

President's Blog

November 2021

Greetings NCD!

I hope everyone has had a fun and productive fall so far! I was very fortunate to be able to attend the Annual AFS meeting in-person this year and was delighted to reconnect with fellow NCD members I haven't seen since pre-pandemic. In fact, this was the first time I have sat down with the officers since I was elected years ago! For those of you who have not been to an annual AFS meeting, I would highly recommend it. It is a chance for fisheries enthusiasts to share ideas and research, discuss the state of fisheries in the nation, and to just reconnect with old acquaintances and talk fish. I also serve on the Management Committee and Governing Board, both of which act as the nuts and bolts of the Society. Several sections also hold business meetings in conjunction with the annual meetings and I was able to attend many of them. The meeting was informative and fun! Next year (2022) the annual meeting will be in Spokane, Washington. In 2023, the NCD will be hosting the AFS national meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan – only a short drive for many NCD members.



So, getting into the blog – a day in the life of a fisheries biologist. The end of October and the beginning of November brings about “shut-down” mode to many fisheries offices in South Dakota and throughout the NCD. Equipment needs to be winterized and put away for long-term hibernation. In the Ft. Pierre office, this means taking apart the salmon station (which we just spent days getting up and running 😊), packing all the gear back in long term storage, and winterizing boats. In our office, we have 7 boats that we change lower unit and engine oil, treat gas, fog heads, replace/repair any damages incurred during the field season, re-pack bearings, and play boat tetris to get them all to fit in cold storage buildings. All the biologists take part in boat winterizing – entry level biologists to supervisors. This is not a team building exercise but just a necessity to get boats put away before the South Dakota winters hit.

In the fall, we also stock our large salmon smolts in Lake Oahe. This year we started a project using telemetry to follow these fish from stocking through their entire life cycle. The advances that have been made in fish telemetry are amazing; we can now surgically implant transmitters in very small fish and track them for multiple years! The tags we just inserted will last over 2 years and we should be able to see where the fish move at different life stages, and most importantly, how they return (or don't return!) to the spawning station on Lake Oahe. Salmon brood stock collection on Lake Oahe has long been variable and we hope to learn more about adult salmon behavior to increase consistency in our brood stock collection. Unfortunately, we must wait a couple years to see the results of our efforts. Hopefully, it will be a fruitful endeavor 😊.

The various “hats” biologists wear are very different than those we, the public, and our peers see. I want to thank Brian Borkholder for bringing to my attention the image (below) of how different people view fish biologists, and more importantly, how we view ourselves. It brought about a good laugh between us and some reflection. I populated the image with a few pictures of how I see myself and how I think others see me.

Remember that NCD award nominations are due on December 3rd. Please take the time to nominate deserving individuals and groups, and send those nominations to President-Elect Brian Nerbonne (click [HERE](#) for all of the details). We all know folks that have made substantial contributions to the fisheries field, please consider showcasing those contributions! The award winners will be honored at the Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference to be held February 13th-16th in Des Moines, IA. I hope to see many of you there! Until next month, enjoy the cooling weather, autumn colors, and time in the field!



Mark Fincel

President NCD-AFS

Fisheries Biologist



What my friends think I do



What my mother thinks I do



What society thinks I do



What I think I do



What I think I am



What I really do

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These are the images that came to mind when I think of how my job is viewed by others and myself.



This October we implanted about 10-inch chinook salmon with acoustic telemetry tags. We stocked these fish at the end of October / beginning of November. These tags have a battery life of about 2 years and hopefully will give us some insights into the behavior of these fish as they grow and mature within the reservoir. Most importantly, the tags could inform our adult collection methods so that we can show more consistency in broodstock collection.



If you have not attended an AFS annual meeting, or it's been a while, I would highly recommend checking one out. Great discussion during section meetings and face-to-face interactions, and informative and inspirational presentations.



Winterizing boats at the end of the year is a pain in the butt but an activity that we perform every year to make sure equipment is ready to go the following spring. As soon as the ice comes off the water next spring (and sometimes while there are still icebergs in the lake) we will be out setting nets for walleye spawn or trot lines for our sturgeon population assessment. Making sure all the equipment is put away ready to use is of utmost importance. It is not the most glamorous job of a biologist!





Future biologists out there, be attentive to the “other duties as assigned” line item on your hire paperwork. In some instances, I get to go do some interesting activities like band hawks, songbirds, even deer fawns! My favorite non-fisheries duty has been to open and run the goose



shack – a chance to spend a couple hours in the morning visiting with fellow waterfowl hunters. Unfortunately, most of the time, these activities are less than desirable. A couple weeks ago, the licensing department had an issue and called on the fish staff to help. All the fish biologists took turns and we each spent several hours stuffing big game hunting licenses into envelopes. Holy boredom. Not something I expected when signing up to be a biologist. And no, I did not slip an elk license into my pocket 😏.

