

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Natchitoches

*National Fish Hatchery*



*The Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery is one of many units in the National Fish Hatchery System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The service also manages more than 500 national wildlife refuges across the country. As the nation's primary steward of fish and wildlife resources, the Service provides leadership in habitat and wetlands protection; fish and wildlife research and technical assistance; and in the conservation and protection of migratory birds, anadromous fishes, certain marine mammals, and threatened and endangered species.*

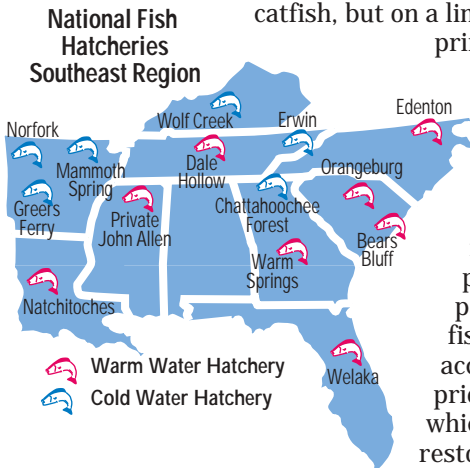
## Welcome to the Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery

The Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery became operational in 1931 under the authority of the White Act as a warm water facility that would produce catfish, largemouth bass, bluegill, and redear sunfish for local public waters and farm ponds.

photo: USFWS



Since 1931, resource needs in the southeast have changed and the mission of the station has changed with the times. We still raise largemouth bass, bluegill, and catfish, but on a limited scale and primarily for National Wildlife Refuges and other federal lands. In addition, we currently raise three species of fish: striped bass, pallid sturgeon, and paddlefish. These fish are raised according to national priority objectives which include the restoration of depleted species (striped bass), recovery of threatened or endangered fish (pallid sturgeon), and management of interjurisdictional fisheries (paddlefish).



### What is a Fish Hatchery Anyway?

Federal fish hatcheries have been part of our nation's resource management efforts for more than 100 years. Hatcheries can be warm water, cool water, or cold water facilities. Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery is a warm water station involved in spawning, hatching, and

photo: USFWS



rearing young fish (fingerlings). The fingerlings are raised to a size and age which provide them with the best chance of surviving in the wild.

photo: Betty Willis



Resource managers nationwide acknowledge hatcheries as a valuable tool for the preservation of our nation's fisheries resources.

### Our Fish ...

The **Paddlefish** (*Polyodon spathula*) is the only living member of the Polyodontidae family. Its only living relative is the Chinese paddlefish (*Psephurus gladius*), an endangered species found only in the Yangtze River valley in China. The paddlefish is recognized by its long, smooth, shark-like body and its long paddle-shaped snout (rostrum). They have a skeleton composed of cartilage instead of bone and are scaleless with smooth skin. The paddlefish feeds like a whale, with its mouth opened wide so it can filter zooplankton from the water. This unique fish is one of the largest freshwater fish in North America. The largest reported specimen weighed in excess of 160 pounds and was seven feet long.

photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



Populations have declined rapidly due to overharvest because of the paddlefish's commercial value. Their eggs are in high demand for caviar and can bring \$500 per pound in some markets. In addition to overharvest, populations have been declining due to environmental factors such as the loss of spawning habitat resulting from dredging, channelization, and damming of rivers.

photo: USFWS



Here at Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery, we spawn paddlefish and raise them to fingerling size (6-10").

photo: USFWS



Before they are released they have coded wire tags inserted in to their rostrums so biologists can track tagged fish and gather valuable information about them. These efforts will help restore paddlefish populations to their historical levels.

photo: USFWS



### Did you know ... ?

Because of their smooth skin paddlefish are sometimes mistaken for a species of catfish. They are nicknamed spoonbilled catfish even though they are not related to any catfish species.

photo: USFWS



**Striped bass** (*Morone saxatilis*) are members of the sea bass family. Sea bass, also known as true bass, are primarily found in salt water environments. Two species, the yellow bass and the white bass, are only found in fresh water. Striped bass are an anadromous fish, which means they can be found in fresh and salt water.

photo: USFWS



Valued as both commercial and sport fish, stripers attain large sizes and are excellent fighting fish. In addition to their angling qualities, biologists often use striped bass as a predator to control high populations of gizzard shad. Overharvest, pollution and other factors have created stress on wild populations. Studies of commercial fisheries have shown a 70% decline in the amount of striped bass caught annually.

photo: USFWS



Efforts at Natchitoches National Fish hatchery concerning striped bass are to restore their historical range and population levels.

photo: USFWS



The **Pallid Sturgeon** (*Scaphirhynchus albus*) is a member of the sturgeon family, a small group of primitive fishes that evolved approximately 250 million years ago. Sturgeon inhabit waters in northern Europe, Asia, and North America. Seven species are found in North America. Sturgeon have sleek, shark-like bodies. They

photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



are unique in that they possess bony plates that run lengthwise along the sides of their bodies. These plates are called scutes. Sturgeon do not have scales.

Sturgeon face many of the same problems as paddlefish... their eggs are used as caviar and their spawning habitats have been destroyed in most

photo: USFWS



areas. The pallid sturgeon is listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They prefer extremely turbid waters and strong currents where they feed on insects and small fish. The pallid sturgeon spawns between June and August. Our goal here is to develop spawning and culture techniques that will allow us to successfully raise large numbers of these fish for supplemental stocking. These supplemental stocking efforts will hopefully enable populations to be restored so that the pallid sturgeon can be removed from the Endangered Species list.

photo: USFWS



### The Aquarium

The aquarium houses 16 tanks which display a variety of warm water fish, alligators, and turtles. The aquarium also boasts a rare albino snapping turtle. The aquarium is open 7 days a week from 8am until 3pm. The aquarium is closed on all federal holidays.

photo: USFWS



photo: USFWS



### The Harold B. Wales Environmental Education Classroom

The Classroom is used for grades K-12 and is equipped with microscopes, video teaching capabilities, and a host of hands-on items. Call 318/352 5324 for reservations.

photo: USFWS



### The Holding House

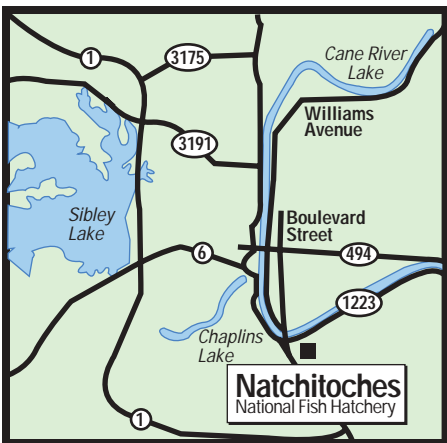
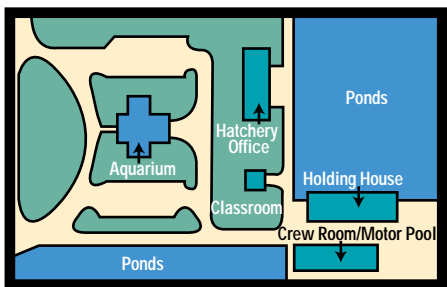
The holding house is used to spawn and hatch eggs, to raise newly hatched fish (fry) to a stockable size, and to prepare newly harvested fingerlings for distribution to various sites throughout the Southern United States.

### The Ponds

There are 53 ponds, each averaging 0.8 acres in size. There is no designated walking trail, but you are welcome to walk on the levees to birdwatch or to just enjoy being outdoors.

### The Hatchery Office

The office is open Monday through Friday from 7am until 3:30pm. Call 318/352 5324 for more information.



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