

Bears Bluff

National Fish Hatchery

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Station Facts

- Bears Bluff National Fish Hatchery is a unit of the Warm Springs Fish Technology Center, a component of the Warm Springs Regional Fisheries Center, Warm Springs, Georgia.
- Area consists of 31 acres bordering the Edisto River south of Charleston, South Carolina.
- Facilities include the world's largest shortnose sturgeon broodstock holding/spawning facility; eight recirculated intensive culture/holding systems; a large recirculated egg incubation/larval rearing system; three large tanks for holding larger fish species; numerous holding and intensive rearing tanks; and six salt and freshwater ponds.
- Number of staff: three biologists; one maintenance worker. Operations budget: (FY 03) \$233,000.

Geographic Area Covered

- Primary area of concern is South Carolina. However, several freshwater and saltwater aquatic species, such as the shortnose sturgeon, benefit from our restoration and recovery efforts.

Station Goals

- Restore and manage interjurisdictional coastal and riverine fishes, such as the shortnose sturgeon and Atlantic sturgeon.
- Recover of species listed under the Endangered Species Act, such as the shortnose sturgeon and candidate species such as the Atlantic sturgeon.
- Pioneer and develop culture techniques for both freshwater and saltwater species.
- Develop hatchery product evaluation techniques.

Services Provided To

- Federal agencies including other Fish and Wildlife Service program offices.
- State agencies.
- Native American tribes.
- Military bases.
- Universities.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- The public.

Activity Highlights

- Produced a record 116,000 endangered shortnose sturgeon fry in FY 99.
- Completed baseline genetic, culture, hatchery, and tagging research on shortnose sturgeon. Initiated construction plans to increase limited water supply for the station.
- Successfully completed red drum rearing season in station's saltwater ponds in FY 2003-2004. Total fish stocked = 562,810 red drum.
- Entered into new partnerships with COE and EPA for restoration of shortnose sturgeon.

Fish Species and Capability

- Shortnose sturgeon: 5-year classes of progeny of wild stock are held on station for study activities, addressing reproduction, culture, tagging and hatchery techniques.
- Atlantic sturgeon: initiating activities to address questions on reproduction and culture.
- Red drum: Batch cultured in saltwater ponds, marked and released into South Carolina waters.

Bears Bluff National Fish Hatchery

- Station has flexible and unique capabilities available to propagate and study most freshwater and saltwater aquatic species found in South Atlantic Coastal Region.

Public Use Opportunities

- Environmental education and outreach to tour groups and individual visitors.
- Informational kiosk installed to familiarize visitors with station and service goals.
- Remote location with beautiful preserved live oak and Spanish moss habitat provides excellent birding, wildlife watching and picnicking opportunities for the public.
- Five major endangered or threatened species can be viewed on the station (wood storks, brown pelicans, American alligators, bald eagles, peregrine falcons and shortnose sturgeons).
- Aquatic displays for off-site events.

Calendar of Events

June: Kids Fishing Day and Open House in support of National Fishing Week.

May: South Carolina Division of Natural Resources Marine Fishing Fair, Fish-a-Rama, Atlanta and Perry, Georgia.

Questions and Answers

What is a shortnose sturgeon and why is it endangered?

The shortnose sturgeon and its much larger cousin the Atlantic sturgeon are members of the most ancient group of fishes in the world. These fish are still very much in demand on the black market for caviar. The shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon were once plentiful in most rivers on the Atlantic coast extending from the St. Johns River in Florida to the St. Johns River in New Brunswick where there was a fairly good size commercial fishery for both caviar and flesh.

Dams that block their natural upriver migrations to spawn, over fishing, dredging, habitat loss, and pollution have contributed to the reduction of the populations. The shortnose was declared a federally endangered species in 1967.

Can you describe the work done at Bears Bluff with the Shortnose Sturgeon?

The Bears Bluff National Fish Hatchery is at the forefront of a national effort to replenish the once commercially valuable species to its natural river habitats up and down the East Coast. Bears Bluff is the largest holding/spawning facility in the world for shortnose sturgeon. Its mission is to improve fish culture techniques as part of the draft "Shortnose Sturgeon Recovery Plan of 1997." Juvenile sturgeon produced at the facility are used in on-station research and are distributed to other research facilities, such as universities, fish hatcheries, other U.S. Fish and Wildlife fish technology centers, and other government facilities. No hatchery-produced sturgeon are used for restocking, although that is a probable long-term objective of the recovery effort.