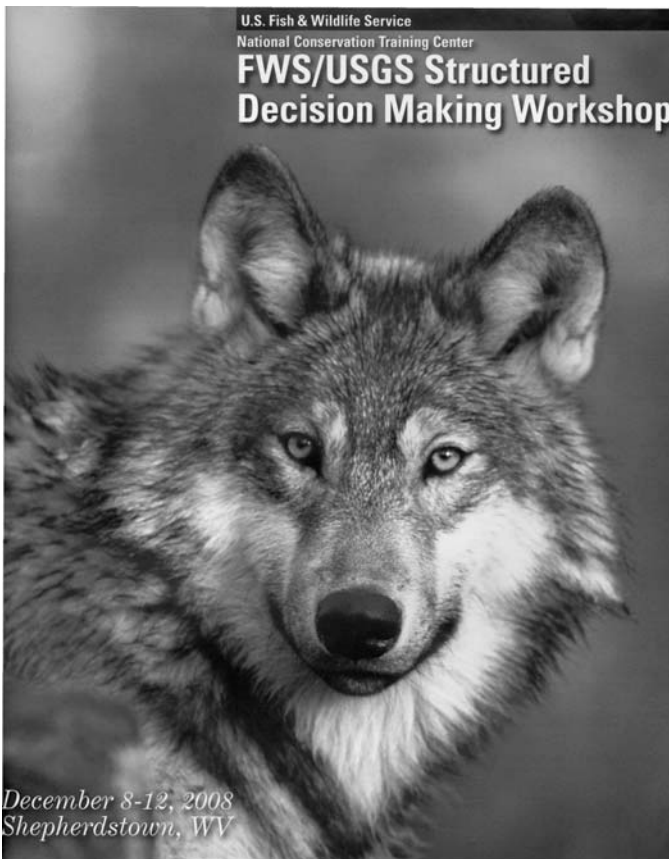
Data collected from lake trout CWTs are used in several ways. First, lake trout age data are used in population models that determine lake trout harvest limits for parties to the Year 2000 Consent Decree. Second, stocking location data are used to determine lakewide lake trout movement patterns. Finally,

two existing studies to determine differences in survival between groups of lake trout reared under different culture techniques and differences in survival of various lake trout strains depend on analysis of CWT data.

These outcomes are consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while providing recreational fishing opportunities and meeting the needs of tribal communities under the "Aquatic Species Conservation and Management" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future. The multi-agency nature of this work is also consistent with the Service's goal of establishing and maintaining open, interactive communication with its partner agencies under the "Partnerships and Accountability" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Workforce Management

Biologist Attends Structured Decision Making Workshop



*Submitted by Andrea Ania
Fishery Biologist*

Alpena NFWCO Biologist Andrea Ania attended the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service/U.S. Geological Survey Structured Decision Making (SDM) Workshop held December 8-12, 2008 at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. The goal of this week long workshop was to apply structured decision making to field level problems using a rapid prototyping technique to navigate through the process. Region 3 personnel attending this workshop focused on the case study "Fish Passage in Great Lakes Tributaries."

The Region 3 team consisted of Tim Patronski, Colette Charbonneau, Pam Dryer, Cheryl Kaye, Christie Deloria, and Ania. This diverse group represented FWS Fisheries, Environmental Contaminants, Endangered Species, and Sea Lamprey Programs. The team worked through the structured decision making process to address barrier management in Wisconsin's Bad River Watershed. This workshop provided an opportunity for cross-programmatic discussion and decision making related to on-the-ground resource issues. A noteworthy outcome of this workshop was the identification of data gaps and

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Training Center in Shepherdstown, West
Virginia. Photo: USFWS.*

needs that are currently hindering the consequences step of the SDM model as applied to the R3 Fish Passage Program.

Continued educational opportunities are consistent with the Service's goal of providing employees with opportunities to maintain competencies and improve opportunities for professional achievement under the "Workforce Management" priority of the Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

For more information about Alpena NFWCO programs and activities contact us at:

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