

Mammoth Spring NFH ready for education center construction to start

An environmental education classroom, interpretive exhibits and outdoor features are planned

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Mammoth Spring National Fish Hatchery Manager Richard Shelton said his dream of an environmental education center at the hatchery is soon to become a reality. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service awarded a contract of \$1,281,000 to Linc Government Services, LLC through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Linc is the contractor of the planned Visitor and Environmental Education Center at the Mammoth Spring National Fish Hatchery. The new funds will allow the addition of an environmental education classroom, retail sales space, additional office space, interpretive exhibits and outdoor features like a display pond and viewing areas according to the plans for the project.

"This new state-of-the-art center will be something that the community can be proud of, a place where people, and especially children, can connect with nature and learn about conservation and environmental issues," Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar said. "In addition, it will provide a boost to the local economy, creating new jobs with stimulus funds."

This new contract with Linc will coordinate with a previous contract of \$1.2 million through a Congressional appropriation in 2005 for the Mammoth Spring National Fish Hatchery project.

"We're excited," Hatchery Manager, Richard Shelton, said. "We've been promoting the idea of an environmental education center at Mammoth Spring for years, and we are finally about to make it a reality."

Established in 1903, the Mammoth Spring National Fish Hatchery (NFH), operated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, is one of the oldest in the United States and has been producing fish for public use and restoration for over a century. It was built in the Ozark foothills due to the availability of cool gravity flow water from the world's tenth largest spring and easy access to the railroad. Water from the spring is a constant 58 degrees with naturally high dissolved oxy-

gen content and a pH of about 7, making it ideal for fish culture. With its unique pond and raceway rearing system, the hatchery has the capability to produce a wide variety of fish and other aquatic species.

Current programs involve the restoration of interjurisdictional fishes (paddlefish and sturgeon); recovery of endangered and threatened species including freshwater mussels; restoration of Gulf Coast Striped Bass populations; restoration of walleye, smallmouth bass and rainbow trout in the White River drainage; and fishery management and stocking recreational fish on national wildlife refuges.

Warmwater fish stocked by the Hatchery for recreational fishing, such as smallmouth bass, striped bass and walleye, have a tremendous economic impact. For every tax dollar spent for recreational fish production at Mammoth Spring NFH, \$12 of net economic value is created. This amounts to a total economic output of more than \$1.5 million every year. This economic stimulus comes from taxes generated, jobs created, and retail sales (like gas, food, lodging, rods and tackle), all of which are created because of the recreational fish stocked out of Mammoth Spring NFH. The amount of taxpayer dollars used to support Mammoth Spring NFH's yearly recreational fish production is far less than the taxes it generates. This activity creates 17 jobs with \$380,000 in salary and wages earned. Mammoth Spring NFH is one of eight National Fish Hatcheries across the Southeast that is responsible for \$26.8 million in annual economic benefits through warmwater recreational fish production.

Current programs at Mammoth Spring NFH include:

- Restoration of interjurisdictional fishes including paddlefish and lake sturgeon – Biologists here are developing spawning and rearing techniques for these unusual fishes. Because their ranges transcend local, state, and sometimes national boundaries, concern for their well-being is a major activity for

the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Conservation measures are necessary in order to maintain healthy populations of these fish in our public waters. Mammoth Spring NFH produces 40,000 paddlefish and 2,500 sturgeon each year.

- Recovery of endangered and threatened species – This hatchery is developing spawning and rearing techniques for the endangered pallid sturgeon, Ozark hellbender salamander, and the alligator snapping turtle. In cooperation with Arkansas State University, the hatchery also assists in nationwide efforts to protect and restore both endangered and non-endangered mussel populations. They accomplish this by developing culture techniques, investigating life histories, and providing a refuge for imperiled populations. Around 5,000 freshwater mussels are produced for research and supplemental stocking by this hatchery each year.

- Restoration of Gulf Coast striped bass populations – Mammoth Spring NFH maintains the only captive spawning population of Gulf Coast striped bass in the world. Populations of Gulf Coast striped bass (also known as strippers or rockfish) began to decline around fifty years ago for reasons such as habitat loss, water pollution and over-fishing. Two million Gulf Coast striped bass are produced by this hatchery to insure greater numbers of the fish in native habitats.

- Restoration stocking in the White River drainage – This hatchery produces walleye and smallmouth bass for restoration stocking in the White River Basin, which has been impacted by flooding of spawning habitat due to Federal water development projects (dams) on the White River and tributaries. 400,000 walleye and 100,000 smallmouth bass are produced by Mammoth Spring NFH every year.

- Fishery management and stocking recreational fish on National Wildlife Refuges – Mammoth Spring NFH provides fish for recreational fishing programs on National Wildlife Refuges, including approximately 100,000 largemouth bass and/or bluegill as needed for Refuge programs.



Photo courtesy of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
The facility features outdoor educational presentations to youngsters during the school year.



Photo courtesy of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
The hatchery is one of the oldest, built in the Ozark foothills due to the availability of cool gravity flow water from the world's seventh largest spring.



Photo courtesy of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
The hatchery maintains the only captive spawning population of Gulf Coast striped bass in the world.

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