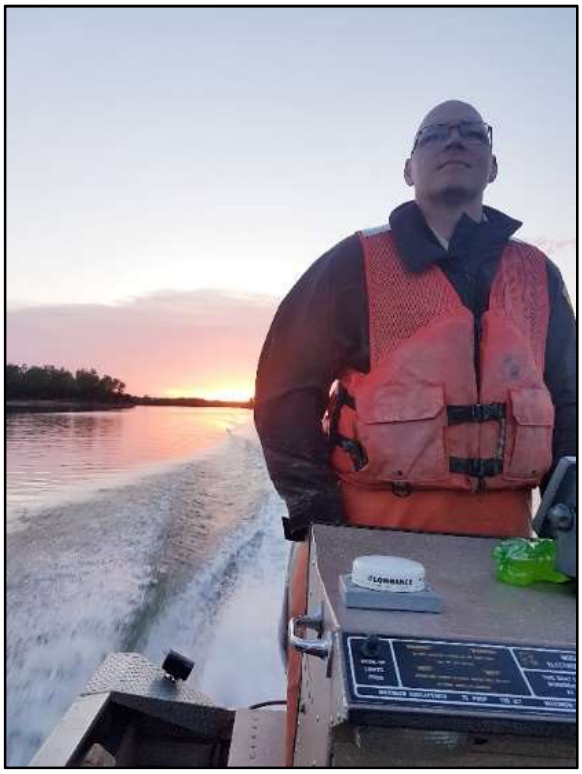
Get out and vote NCD!

Presidential Blog April 2022



Most of us will soon be starting our annual foray into field work. Before you leave the office and forget about the mundane, please let me remind you that voting for the AFS 2nd Vice-President is currently open. Routinely, only about 10-20% of AFS members vote for their president. This is abysmal especially when you consider the sway this position can carry within AFS. I am excited to see a presidential ballot with 2 state employees on the docket – something I have not seen during my time with AFS. Although roughly 30% of AFS members are employed by a state agency, a president employed by a state agency has been absent from AFS leadership for quite some time. But not this year! AFS leadership will soon get a boost of state agency perspective. Please, head to AFS, read the nominee bios, and cast your vote. Every AFS member was emailed a link to vote. I have heard that many did not receive this email – please check your junk mail (especially those using gmail). If you still can't find the ballot, contact Lauren Maza (lmaza@fisheries.org) to issue a new ballot.

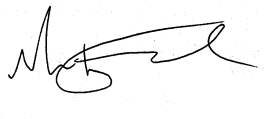
March and April marks a drastic shift in the life of a fisheries biologist in South Dakota. Biologists are wrapping up their winter duties and preparing for the field season. Most pressing is the upcoming Walleye spawning efforts. Every year, all six SD state offices prepare for a unified effort to collect millions of eggs in a relatively narrow window of time. Last year, over 220 million eggs were collected in about 3 weeks. Most of these eggs usually come from Lake Oahe, the reservoir which I get the privilege to work on. Preparing for this effort starts in March as gear is prepared, boats are removed from storage and made operational, and spawning plans made. Our office (along with the Mobridge, SD office) holds and maintains the equipment for the Lake Oahe Walleye spawn. Thus, our staff spend considerable time mending and tarring nets, getting the "spawntoon" ready to deploy, making sure all vessels are seaworthy, and gathering, inventorying, and transporting all spawning gear up to Mobridge. Many days of prep work go into operating the Walleye spawning effort before a single fish is caught.

We staff two spawning operations in Mobridge, SD, on northern Lake Oahe, about 2.5 hrs (drive time) from Pierre. Both operations have a crew of six biologists that work 7 days a week until the egg goal is reached. Biologists from every state office spend 3-4 days in Mobridge and live in hotels (and lodges) during this time. By the end of a 4-day stint (and in some cases as many

as 7 or more), many biologists are frazzled and ready for a break. But Walleye stocking is a priority for South Dakota and it is encouraging to see the mental fortitude by the state's biologists to accomplish the egg goals each year. In a good year, egg goals can be reached in a matter of days. Unfortunately, in some years, spawning efforts can drag on for four weeks or more. Most of the discrepancy in spawning duration is governed by weather, in particular wind. Lake Oahe is a very large reservoir, and nothing is safe on the water when the South Dakota wind blows. We have sunk boats (that's right, multiple boats) and buried nets under feet of shoreline. Often, we just sit in our hotel rooms and listen to the wind blow and somberly consider the mountain of work that lays ahead when we return to the "spawntoons".

If you need to get a hold of me over the next few weeks, please shoot me an email or leave a message and I will respond when I can. My schedule is booked with multiple stints up to the spawning operation through the beginning of May. Hopefully, egg goals are reached soon, and I can return to Pierre ASAP. Unfortunately, you never know how long the spawn will last.

A quick reminder that the AFS national meeting will be held in Spokane, Washington, August 21st-24th this year. I hope to see many of you there! Also, as many of you start traveling to the field, please snap a few photos and consider sharing your work with the new communications committee chair Brittany Harried (blhf39@missouri.edu) and produce posts to NCD's new twitter and Instagram accounts. See you after the spawn!



Mark Fincel

President NCD-AFS

Right: Approximately 60 trap nets have been tarred and loaded on the 3 boats ready for setting.

Left: Tarring nets for upcoming Walleye spawning operation

Right: Spawning Walleye in the shelter of the spawntoon

Left: The “Spawn-toon” has been set, canopy constructed, and ready to start spawning Walleye

Right: Walleye (and other fish) collected in the trap nets. Walleye are scooped out of the trap nets, sorted, and used for spawning in the spawn-toon

Left: Setting the trap nets to collect Walleye

In South Dakota, weather is always a factor when spawning. Days can be warm, sunny and mild or a blizzard. In my 10+ years of spawning, no 2 years have ever been the same. Wind is by far the hardest weather element to work with. High wind events can move nets completely out of the water (top left 2 pictures) or completely bury them with feet (that's right, feet!) of shale (bottom left picture). Lake Oahe is the 4th largest reservoir in the US and we are always watching the weather. Additionally, gear malfunctions (like blowing a prop off – top right picture) and blizzards (bottom right picture) play a role in shaping the Walleye spawn, but wind is ultimately the deciding factor!

We catch a lot of non-target species during the Walleye spawning efforts. Some of these fish we retain and stock in other waters throughout the state. We will have stocking trucks on the ready and we are prepared for moving Northern Pike, Channel Catfish, and when available even large Crappie. In fact, a few years ago we moved hundreds of 12 to15 inch Crappie from Lake Oahe to urban fisheries throughout South Dakota. The only constant with the Walleye spawning effort is that you never know what you are going to catch!