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UDP focus: Fishing for answers

Beth Bohn
Kansas State University

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Fishing for answers

Why fish and their habitats lure biologist

By Beth Bohn

Keeping fish from being out of water is what drives Keith Gido in his award-winning research to protect native fish species and preserve natural waterways.

The Kansas State University distinguished professor of biology leads the Fish Ecology Lab, where the focus is on the conservation of aquatic systems in the western and central U.S. Gido and his team in the College of Arts and Sciences study fish ecology, invasive species effects and fish assemblage structure.

In this work, Gido has contributed significant findings to his field with more than 120 peer-reviewed publications. His undergraduate and graduate student mentees work for state and federal natural resource agencies, academic institutions and private consulting firms. He has reeled in notable honors, including the 2019 Fisheries Excellence Award from the North Central Division of the American Fisheries Society and the 2015 Donald Tinkle Research Excellence Award from the Southwestern Association of Naturalists. He recently earned the highest faculty ranking of university distinguished professor from K-State for excellence in research and teaching.

Gido said his love of the outdoors, particularly activities associated with water, such as fishing, boating and rafting, drew him to his field.

“A primary motivating factor for my research is to provide science aiding in fish conservation and the preservation of the natural waterways where they live,” Gido said.

That motivation is seen in his latest projects. With funding from the National Park Service, Gido and his team are evaluating how large predatory fish that escape from ponds during flooding affect the diversity of native fish species in streams.

“We are monitoring the rate at which the large predators escape from ponds and then testing how they change the behavior of fish using an experimental stream facility,” Gido said.

A second study evaluates providing fish passages across barriers such as dams that block their movement. Most of the work is funded through the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and is taking place on the San Juan River in New Mexico and Utah.

“We implant fish with radio transmitters and move them above the barriers,” Gido said. “We can then track their movements and quantify if they move back downstream or stay above the barrier.”

A final project is testing how a highly abundant fish and bottom feeder, the gizzard shad, influences sport fish communities and ecosystems of small impoundments in Kansas. The project is being done with the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism.

With a career devoted to preserving fish species, it’s not surprising Gido isn’t hooked on just one species.

“There are more than 25,000 species of fish on Earth,” Gido said. “Rather than have a favorite, I enjoy the diversity of species and amazing adaptations they all have to survive in their environments.” **k**

Keith Gido, university distinguished professor of biology, works at an experimental stream facility on the Konza Prairie Biological Station near Manhattan. The stream facility is being used in a research project by a doctoral student in Gido’s Fish Ecology Lab.