



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
COLUMBIA FISH AND WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION OFFICE
ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT

...Dedicated to Conserving Big River Ecosystems in America's Heartland.

Partnerships and Accountability

Educational Float Trip on the Big Muddy!

The Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (FWCO) was asked to participate, once again, in the “Big Canoe Float on the Big Muddy”. This event is organized by the Missouri River Communities Network, a non-profit organization which raises awareness of Missouri River issues. July’s event, with over 100 paddlers, was the second offering of this educational field trip. In September of 2007, the Network organized a similar float trip with participants stopping at several locations along a 15 mile float. However, high winds and multiple presenter stops led to some pretty worn out paddlers at the end of the day.

This year’s event was shortened to ten miles and participants stopped at just two islands for presentations. Tim Haller from the Big Muddy National Fish and Wildlife Refuge (NFWR) was the first stop, with live turtles in hand, he explained how the adjoining refuge land was important for various plant and animal species.

The next stop on the tour was on a large sandbar, locally known as California Island. Presenters from Missouri Department of Conservation talked about the recreational opportunities available on their riverfront conservation areas. Missouri River Relief presented the total tonnage of trash removed from their Missouri River clean-ups. Aaron Delonay with the United States Geological Survey was on hand to talk about their research concerning the federally endangered pallid sturgeon. Columbia FWCO’s Andy Starostka and Andy Plauck had captured some shovelnose sturgeon and showed the



Columbia FWCO's Andy Plauck shows a sturgeon at the Big Canoe Float.



audience the peculiar, prehistoric fish. The two fish biologists talked about the ongoing fish monitoring projects on the lower Missouri River. Several different nets were set up and demonstrated to illustrate different fish capture techniques. The live fish were a great “talking tool” since very few people have ever seen a sturgeon face to face. A local historian then finished up with a detailed account of local settlements.

This event was a great opportunity for all of the involved agencies to inform people of the work being conducted on the Missouri River. All of the participants took time on a Saturday afternoon to go out and use a resource, not commonly used in the Columbia area. Partnering with other agencies for outreach events is a goal of the Fisheries Vision for the Future. Hopefully everyone in attendance learned something about the biology of the Missouri River and its interesting fish!

Andrew Plauck and Andy Starostka

When Landowners Are Engaged, The Resource Benefits!

Columbia FWCO’s Brian Elkington and Aaron Walker traveled to Sullivan, Missouri to take part in a meeting between local land owners and the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) during July. The meeting brought together active members of the community from the Lower Bourbeuse Conservation Opportunity Area. These landowners are working together with the support of MDC and Columbia FWCO to improve streams in their area through environmentally conscience land management practices. This group of landowners has been meeting for many years and was recently highlighted as one of the “Ten Waters to Watch” by the National Fish Habitat Action Plan Board.

It is a great opportunity for Columbia FWCO to take part in these meetings and work with landowners and MDC towards achieving the “Partnerships and Accountability” goal of the ‘Fisheries Program Vision for the Future’. Columbia FWCO appreciates being part of a project where the land owners are not only excited to be there, but are eager to try new practices and are truly driving the venture.

Brian Elkington and Aaron Walker

MICRA Executive Board Meeting

Project Leader Tracy Hill and Fish Biologist Brian Elkington traveled to LaCrosse, Wisconsin on 28 July to attend the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association Executive Board meeting. The meeting served as an opportunity for Standing Committees and Basin Workgroups to report to the Executive Board and for the board to hear the recent progress that MICRA had made on the sturgeon similarity of appearance issue. Meeting participants had an opportunity to discuss the shovelnose sturgeon study conducted by MICRA. A multi-agency partnership effort to address fishery conservation issues in the Mississippi River Basin is consistent with the core principals of the Service’s Fishery Program and is essential to protect, enhance and restore native riverine species in this system.





Service participation in this association is consistent and supportive of the “Partnerships and Accountability”, “Aquatic Species Conservation and Management” and “Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management” priorities of the Service’s Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Tracy Hill

Columbia FWCO Biologist Gives Fish Presentation for Local River Group

Missouri River Relief is a non-profit organization which specializes in river clean-ups. Our office has partnered with them in the past, lending boats and drivers to shuttle volunteers up and down the river. This group has organized the removal of over 450 tons of trash from the banks of the Missouri River and its tributaries. In addition to river cleaning, the group does everything they can to promote recreational use of the river.



River Relief hard at work, with the help of many dedicated volunteers, cleaning up one of Missouri’s beautiful waterways.

The group has recently begun organizing presentations concerning Missouri River issues. Missouri River Relief’s Lower Reach Manager, Steve Schnarr, contacted our office to find out if anyone would like to talk about Missouri River fish. Knowing that fish biologists like to talk about fish, he had no trouble getting the event set up. Steve was able to reserve the “river lookout” room at Les Bourgeois Bistro. This restaurant sits on a very scenic piece of property atop the Manitou Bluffs overlooking the Missouri River and a section of the Big Muddy NFWR. About thirty people showed up to watch Andy Plauck deliver a presentation entitled “Beyond Catfish: A Peek Below Muddy Water and the Diversity of Missouri River Fish.” Plauck showed dozens of pictures of Missouri River fish as well as a brief history lesson of Missouri River alterations. When all of the pictures were shown and questions answered, the group examined several catfish and shovelnose sturgeon. Field crews had captured the fish earlier in the day and placed them in an aerated hauling tank. Just about all of the attendees wanted to hold, or at least touch the sturgeon.

Partnering with a group like Missouri River Relief allows the Columbia FWCO to reach diverse audiences and to tell the story of the endangered pallid sturgeon, as well as other fishes of the Missouri River. Judging from the interest showed by the attendees, the event was a success. A few fishing pointers were given out as well. Hopefully this presentation sparked some interest in utilizing the “Big Muddy.” For more information about Missouri River Relief’s programs, log on to www.riverrelief.org.

Andrew Plauck



Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Missouri River Recovery Program Agency Coordination Meeting

Project Leader Tracy D. Hill and Branch Chief for Missouri River Studies Wyatt Doyle traveled to Omaha, NE on 8 July to attend the quarterly meeting of the Missouri River Recovery Program, Agency Coordination Team (ACT). The meetings are intended to brief the state and Federal agencies on the progress of this program. Under the Missouri River Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Project, a variety of aquatic and terrestrial habitats acquired by the Corps have been restored and developed in the Missouri River and its floodplain to enhance habitats for fish and wildlife. Monitoring priorities for the upcoming fiscal year were discussed and presented to the ACT. Columbia FWCO continues to partner with state and Federal agencies to conserve and increase native fish populations in the Missouri River and to identify and take appropriate actions that will help achieve desired resource goals and outcomes.

Participation in this activity is consistent with the “Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management” component of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Tracy Hill

Workforce Management

Columbia FWCO Completes its Fourth Year of Partnership with the City of Columbia.

For the fourth consecutive year, Columbia FWCO participated in a local job placement program for high school students called Career Awareness Related Experience (CARE). Josh Thorpe and Riaz Helfer are students at Hickman High School in Columbia. These students are paid by the city of Columbia but gain valuable experience working for local businesses. The two young men learned many new skills during their employment here. They were able to assist in boat and truck maintenance, gillnet repair, organize electronic files and learn some fish sampling techniques on the Missouri River. In previous years we've rewarded the students by going fishing with them at Little Dixie Lake Conservation Area. This year we decided to go for some river fishing, setting trotlines in an afternoon and returning to pull them the following morning. Unfortunately we only caught two catfish on the lines we set. We tried some rod and reel fishing, but the warm



Josh Thorpe (left) and Riaz Helfer (right) with blue catfish from the Missouri River.



July morning probably wasn't the best time for trophy catfish angling. Despite the slow fishing, we all had a great time and enjoyed our river fishing trip.

The CARES program has allowed our office to show many young people the work we do on the Missouri River. Because teenagers are less and less exposed to outdoor activities these days, we hope that the job experience from this summer sparks an interest for them in our natural resources. This day was a great way to thank the students for their hard work all summer, while also getting them outside to enjoy the Missouri River.

Andrew Plauck

Fish and Wildlife Service Family Picnic

The FWS Family in Columbia MO held its 3rd Annual staff fish fry on 24 July. Ecological Services Fish and Wildlife Biologist Rich Hansen was primarily responsible for organization and logistics while staff from the Columbia FWCO pitched in to man 3 deep fryers. Many others from the FWS family participated to make this event a tremendous success. Approximately 50 people representing Fisheries, Ecological Services and Big Muddy NFWR were in attendance at the picnic. Deep fried fish, home cooked food and yard game entertainment were just a few of the highlights of the evening's festivities.

Large gatherings such as this are great moral builders and are consistent with "Workforce Management" priority of the Service's Fisheries Program Vision for the Future.

Tracy Hill

Columbia FWCO Staff

Project Leader: Tracy D. Hill
Administrative Assistant: Debra Turner
Branch Chiefs: Wyatt Doyle, Joanne Grady
Team Leaders: Andy Starostka
Crew Leaders: Brian Elkington, Andrew Plauck, Clayton Ridenour, Joshua Schloesser, Cliff Wilson
Lead Technicians: Patty Herman, Joe McMullen, Colby Wrasse

Technicians: Adam McDaniel, Darlena Oberkirsch, Aaron Walker
STEP Student: Nicholas Cole, Mark Corio, Tony Overmann, Madeline Pletta, Chris Scheppers, Jonathan Spurgeon
Experience Works: George Fadler
CARES Students: Riaz Helfer, Chris Roseberry, Josh Tharp

