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La Crosse Fish Health Center Onalaska, Wisconsin

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Region 3 - Great Lakes/Big Rivers

Leadership in Conserving, Enhancing, and Restoring Aquatic Ecosystems



La Crosse Fish Health Center

Onalaska, Wisconsin



Series of photos depicting La Crosse Fish Health Center activities: (Top Row, Lt. to Rt.); Elementary school students examine aquarium fish and displays as part of a fish health presentation; Staff demonstrate fish health sampling techniques to a group of hatchery visitors; Corey Puzach takes tissue samples from paddlefish snagged on the Black River in Missouri as part of the National Wild Fish Health Survey (Survey); (Middle Row, Lt. to Rt.); This is one of the 26 paddlefish sampled for the Survey; Ralph Simmons, fishery biologist at the Neosho National Fish Hatchery, learned to perform fish health inspections through the training course given annually by Fish Health Center staff; Inspections are critical to monitor fish health in hatchery and wild fish populations.

La Crosse Fish Health Center

The La Crosse Fish Health Center (Center) is located in Onalaska, Wisconsin in the southwest corner of the state bordering the Mississippi River. The Center is one of nine fish health laboratories operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to serve the National Fish Hatchery System. The Center was established in 1962 and moved to its current facilities in 1995. The staff consists of eight permanent w/ 1 vacancy, 4 experience program students, and 2 student volunteers.

As an aquatic animal health laboratory, the Center services include health inspections, diagnostics, training opportunities, and technical information exchange to five Regional National Fish Hatcheries. Fish health assistance is also provided to state, tribal, other federal, commercial, and research facilities in diagnosing, prevention, and controlling infectious disease agents.

Another vital function of the Center is to provide fish health training to state, tribal, federal, commercial, and university personnel through short courses, seminars, presentations, and lab details. The Center has an annual short course of one week titled "Introduction to Fish Health Management" taught in La Crosse, Wisconsin to 16 attendees from all over the country. Trained instructors from the Center are also used to teach other short courses throughout the country in cooperation with the Fish and Wildlife Service's National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Publication of a training manual was recently completed titled "Introduction to Fish Health Management." This very popular publication is used at 7 colleges and universities, many of the state resource agencies, fish culturists at our National Fish Hatcheries, and some commercial hatcheries.

A major effort of the La Crosse Fish Health Center is the National Wild Fish Health Surveys in watersheds throughout the Great Lakes/Big Rivers Region in cooperation with State and Tribal partners. This is a national program that includes all nine Fish Health Centers from across the country to assess the overall fish health concerns of major watersheds in the United States. Some of the species being checked for new pathogens in this Region include paddlefish,



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La Crosse Fish Health Center

Left to Right: Janet Beitlich, Becky Lasee, Cory Puzach, John Whitney, Terrence Ott, Kenneth Phillips, Richard Nelson

pallid and lake sturgeon, baitfish, trout, salmon, sea lamprey, frogs, mussels, carp, bass, drum, suckers and bowfin.

A new program the Center is participating in is a joint national surveillance program for the presence of Spring Viremia of Carp which is a new virus to the United States. This is a cooperative program with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Fish and Wildlife Service, and many state partners. Surveillance teams have been set up to investigate carp die-offs for the presence of the virus throughout southeast and mid-west watersheds.

Outreach is also an important part of operations. The Center works closely with two sister facilities, the Genoa National Fish Hatchery and La Crosse Fishery Resource Office, in supporting and assisting the "Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Fishery Stations" friends group located in the La Crosse, Wisconsin area.

For detailed information about La Crosse Fish Health Center, contact the office at:
(608) 783-8441.