



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

ONE Voice

Outreach, News, and Events

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge / Lower Great Lakes Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office

December 2015

Update from the Field (December): The amazingly mild weather has allowed invasive species crews to sample in the upper Niagara River using fyke nets well into the fall. Paired fyke nets often catch a large number of species, which is one of the goals of the Early Detection & Monitoring Program--detecting invasive species early before they become established. This type of net is anchored in shallow waters to catch a large number of fish at once. "Wings" extend out on either side of the "hoop-like opening" of this cylindrically-shaped net so that any fish swimming past are directed into the nets for capture. (Photo credit: Kelly McDonald/USFWS)



Joining Together for Cisco (December 2): On December 2nd, fish biologists from the Lower Great Lakes FWCO donned their survival suits and headed out on the icy waters of Chaumont Bay to participate in a joint effort by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC), Nature Conservancy and Cornell University to collect Cisco eggs for hatching. Cisco (*Coregonus artedii*) is a native whitefish species that was once highly abundant in Lake Ontario and a key forage and commercial fish. Habitat degradation, overfishing, sea lamprey and competition from alewife led to a massive decline in the species, but in recent years restoration efforts have been underway to bring the species back. Chaumont Bay, near the mouth of the Saint

Lawrence River, was historically one of the primary spawning grounds for Cisco in Lake Ontario. Lower Great Lakes FWCO biologists assisted by setting trap nets in the bay on rocky submerged ridges, or shoals, to catch spawning female and male fish for the USGS Tunison Lab of Aquatic Science Hatchery Program. In previous years, it took up to two weeks to collect the 30 mature fish needed, but this year all the necessary fish were collected in one day and one of the nets caught over 500 Cisco! This is very encouraging for the future of Cisco in Lake Ontario, and the egg take from this year will further bolster the growing stocks in Chaumont Bay. (Contact: Curt Karboski)

Career Discussion at Niagara University (December 3): The Lower Great Lakes FWCO's Deputy Complex Manager, Mike Goehle, spoke to two classes at Niagara University on December 3. Mike gave an overview of the Service's programs, the activities of our local Fisheries local office, and a general discussion about fields of study leading to a career with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to students from Nature Study (Bio 302) and Environmental Studies (ENV 200). His presentation also focused on some of the important considerations of pursuing a biological career path such as networking, volunteering, and learning to work well in teams and crews. Many of our volunteers and interns come from local universities such as Niagara and contribute significantly to our seasonal field activities on local Great Lakes waters. (Contact: Mike Goehle)

Braving the Cold for the Oak Orchard Christmas Bird Count (December 28): The 2015 Oak Orchard Christmas Bird Count took place on and around the refuge on Monday, December 28, 2015. Approximately 25 enthusiastic birders spent the day in the cold and wind counting all the birds they could find within a 15-mile radius circle, centered on Iroquois NWR. In fact, the Christmas Bird Count has an extensive history as the nation's longest running citizen



science project. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them as was customary. The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. This year's count was unusual because the mild December weather resulted in essentially no ice cover on area wetlands on the day of the count. Waterfowl that are usually long gone from the area by the end of December were still present in large numbers. Thousands of Canada geese and mallards were most conspicuous, but smaller numbers of many different species of waterbirds were also counted. For those counting on the refuge, five sandhill cranes were likely the best bird sightings of the day but a single northern mockingbird also was a good find near the refuge headquarters. This historical data compliments surveys conducted on the refuge, providing a picture of bird population changes over the years. Thank you to all of the participants both locally and across North America for their dedication to this annual tradition. (Contact: Madeline Prush)