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Professionals from diverse backgrounds must collaborate for the management of fisheries and aquatic ecosystems to be effective. These professionals include researchers, who provide needed science and data, which informs management decisions; managers, who protect and conserve fisheries and aquatic resources for our future use; and policymakers, who communicate important issues and impact change through policy and legislation. These groups of professionals represent some of the key participants in today’s fisheries and aquatic ecosystem management processes. However, an equally significant but often overlooked group of professionals is comprised of law enforcement officials, whose role in fisheries and aquatic resource management processes includes discovering, deterring, and decreasing illegal and environmentally harmful behavior.

Law enforcement officials are the only professionals that possess the on-the-ground power to prevent behavior that harms fisheries resources and aquatic ecosystems, such as polluting, overharvesting, or transporting species from one location to another. Law enforcement officials commonly prevent these harmful behaviors by issuing warnings, citations, and fines, or by educating anglers and natural resource users about the importance of fisheries and aquatic resource protection and conservation.

As a new doctoral student at Michigan State University (MSU), I recognized the significance of law enforcement in maintaining order in society from a criminological standpoint, but I did not fully understand its role in fisheries and aquatic ecosystem management and its ultimate influence on fisheries and aquatic resources sustainability. I was eager to better understand its role and influence and further to learn about its effectiveness in the protection and conservation of fisheries and aquatic resources. It was not until I became the 2014–2015 MSU Fenske Fellowship recipient that I began to understand the importance of law enforcement in fisheries and aquatic ecosystem management.

Janice Lee Fenske (1954–2005) was the first female fisheries biologist in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Fisheries Division. Fenske’s colleagues, friends, mentees, and family members knew her to be a dynamic leader and bold advocate for the state’s fisheries and their habitats. During her 27 years of service with MDNR, Fenske worked tirelessly and, as needed, brazenly to overcome adversity and external prejudices, becoming one of the most valued and respected fisheries biologists within the agency. Fenske was also a consummate mentor, who shared her love and passion for fisheries, natural resources, and the outdoors with others. The Michigan State University (MSU) Janice Lee Fenske Excellence in Fisheries Management Fellowship honors Fenske’s legacy by recruiting a graduate student from the underserved community to the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at MSU and providing them with a fisheries management agency mentoring experience that will benefit the student’s personal and professional development.

For more information about the MSU Fenske Fellowship, please search Facebook for “MSU Fenske Fellows.” Additionally, please visit our blog, MSU Fenske Fellows, at: fenskefellow.wordpress.com. For more information about applying for the MSU Fenske Fellowship, please contact Dana Infante at infanted@anr.msu.edu.
taught me that relationships or, better yet, partnerships—made up of people who work together toward a common goal that is important to them—matter in building and maintaining networks, thinking big, and improving organizational and agency effectiveness. The partnership between the MSU Fenske Fellows, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and GLFC in Michigan alone is evidence of a growing network of state-trained future leaders in the conservation of fisheries and aquatic resources. I am grateful to MSU, Jan Fenske’s family and friends, the MSU Fenske Fellowship partners, my mentors, and to GLFC for accepting me into their community and empowering me to establish my own network and gain fresh perspectives on fish, management, and the law. I will not let them down, nor Jan Fenske!