



**Zachary Legaux gives a good luck kiss to a small sturgeon as his father, Chris, and big brother, Nicholas, watch. The fish is held by Gary Peebles of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Asheville, N.C. Douglas Dam is in the background.**

illegal to keep them. If the program achieves its ultimate goal, however, one day the fish could be downlisted by the state and once again considered for a limited sport fishery.

Until then, anyone who wants to see a sturgeon up close and personal should plan a visit to the Tennessee Aquarium, where eight to 10 fish are on display in a touch tank. These fish are about 1.5 to two feet long and weigh five or six pounds.



**Three TVA hatchery trucks delivered several hundred three-year-old Lake Sturgeon to the Seven Islands Wildlife Refuge on the French Broad River in May of 2003.**

In the wild, Lake Sturgeon thrive on small fish, snails, crayfish, and worms. In captivity, however, juveniles dine on frozen bloodworm and pelleted chow, depending on the size of the fish.

## *Spawning Success*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a long history of successfully raising hatchery fish. "We started in the early 20th century with sport fish and farm pond programs on private lands," says Carlos Echevarria, hatchery manager at Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery in Warm Springs, Georgia. "Through the years, the mission has changed, and our hatcheries are now more involved with imperiled, threatened, and endangered species."

Each spring in April or May, Echevarria goes to the Wolf River in Wisconsin to help collect fish eggs from three different populations in the Wisconsin River and the Yellow River, tributaries of the Mississippi River, and the Wolf River, a tributary of Lake Winnebago. "It's very important in a reintroduction program to build a population that maintains genetic diversity," he says.

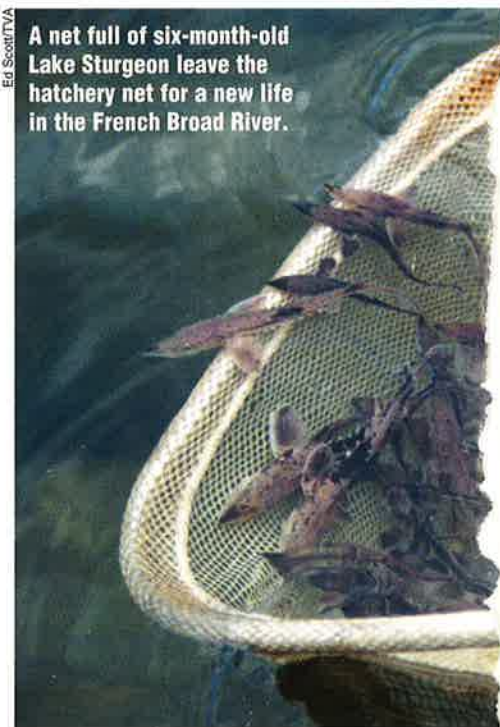
The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been working to ensure the survival of Lake Sturgeon since the late 1950s, and the Wolf River

is one of the few remaining areas where natural reproduction of Lake Sturgeon occurs. "In one place, you can see 1,500 to 2,000 fish spawning. We send the progeny of each year's hatch to a different hatchery," Echevarria says. Warm Springs Hatchery keeps the Wolf River strain, the Yellow River strain goes to Pvt. John Allen Hatchery in Tupelo, Mississippi, and the Wisconsin fish go to Mammoth Springs Hatchery in Arkansas.

When a release is planned, the fish are shipped by truck from the hatchery to the release sight, where they are slowly acclimated to the temperature of the water in the river. Then, the fish are dipped from the tanks and released.

## *Population Pressures*

Concerted efforts to improve the waters of the French Broad and Holston Rivers have paved the way for this major reintroduction effort. The Lake Sturgeon and other aquatic species, however, may face other threats in the future. While provisions of the Clean Water Act have reduced the number of industrial pollutants, and stricter regulation of residential sewerage has helped revive the rivers, the lower stretches of the watershed through which the two rivers flow are



**A net full of six-month-old Lake Sturgeon leave the hatchery net for a new life in the French Broad River.**