

Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association

The EPSFA was formed to educate, enhance and protect the sport fishing in Pennsylvania, especially in Lake Erie, Presque Isle Bay and its tributaries.

March 6th, 2023

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Attn: Executive Director Timothy D. Schaeffer
1601 Elmerton Avenue
PO Box 67000
Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000

Re: Lake Erie and Tributary Brown Trout Stocking

Dear Mr. Schaeffer,

I am writing to you and the P.F.B.C. to request additional brown trout be stocked into Lake Erie and her tributaries. I write this on behalf of the E.P.S.F.A and as the Great Lakes Fishery Commission Sport Fishing Advisor for Pennsylvania. Below you will find a brief history of the effort that we initiated in 2008 through 2012.

In 2008/2009 we had a series of meetings with the P.F.B.C. and various local stakeholders to request the Commission to develop and increase an annual brown trout stocking effort. The goal was to raise 80,000-100,000 fingerlings and stock them both east, west and centrally (Presque Isle Bay) for the main purpose of establishing a bona-fide brown trout fishery for shore, tributary and boat anglers. In 2009, brown trout stocking effort was increased.

Initially, the P.F.B.C obtained and relied on eggs from the NYDEC until they developed their own brood trout. The initial efforts fell below 80,000 stocked fish for a variety of reasons and then the P.F.B.C for reasons, changed stocking efforts and locations. The efforts made early on slowly faded and were deemphasized. And that included our own efforts and goals.

The initial returns were exceptional. The first 2 years saw many, many brown trout showing up in catches from shore (east and west counties), boats and tributary anglers. The P.F.B.C. even saw larger than normal amounts showing up in their August net samplings. Folks were excited about what was unfolding and the future.

Let's fast forward to present. On February 28th 2023, we held a meeting with the Pennsylvania Steelhead Association, Sons of Lake Erie, 3-C-U and the Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association. Mr. Mark Haffley represented the P.F.B.C and we had a good discussion on the past (as noted) and future for this brown trout fishery.

We recognize that we have a stellar steelhead program in Pennsylvania and all agreed that we should maintain the target goal of 1 million steelhead. In 2021, there was 1.9 million stocked lake wide

Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association EPSFA – PO Box 3341 – Erie, PA 16508

Check us out at www.epsfa.com

Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association

The EPSFA was formed to educate, enhance and protect the sport fishing in Pennsylvania, especially in Lake Erie, Presque Isle Bay and its tributaries.

according to the L.E.C. Erie receives plenty of steelhead. In the past, I have seen PA steelhead stocking numbers as high as 1.2 million in conjunction with 30,000-50,000 browns. However, we would like to request that 200,000 brown trout be stocked on an annual basis moving forward. Not simply stocked, but stocked with intent to develop, maintain and improve-as needed a viable brown trout put-grow-take fishery for the future.

Some of the benefits of such an established fishery would be:

- Increase license and permit sales.
- Enhance our diverse cold-water fishery.
- Generate additional business to local businesses.
- Create added excitement for the anglers. (Everyone loves to catch and take a picture of a brown trout)
- Instant Gobie control measure. (Browns love Gobies and would inhabit their waters)
- Create a unique spring trout boat fishery. (Like Ontario and Michigan)
- Separate PA from Ohio and NY cold water fishery in terms of what we can offer the tributary anglers (browns).
- These fish do not travel far and are homebodies-we should not see much straying, like steelhead, so our anglers should reap the benefits.

Recently, I put a Facebook post on two steelhead forums. Similar to what we did in the past, these were met with an overwhelming positive response to stock more brown trout.

Mr. Haffley mentioned that in order for us to see an increase in numbers in the near future, the P.F.B.C. would need to act within the next few months in order to alter the stocking levels for 2025. So, with that knowledge, we would ask the P.F.B.C entertain this request in the very near future.

If you have any questions on regarding this request or would like to see any additional correspondence from the past, please call me at 814-602-8432 or via email at: captainpete@visionquestfishing.com

I have attached some information from the past efforts as well as some of the articles written in outdoor publications that detailed this brown trout program and efforts. The articles do a good job of highlighting those initial efforts.

Respectfully,



Peter Alex

E.P.S.F.A President/Sport Fishing Advisor to the G.L.F.C.

Encl: (12)

CC: Mr. Dan Pastore; P.F.B.C.-Fish Commissioner
Mr. Mark Haffley; Biologist-P.F.B.C.



March 10, 2023

Mr. Timothy D. Schaeffer, Executive Director
PA Fish & Boat Commission
1601 Elmerton Avenue
P.O. Box 67000
Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000

Re: Proposed increase to PFBC brown trout stocking into Lake Erie and Pennsylvania tributary streams

Dear Mr. Schaeffer:

Currently, the PA Fish & Boat Commission stocks a combined 1.1 million steelhead and brown trout (1,000,000 steelhead / 100,000 brown trout) annually into Lake Erie and its Pennsylvania tributaries. **The PA Steelhead Association supports the consensus recommendation that the PA Fish & Boat Commission increase the stocking of brown trout to 200,000 annually, so long as there is no reduction of the number of steelhead stocked annually to achieve it.**

The economic benefits of the steelhead program to the Erie region are significant and well documented. We believe that the increased brown trout numbers would complement this and enhance the overall fishery. Other Erie County based fishing groups, including the Erie PA Sport Fishing Association are in full support of this recommendation.

Why request an increase in brown trout stocking into Pennsylvania's Lake Erie fishery?

- Many PA anglers travel to New York State to pursue brown trout in Lake Ontario waters. More brown trout in our waters would encourage those anglers to stay in PA to fish.
- Introduction of more brown trout into our waters would increase the biodiversity of the Lake.
- Brown trout readily consume gobies which are an invasive species in Lake Erie.
- More brown trout would enhance the Presque Isle Bay fishery which already provides a decent brown trout fishing experience. It would also enhance the fall and spring boat fishery in the Lake.
- Bottom structure and depth on the East side of the PA Lake Erie shoreline provides favorable brown trout habitat. Increased shore and near-shore fishing opportunities at this location could bring economic benefit to the East side of Erie County while potentially relieving some of the fishing pressure on the West side shoreline and streams.

**PA Steelhead Association
PO Box 8892 Erie, PA 16505
www.pasteelhead.com**

PA Steelhead Association is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established in 1996.

In conclusion, we are of the opinion that increasing the number of brown trout stocked into the Commonwealth's Lake Erie and tributary waters without reducing steelhead stocking numbers would enrich our first-class fishery and provide a wider fishing diversity that would attract more anglers. We strongly encourage the PA Fish & Boat Commission to follow our recommendation.

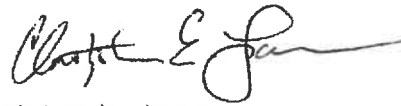
Tight Lines!

Sincerely,



John Hall

President/PA Steelhead Association



Christopher Larson

Vice President/PA Steelhead Association

Cc: Dan Pastore, PA Fish & Boat Commissioner
Mark Haffley, Lake Erie Research Unit Fish Biologist

Addresses:

Mr. Dan Pastore
PA Fish & Boat Commissioner
c/o Fish USA
6960 W. Ridge Rd
Fairview, PA 16415

Mr. Mark Haffley
Lake Erie Research Unit
7895 West Lake Rd
Fairview, PA 16415



NWPA Chapter of Trout Unlimited

4616 Perkins St, Erie Pennsylvania 16509

To whom it may concern: The Northwest Pa Chapter of Trout Unlimited Board has reviewed the request by Pete Alex and other local sportsmen groups to increase Brown Trout stocking in Lake Erie and its tributaries by 200,000 fish on an annual basis. We join with them to support this proposal.

Best Regards, Jim Head

Chapter President

FISHING ● CONSERVATION ● COMMUNITY

We bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rives and streams, so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon.



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established 1866

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
P.O. BOX 67000
HARRISBURG, PA 17106-7000
717-705-7801 – 717-705-7802 (FAX)
E-MAIL: DAUSTEN@STATE.PA.US

February 11, 2008

Pete Alex, President
Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association
Post Office Box 7245
Erie, PA 16501

Dear Mr. Alex:

Thank you for your January 24, 2008 letter requesting that the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission consider increasing the number of brown trout stocked into the waters of Lake Erie. You should be interested to learn that I have directed staff to investigate the feasibility of your request and report on their findings at a February 27 Fisheries Committee meeting that will be held in Harrisburg. Some of the things we plan to evaluate are the capabilities within our hatchery system to raise additional brown trout, the tradeoffs that may be necessary for these changes (there is a cap on the number of pounds of trout we can raise in our hatcheries as a condition of our hatchery discharge permits), and the strains of brown trout that would be most likely to do well in Lake Erie. It would be premature for me to comment further until the results of the staff investigation are presented.

In closing, thank you again for your letter. Please feel free to contact Fisheries Management Division Chief Dave Miko at 717-705-7832 or dmiko@state.pa.us for future updates on the status of our evaluation.

Sincerely,

Douglas J. Austen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

cc: Commissioner Samuel M. Concilla

Our Mission:

www.fish.state.pa.us

To provide fishing and boating opportunities through the protection and management of aquatic resources.



Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association

"Dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of all sport fish species in Lake Erie through education and association"

March 25th, 2008

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Attn: Mr. Douglas J. Austen; Exec. Dir.
P.O. Box 6700
Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000

Re: Lake Erie-Brown Trout Stocking Program

Dear Mr. Austen,

Thank you for your January 24th letter which responded to our Brown trout stocking request. We appreciate your response and recent efforts to analyze the request to enhance the Brown Trout program in Lake Erie.

I have seen the results of your recent meeting which addressed our request. The PFBC has excited "many" anglers. I have enclosed a copy of a recent article as well as the results of recent web discussion on a very popular discussion board. The discussion board is a very good indicator of the interest that has been shown by Pennsylvania Anglers in regard to the Brown Trout. This topic has received over 3,000 views on a recent post and over 130 replies. This topic has been tabled three times since January on this particular discussion board and it has received nearly 7,000 views. This topic has generated by far the most interest and excitement in comparison to any on that popular site. This interest is "not" just from Erie County anglers. Anglers from across the State have expressed their desire and support for this. I cannot put into words the buzz that is out there in the angling community regarding the possibility of a bona-fide Lake Erie Brown trout program.

You should have received a support letter from the Pennsylvania Steelhead Association. They, as well as the Wesleyville Conservation Club and Pittsburgh Downriggers Club are in support as well.

This month, we expect to meet with Mr. Sam Concilla and the two local co-ops hatcheries to discuss their efforts toward this program. We expect a representative of the PA Steelhead Association and Pittsburgh Downriggers to be present as well.

Mr. Austen, we are grateful for the efforts placed forth by Mr. Concilla and the PFBC to date. We hope they continue and the end result is that another great sport fish is available and will compliment the excellent Steelhead Fishery in Lake Erie.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pete Alex". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Pete" being more prominent than the last name "Alex".

Pete Alex,
President,
E.P.S.F.A.

Cc: Mr. Sam Concilla; PFBC
Mr. David Miko; PFBC Fisheries Manager

PFBC Brown Trout Stocking info. January 2009

Talked to Larry Hines-PFBC Production Mgr. at Linesville, PA hatchery.

- He took over Marty Marcenko job
- They requested 100,000 disease free BT eggs from NY State. Struck 4-year deal.
- Goal is to have their own brood stock (disease free) by then. May repair Corry hatchery and use it for the brood stock. They would have to revamp lower hatchery to keep brood stock there.
- Water at Linesville is 53 deg. GOOD temp. They grow faster with milder water.
- PA allowed 1.1 million salmonids in Lake Erie.
- They will deduct the BT's from this 1.1 million number and balance to be Steelhead.
- March stocking. But they may stock in Fall if fish get too big and outgrow their hatchery space-probable.
- 43,000 left alive as of January 2009.
- Steelies raised in silo's. They go from raceways to Silo's.
- BT's came from Catskills NY hatchery. Rome Brown Trout strain. Located NE corner above, PA
- These BT's came from a disease free hatchery-Class A hatchery. Linesville not a Class A hatchery yet.
- Linesville and Corry guys are excited about this new BT deal and I could tell from his voice.
- Steelie fish raised: 300,000 at Fairview, 100,000 at Linesville (less BT's), 650,000 at Tionesta.



Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association

"Dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of all sport fish species in Lake Erie through education and association"

General Discussion Notes from Meeting November 2, 2010

Brown Trout

- Program history (recent)
- Long term financial benefits to economy and PFBC
- Increase efforts and stocking levels
- What EPSFA is doing to help PFBC with catch reports
- Smarter stocking procedures
- Develop bona-fide spring trout program for boaters
- Give anglers variety

Steelhead

- Recent downward trend
- Ways to improve stocking
- Ways to improve size
- Maintain existing financial benefits to economy and PFBC

Charter Boats

- Not important to area economy?
- Cleaning fish on water (restrict disposal offshore to one mile)
- Fish cleaning stations (way to generate money to PFBC)
- 3 rod proposal (our clients deserve the best chance for success)
- Maintain competitive limits and regulations with neighboring States

WCO's

- Guilty before proven innocent approach
- Not friendly-to much enforcement not enough friendly "customer relations"
- Bad reputation-Why? What is their goal?

Brown Trout raceway

- Can PFBC help with monies to build raceway?
- Will PFBC assist with more fry/eggs for this raceway

3 rod proposal

- Give and take. Reduce walleyes, so give us 3 rods in exchange (Open waters)
- Keep PA anglers from going to OH to fish. A bonus to fish in PA waters
- Other States going there. MI already and NY going there
- Would increase license sales thru recreational anglers and charter clients

Brown Trout:

2011 will be the third year for fingerling brown trout program.

About 100,000 certified disease free eggs are being supplied by the NY Dept of Environmental Conservation on a yearly basis. These eggs are provided based on availability, and hopefully we may be able to secure more in the future to reach our annual goal of stocking 100,000 fingerlings.

Eggs are hatched at Linesville FCS. Half of the hatchlings are retained and raised at Linesville and half are distributed to the cooperative nurseries (3-CU and Wesleyville Conservation Club). This is a great example of cooperation between the PFBC and our local sportsmen's groups.

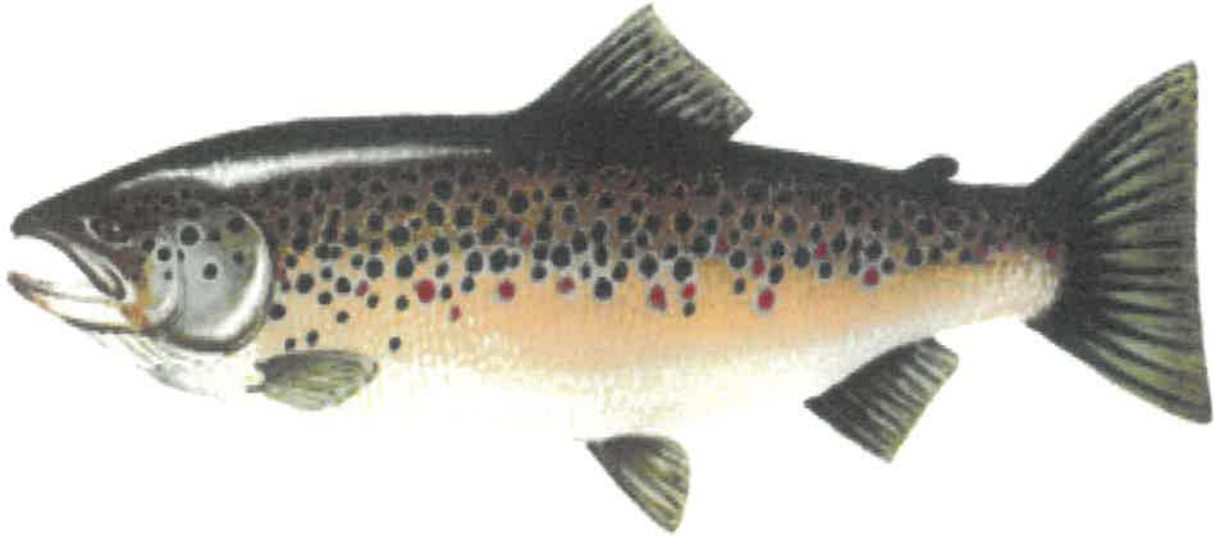
86,875 fingerlings (43,925 by the PFBC and 42,950 by the Coops) were stocked in 2009 and 79,859 fingerlings (41,259 by the PFBC and 38,600 by the Coops) were stocked in 2010.

We should begin to see the fruits of our labor this year. The 2009 fingerling stockings should return as adults this fall.

The PFBC is monitoring the program through fin clip evaluation, small scale creel surveys and surveillance at our nursery streams (Trout Run and Godfrey Run) while collecting steelhead broodstock.

Early reports from anglers suggest that the program is working.

WANTED



Please help the Erie, PA Sport Fishing Association and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission collect data on the brown trout stocking program. This information is critical to the future of this program in Pennsylvania.

The PFBC with help from the Wesleyville Conservation Club and 3-C-U began a Lake Erie stocking program in 2009. This effort is for the sole purpose of creating diversity and a bona-fide Lake Erie brown trout fishery.

This establishment has a log sheet available to them or you. Please ask them to fill out the following information regarding any brown trout that you caught. This information can be provided whether the fish was kept or not.

The following information is needed: date caught, location, estimated length, estimated weight, presence of fin clips and lamprey eel scars.

CHAPTER 6

TROUT MANAGEMENT IN LAKE ERIE

Contemporary trout management on Lake Erie includes the goal of restoring native lake trout and providing recreational angling opportunities through the stocking of steelhead strain rainbow trout (hereafter referred to as steelhead) and brown trout.

Endemic stocks of lake trout have been extirpated from Lake Erie since 1965. Restoration efforts were initiated by the PFBC when 17,000 yearling lake trout were stocked in 1969. This effort was expanded in 1982, when the PFBC, in partnership with the USFWS Service and the NYDEC committed to stocking 160,000 yearling lake trout annually, with the ultimate goal of establishing a self sustaining population (Markham et. al, 2008). An extensive review of this effort can be found in the Lake Erie Lake Trout Management Plan at <http://www.glfrc.org/pubs/SpecialPubs/2008-02.pdf>.

Current steelhead stocking objectives for the PFBC are one million yearling smolts annually, with the primary goal of providing an attractive seasonal trophy fishery in the tributaries to Lake Erie. The steelhead program is recognized as a put-grow-take fishery that is maintained exclusively through stocking. The program is sustained through the collection of sexually mature steelhead at Trout Run and Godfrey Run. Artificial spawning takes place at the Fairview State Fish Hatchery. Fertilized eggs are transferred to and hatched at the Tionesta State Fish Hatchery. Fingerling steelhead are then reared for approximately 15 months at Tionesta SFH (600,000), Fairview SFH (300,000) and Linesville SFH (100,000). Additional steelhead fingerlings or fertilized eggs are also supplied to the local sportsman's cooperative nurseries to augment PFBC production, which result in an additional 100,000 steelhead smolts annually. Stocking location and relative stocking intensity are based on the proportional distribution of public access, angler effort and the perpetuation of feral brood into the nursery streams. In 2008, thirteen tributaries and Presque Isle Bay were stocked with a total of 1,220,934 steelhead yearlings (Figure 8). A comprehensive evaluation of this fishery in 2003 -2004 estimated that anglers direct over 200,000 angling trips for steelhead annually in Pennsylvania (Murray and Shields, 2004). Opinion surveys taken during this study showed overwhelming support for

supplemental funding to secure or improve angler access through a special stamp or permit program. As a result of this feedback, and strong support of local angling groups, a Lake Erie permit was established in 2005. Revenue from this source is dedicated to acquiring new access and enhancing existing access on the Pennsylvania portion of Lake Erie and the tributaries through the Erie Access Improvement Grant Program (EAIGP)

In 2008, the PFBC, in collaboration with local Sportsman's cooperative nurseries, have initiated a put-grow-take brown trout stocking program on Lake Erie. The objectives of this effort are to increase the diversity of the Erie tributary fishery, enhance the open lake boat fishery, and create a near shore spring fishery by stocking 50,000 - 100,000 yearling brown trout annually. The program was started with donation of 100,000 certified disease free brown trout eggs by the NYDEC. The NYDEC has agreed to continue providing eggs for this program for several years, based on available surplus. During this period, the PFBC expects to develop a self-sustaining source of brown trout eggs for the continued support of this program. Fish will be stocked in the nursery streams and Presque Isle Bay to minimize angler induced mortality of incidentally caught juvenile brown trout. The first stocking of the put-grow-take brown trout took place in May, 2009 with fish from the local sportsman's cooperative nurseries. The PFBC will follow that stocking event with a fall planting of fish in October 2009. The PFBC will fin clip these fish so that relative survival and stocking strategies can be evaluated. Future plants of both cooperative nursery and PFBC brown trout will be fin clipped for at least three years to measure the success of this program. Information will be garnered through creel surveys, existing assessment programs and when conducting steelhead brood stock collections in the nursery streams.

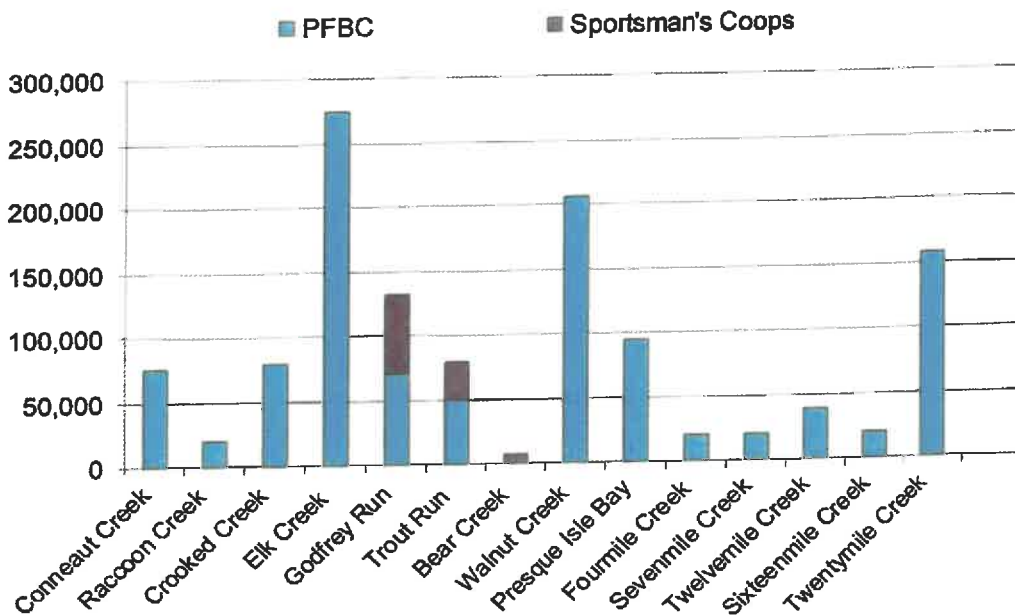


Figure 8. Total (PFBC + Sportsman's Cooperative Nurseries) steelhead stocking by location in 2008.

Goals

The goals of trout management in Lake Erie are to:

1. Restore stocks of native lake trout
2. Provide recreational angling opportunities through the stocking of steelhead and brown trout

Stressors and Threats

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) have posed a risk to the upper Great Lakes since the Welland Canal was created in 1829. The problem was exacerbated with the completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959. These actions not only allowed for the direct passage of sea lamprey above Niagara Falls, but also increased maritime transport and introduction of non-native aquatic species from other ports around the world through ballast water transfer. There are currently over 180 nonindigenous species in the Great Lakes including sea lamprey, rainbow smelt, alewife and round gobies, which have all demonstrated direct negative impact on the capacity to restore lake trout in Lake Erie. Additionally, it is assumed that viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) was also introduced to the Great Lakes through this vector. This disease is a

major threat to the perpetuation of Lake Erie trout fisheries, especially to the feral broodstock program in Pennsylvania. In addition to VHS, a suite of other contagions including infectious pancreatic necrosis (IPN), infectious hepatic necroses (IHN), and bacterial kidney disease (BKD) could impart serious consequences to the production facilities currently rearing trout for the Lake Erie program including steelhead and brown trout.

Another risk to the continued success of Pennsylvania's potamodromous (migrates within freshwater) trout fishery is sustained public access to the Lake Erie tributaries. Access to the Erie tributaries continues to be threatened by posting of private lands, and loss due to private leases secured by commercial enterprises and exclusive angling groups

Opportunities

Maintaining access on waters currently open to fishing and opening new public access areas to Lake Erie and its tributaries is vital to the continued participation and growth of trout fishing in the Commonwealth. Opportunities exist to expand angler access to Lake Erie and its tributaries through the wise application of the Lake Erie Access Improvement Program. Further improvement in access may be realized through partnerships with conservation groups and private individuals, which can prove beneficial in securing long-term public easements or purchasing riparian lands to provide public access. Cooperative efforts such as landowner recognition programs could be used to improve landowner relations. Furthermore, it is recognized that extensive angler use on private lands open to public fishing has the potential to result in that land being posted against trespass. Opportunities exist to promote the use of less used angling areas on Lake Erie tributary streams and to open up new areas through the removal of instream structures that block the upstream migration of fish.

Strategies

The following strategies are designed to address the highest priority threats and opportunities to Lake Erie as they pertain to the management of trout.

Issue 23: The PFBC does not have a long term source of disease free brown trout eggs or an isolated facility to raise fingerling brown trout for stocking Lake Erie. Addressing these issues is critical to the development of an expanded Lake Erie brown trout fishery within the guidelines of the Great Lake Fish Health Advisory Committee.

Strategies:

- By 2013, develop an in-house source of disease free brown trout eggs.
- By 2013, develop an isolated rearing facility capable of raising 75,000 brown trout fingerlings for stocking into the waters of Lake Erie.
- Strictly adhere to the Great Lakes Fish Disease Control Policy and Model Program supplied through the Great Lakes Fish Health Committee.

Issue 24: Maintaining public access to Pennsylvania's portion of Lake Erie is important to maintain Pennsylvania's angling heritage.

Strategy:

- Improve public access to Lake Erie and its tributaries. Access improvements may include, but are not limited to improved parking areas, long-term access easements, and purchase of riparian lands.
 - Work with PFBC access coordinators to create greater public awareness of the need to secure public access; be proactive in pursuing landowner easements along and access to privately owned tributary corridors.
 - By December 2010, develop a program to better acknowledge and show appreciation to private landowners who allow habitat improvement work and public access on their land.

Issue 25: Invasive species and disease pathogens such as didymo, round goby, zebra mussels, and VHS threaten our trout fisheries.

Strategies:

- Continue to work with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission to ensure the effective suppression of the sea lamprey population in Lake Erie to allow for the restoration of lake trout and improved survival of stocked salmonids.
- By December 2010, implement effective outreach and education priorities identified in the Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan.
- Fully implement the agency's new biosecurity policy in 2010.
- Work with federal agencies, neighboring states, and other Pennsylvania state agencies to establish regulations to help reduce the introduction of new AIS and control the spread of established AIS in the Great Lakes.

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March/April 2011 \$3.00


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The Browns are Big Winners in Erie

by Deborah Weisberg

They're trout, and scoring big points as the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) adds a new dimension to a fishery dominated by steelhead.

"Anglers have always caught browns in Erie," said PFBC biologist Chuck Murray. "We stock 20,000 a year for Opening Day. But, this is a much bigger program intended to restore some of the diversity lost when we stopped stocking Cohos back in 2003."

Brown trout also may take a bite out of Erie's exploding population of round gobies. The exotic invader that replaced Emerald shiners as the lake's forage base is the speckled salmonids' favorite food.

The first cohort of "put-grow-and-take" browns was put into the lower reaches of select tributaries in 2009 when the PFBC and private-sector partners 3 C.U. Trout Association and Westleyville Conservation Club stocked a total of 89,000 enhanced fingerlings in the spring and fall. The fish had been cultivated at the PFBC's Linesville State Fish Hatchery from certified-disease-free, fertilized eggs provided by New York State. When they reached 5 to 7 inches, they were stocked in the nursery waters of Crooked Creek, Godfrey, Trout, and Orchard Beach runs and Presque Isle Bay. The PFBC hopes to eventually develop a self-sustaining brood stock program and boost brown trout plantings to 100,000 a year—about 10 percent of the 1.1 million steelhead put

photo-PFBC archives

Tackling browns has nothing to do with football for Lake Erie anglers.

into Erie tributaries each spring, Murray said. "Browns won't compete with steelhead. Each has its niche, but they'll make a notable contribution to the charter fishery and to recreational opportunities in general."

Although some of the enhanced fingerlings from the stocking two years ago may have shown up in 2010, the brown trout program is still in its infancy. Trophy browns caught last year were most likely from the PFBC's April put-and-take stockings at Crooked, Elk, Cascade and Twentymile creeks or from Dunkirk, New York, where biologists have managed a put-grow-and take program since 2002. "Pennsylvania's initiative is about twice the size of New York's," Murray said. "We're about two years away from

seeing the full benefit of the new stockings, when we will have multiple year classes—two- to four-year-olds—in the lake. However, preliminary results look promising."

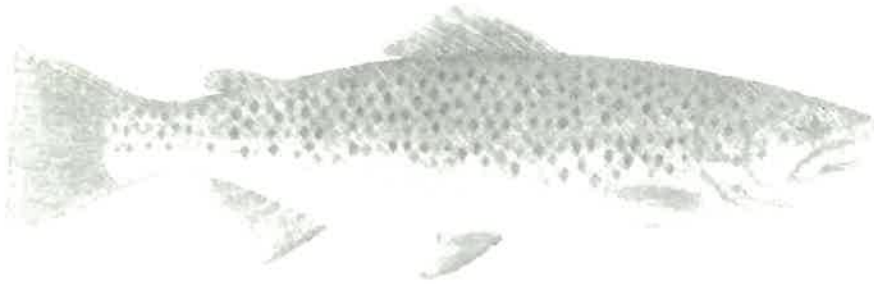
Pete Alex, a charter captain who heads the Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association, pushed for a bigger brown trout fishery. Last fall, his group enlisted tackle shops in conducting creel surveys and planned to share the results with the PFBC. "We asked Poor Richard's, North East Marina and East End Angler to note the length and weight of the browns they were handling and whether they were fin-clipped," said Alex.

Fin-clipping was done by the PFBC, so survival of browns stocked in Presque Isle Bay can be compared with those at

Chris Coleman of McMurray, Pennsylvania, released this beautiful brown trout on a woolly buggie on Twentymile Creek last October.



photo-courtesy of Chris Coleman



“We’ve heard about a lot of 18- to 22-inch fish. Some of our members have posted that they were catching browns over 7 pounds, 24 inches.”

the mouths of the tributaries, Murray said. “We want to evaluate where we’re getting the most bang for the buck. We may adjust the stocking ratio between the bay and the tributaries if, for example, we find browns in the bay are performing poorly due to northern pike and muskellunge predation.”

Whatever tweaking remains to be done, Brian Ruland of Poor Richard’s thinks the brown trout fishery is a winner. “We’ve weighed quite a few browns from 2 to 7 ½ pounds,” Ruland said early last November. “So far, we’ve counted 42. Every year, it seems we see more.”

Alex pointed out that for every brown brought to a shop, three or four are probably released, and the quality of the fishery is impressive. “We’ve heard about a lot of 18- to 22-inch fish. Some of our members have posted that they were catching browns over 7 pounds, 24 inches,” he said. “There were some big ones in Presque Isle Bay.”

Steve Brugger of Lake Erie Ultimate Angler reported “decent returns” last year. “We saw quite a few browns hanging around the mouths of the tributaries, which is a first for this area,” he said. “We also saw several in the 24 and 26 inch class. It’s an awesome addition to the fishery. It’s getting anglers all riled up and excited.”

Chris Coleman of McMurray, near Pittsburgh, is one of the browns’ biggest fans. After releasing his first Erie brown—a 25-inch, 7-plus pounder—on a wooly bugger on Twentymile Creek last October, he was hooked. “To see multiple brown trout of such size running with steelhead makes you wonder what the real prize is when you set out on the streams,” he said. “I’ll take the brownie every time.”

Murray is just as enthusiastic and with good reason. “Browns have an affinity for gobies, and there’s an abundance of those in the lake, which is why we think the program will be successful.

“Gobies will bolster browns’ survival and size.”

Like gobies, browns are a bottom dwelling or structure oriented species, while steelhead are more pelagic, Murray said. “During the summer, you’ll typically find them at or above the thermocline in the open lake waters of the central basin.”

Browns are also able to tolerate warmer water temperatures better than steelhead, which makes them good candidates for year-round recreational

opportunities. The state record brown trout—a 19-pound, 10-ounce behemoth—was caught on the 4th of July in 2000 off the wall at the PFBC Walnut Creek Access Area. Also, a 9-pound, 24.5 inch brown trout with a 16-inch girth was taken on a spoon in Lake Erie in July. Browns are fall spawners—although in Erie they go through a false spawn—and often come to the mouths of the tributaries in late summer and early fall when water isn’t yet cold enough to draw steelhead.

“Depending on water levels and temperatures, they’ll hover around the shoreline in late August and early September, and they’ll come as far up into the streams as steelhead in the right conditions,” said Alex, who enjoys stream fishing for browns in his off-season. “They’re pretty skittish, so their nature is to forage at dawn, dusk and during the night.”

Because they are line-shy, Alex fishes light line with fluorocarbon leader and live minnows in the streams and throws spoons and plugs into surf at the shoreline. “Any 2 or 3-inch lure that imitates a minnow should be productive,” he said.

Brugger offered the following fly angling tips. “Concentrate on the lower reaches, because browns generally won’t run as high as steelhead. The vast majority of browns will probably be taken on nymphs, but you can streamer fish, too, especially when streams are on the rise.”

“It’s easy to trigger aggressive behavior in brown trout by dead-drifted nymph or swinging a streamer in front of them,” he said. “They’re cannibalistic and won’t hesitate to attack a smaller brown. Personally, I find yellow is a great trigger color with browns.”

Coleman calls them eating machines and lands most of his browns on streamers. “They’re not the bug and egg type. They’d rather eat a minnow than a nymph,” he said. “I catch them by drifting a wooly bugger with a little split shot and no indicator. They want to be down low. They’ll grab the fly and go straight to the bottom, nose to the gravel and shaking their heads.”

“They’ll put up a good fight, but aren’t as acrobatic as steelhead, which makes catching them easier in some respects,” Alex said. “They don’t take those long runs that strip out your line. They fight more like a smallmouth bass. It’s that strong bulldog fight. So, your percentage of landing is definitely higher than with steelhead.”

Brown trout have a tendency to be near drop-offs and rock piles.

As someone who makes his livelihood on the lake—owning and operating the Vision Quest Sport Fishing fleet—Alex expects to add browns to his down-rigging charters in another year or two. He thinks any boater with dipsy divers and planer boards will find them fun to catch. “They have a tendency to be near drop-offs and rock piles, shipwrecks and ledges,” he said. “Find their preferred water temperature—55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit—near structures close to the bottom. Tie on a goby or minnow imitation, and you’ll catch browns. You’ll catch more than one, probably, because they tend to school.”

“If you go to 100 feet in the middle of the lake with no structure around, you’re not going to catch a brown, period.”

Adding browns to the fishery is good for both anglers and the Erie economy, according to members of the Pittsburgh Downriggers, a club devoted to deep-water fishing for walleyes, steelhead and lake trout on the Great Lakes. Many have been downrigging long enough to remember the Coho program and welcome increased diversity. “It’d be good for Pennsylvania anglers,” said downrigger Anthony Timlin of suburban Pittsburgh, “and it would draw people from other states, too, like West Virginia and Maryland.” □

Pete Alex, Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association president and charter captain, holds up two brown trout he caught aboard his boat.



photo-courtesy of Pete Alex

Pete Alex

From: "Laura Chandler" <chandler6925@roadrunner.com>
To: "Pete Alex" <petealex@alexroofing.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 19, 2009 7:28 PM
Subject: Fw: Mike Bleech article

Pete, Walt sent this today, thought you might like to see it. Bob

— Original Message —

From: [Walt Young](#)
To: [Bob & Tookie Chandler](#)
Sent: Tuesday, May 19, 2009 11:49 AM
Subject: Mike Bleech article

Hi Bob,

Here is the article Mike wrote about Lake Erie Brown trout.

Walt

New effort underway to improve Lake Erie brown trout fishery By Mike Bleech

A new program will attempt to improve the Lake Erie brown trout fishery. But this already has been tried. Why has this fishery not taken off before and will it ever? Perhaps Lake Erie already has a brown trout population that is underutilized. Last year, four of the top five brown trout entered in Pennsylvania's Angler Recognition Program came from Lake Erie tributaries led by Herb Wagner's 13-pound fish.

"We know that on Lake Ontario they have a near-shore spring fishery for them in the lake itself. So if we can uncover some secrets here and share them with everybody, maybe we can develop a fishery that's going to be attractive to everybody," said Chuck Murray, biologist at the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Lake Erie Fisheries Unit.

Several years ago in an interview with a New York fisheries biologist who specialized on Lake Ontario, he explained that brown trout do not seem to like to inhabit water deeper than 100 feet. It is for this reason that, although there is very fine brown trout fishing along most of the Lake Ontario shoreline, the better brown trout fishing is toward the eastern end of the lake where the bottom does not drop so steeply as it does across most of the southern shoreline. This would seem to make Lake Erie the perfect lake for brown trout since so much of it is less than 100 feet in depth.

Temperature is another factor favoring Lake Erie. Brown trout would seem to be better suited to Lake Erie than any of the Pacific salmon that flourished here from the latter 1960s and as late as into 2003 to a small degree.

"The thing is, I guess, just looking at the animal it has wider temperature tolerances than Pacific salmon," Murray said.

And yet a good brown trout fishery has never been established in Lake Erie despite serious efforts going back as far as the late 1970s. In 1977, 49,096 brown trout were stocked into Lake Erie. Stockings increased through the next several years, first peaking in 1990 when 117,899 fingerlings were stocked. This included 64,500 of the Seeforellen strain, a special strain imported from a European lake where brown trout were reputed to live longer and grow larger.

New York made a more extended effort to get a brown trout fishery started in Lake Erie beginning in

1974 when 88,000 brown trout yearlings and fingerlings were stocked. But the only encouraging results have been a fair brown trout fishery at Cattaraugus Creek each fall and a modest brown trout fishery during the winter at Dunkirk Harbor. Brown trout are being caught in gillnets set to sample the lake trout population.

Combined brown trout stocking in Lake Erie by all state fisheries agencies averaged 87,707 per year from 1989 through 2004. The current effort to establish a brown trout fishery will involve stocking approximately 60,000 brown trout per year with many of them coming from cooperative hatcheries. I asked Murray why the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is making another effort to establish a brown trout fishery in Lake Erie.

"One thing was because the coho disappeared after 2003," Murray said. "So the anglers have been asking that we incorporate some diversity into the fishery again. Of course, we know the success the DEC has had on Lake Ontario, and a few years ago they implemented a similar but smaller scale program on Lake Erie."

This year brown trout stockings in the lake will be done by local cooperative nurseries. These brown trout will be the standard domestic brown trout strain. According to Wesleyville Conservation Club president Ron Dombrowiak, the brown trout they stock are about a foot in length, which gives them a good chance at survival.

"We always put a couple thousand of the leftovers a year in," Dombrowiak said. "This year we have 16,000 to put in."

Dombrowiak explained that the new stocking effort is largely a result of urging by the Erie, PA, Sport Fishing Association and Capt. Pete Alex who worked with Fish Commissioner Sam Concilla. On the west side of Erie, 3-C-U will be stocking 25,000 brown trout according to Bob Hetz. They will average about 9 inches in length when they are stocked.

"We'll put them right directly in the lake," Hetz said, "probably anywhere from Elk Creek to Walnut Creek. Probably mostly Trout Run and Walnut because they're the most accessible."

The Fish and Boat Commission has an agreement with New York to acquire 100,000 eggs from a hatchery that is certified to be free of disease. They hope to develop a brood stock population from these fish.

Is there any reason to believe the current effort may succeed where past efforts failed?

"We're starting to see it (the brown trout) feed heavily on round gobies, the ones that we've been catching in our assessment nets seem to be just gorged on them. This is something that wasn't around, of course, 15 years ago so perhaps brown trout will utilize round gobies," Murray said.

This new effort to establish a brown trout fishery in Lake Erie is exciting. Be it the presence of the gobie, or the lack of competition from Pacific salmon, other than steelhead, perhaps the timing is right this time.

Looking ahead to 2009 (and '10): New plan to stock trout in Erie steelhead streams

Sunday, December 28, 2008

By Deborah Weisberg



John Hayes

"The old timers remember the salmon runs, and some anglers have been asking us for a little more diversity again." -- Chuck Murray, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission biologist

The Browns are coming to Erie.

Not *those* Browns, who meet the Steelers today at Heinz Field.

In the spring, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission will begin resurrecting the Lake Erie brown trout fishery by planting the lake with 42,000 browns that should reach legal creel size by 2010. Another 57,000 will be stocked in 2011.

They call it a "put-grow-and-take" fishery.

"This isn't *instead* of steelhead, it's in addition to," said commission biologist Chuck Murray. "We'll continue to stock 1 million steelhead every year, but our goal is to also stock 100,000 browns and to have brown trout be 10 percent of our annual Erie stocking program."

Like steelhead, the browns will be 7 to 9 inches when planted to minimize predation

by walleyes and northern pike, and to prevent angler harvest. Minimum size in the Erie watershed is 9 inches April 12 through September 1. Stockings will occur in the open lake and near shore.

The commission has stocked browns both for "put and take" and "put-grow-and-take" since 1987, but cut back on numbers as the steelhead program took off. The fish have been German browns, although the commission also stocked the Seeforellen trophy strain in the early 1990s. The 19-pound, 10-ounce state record brown landed on Walnut Creek in April of 2000 most likely represents the peak brown stockings of the mid-1990s, Murray said.

The brown trout fishery is being developed at the urging of the Erie Pennsylvania Sport Fishing Association, which wanted to expand open-lake angling opportunities April through October. Wesleyville Conservation Club and 3-C-U Trout Association are partnering in the initiative, with support from Pittsburgh Downriggers and the Pennsylvania Steelhead Association.

"We want to create more of a year-round recreational fishery," said association president and charter captain Pete Alex. "There's a lot of interest in browns because you target them in open water just like steelhead, by downrigging or with Dipsy Divers, lead core line and planer boards."

Browns are also expected to add new interest to Presque Isle Bay -- where Murray said future stockings could occur -- and to enhance shoreline fishing in early fall. Brown trout are fall spawners, but will come in a little earlier than steelhead and probably won't travel quite as far up the tribs, Murray said.

"We expect they'll give anglers early-season action around the near-shore waters of Godfrey and Trout runs. Those are some of the areas where the browns will be stocked."

Murray said there's little chance browns will out-compete steelhead for habitat or food. Although they grow at the same rate as steelhead, browns tend to live in cooler parts of the open lake.

"We expect they'll congregate a little east of Erie, since temperatures are lower there," he said. "Steelhead tend to be more in the west. Of course, this is a pilot program, a work in progress, so we'll have to wait to see where they'll actually go."

Fry are being raised now at the Linesville hatchery with disease-free fertilized eggs

- from New York State, which maintains a popular brown trout fishery in lakes Erie and Ontario.

"New York's Lake Ontario fishery is really great and has been for years," Murray said. "We're looking to create something like it here, but on a smaller scale."

Steelhead guide and author John Nagy applauds the idea.

"It's very exciting when you unexpectedly hook up with one of those [browns] when fishing for steel," he said. "Fisherman specifically targeting browns in the fall should look for them in faster runs and shallow pocket water areas, which they prefer over slower moving pools and runs."

Anglers old enough to have fished Erie more than 30 years ago will remember when Coho salmon were the big draw. Cohos were introduced in 1968 -- seven years after the first steelhead were planted -- and they dominated the fishery until 1992 when poor egg survival and low angler returns prompted the agency to shift its focus to steelhead. The Coho program ended in 2003.

"The old timers remember the salmon runs," Murray said, "and some anglers have been asking us for a little more diversity again."

Avid Pittsburgh steelheader Bob Bukk is keeping an open mind.

"Friends of mine have caught the occasional wayward brown trout in the Erie tribs, and the variety would be interesting," he said. "My concern is their impact on the food chain and the watershed itself. As long as the fish commission studies it thoroughly, it would be great."

First published on December 28, 2008 at 12:00 am