

Austen Leads National Fish Habitat Effort

Fish & Boat Commission Executive Director Dr. Douglas Austen has been selected to chair a national workgroup that's developing a strategy to protect aquatic habitats and fisheries across the country. Much like the highly successful North American Waterfowl Management Plan in the 1980s, which forged partnerships for restoration or protection of millions of acres of wetland breeding areas for waterfowl, the National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) is a collaborative effort to focus attention on common priorities

for fish habitat across the country. Visit NFHI's web site at www.fishhabitat.org.

"Destruction of habitat is a principal culprit in many of the challenges fisheries managers face. Habitat alteration is a contributing factor in 75 percent of all fish extinctions during the past 75 years and 91 percent of fish listings under the Endangered Species Act," Austen said. "Our goal is to substantially increase the level of activity by state and federal agencies and conservation organizations in addressing aquatic habitat issues. Ultimately, the

NFHI will produce geographically focused, locally driven, scientifically based partnerships to protect, restore and enhance aquatic habitats across the nation."

The development of the NFHI is one of six priority areas the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) identified in its Fisheries Program for the Future vision document in 2002. The USFWS then asked the state natural resource agencies, through the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA), to develop a formal NFHI plan and begin its implementation. IAFWA established a NFHI core workgroup committee comprised of its membership and other partners to begin the project in 2005. IAFWA then asked Austen to chair the NFHI core workgroup. This core workgroup includes key representatives from many state and federal natural resource agencies, conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, and industry partners like Bass Pro Shops and Pure Fishing.

The NFHI project is now in the midst of a series of workgroup and support team meetings to develop the NFHI plan, acquire more partners and begin implementation. The workgroup is developing compilations of current habitat restoration efforts, habitat monitoring programs, research projects and databases from across the nation that will be useful in developing NFHI objectives.

The group is also actively looking to build the list of partners in the effort. In addition to state and federal agencies, sponsors of the NFHI now include conservation organizations like the American Fisheries Society, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Trout Unlimited, many BASS Federation chapters including the Pennsylvania Chapter, as well as industry partners such as Bass Pro Shops, Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council and BASS/ESPN Outdoors. Interested groups can become a member of the

Fishin' from the Kitchen

Greek-Style Baked Walleyes

by Wayne Phillips

Surprise your dinner guests with walleyes packed with the traditional Greek flavors of lemon, garlic, oregano, Kalamata olives, and fragrant Greek extra-virgin olive oil.

- ✓ 4 pieces of boneless, skinless walleyes.
- ✓ 1 large onion, sliced.
- ✓ 2 garlic cloves, finely minced.
- ✓ 2 lemons, 1 sliced and 1 zested.
- ✓ Greek extra-virgin olive oil.
- ✓ 2-3 Tbsp. dried oregano.
- ✓ One-half cup white wine.
- ✓ One-half cup chicken stock or water.
- ✓ Salt and white pepper to taste.

Procedure

Slice onion and lemon into fairly thick slices. Finely mince garlic. In a glass baking dish sprinkle the dried oregano. Add onions, lemon slices and garlic. Add liquid. Season fish with salt and white pepper. Place fish on top of vegetables, taking care to keep it from touching the oregano. Drizzle fish with olive oil. Bake in a 350-degree oven until fish is opaque, about 10 minutes per inch of thickness.



photo-Wayne Phillips

Serve

Add the lemon zest and the juice of one-half lemon to your favorite tomato sauce. Coarsely chop Kalamata olives and add to sauce. Optionally, toss cooked orzo in the sauce.

Hints

Add enough lemon juice to the sauce so that it has the fresh taste of lemon. Serve lemon wedges with the walleyes for those who enjoy more lemon with their fish. Garnish walleyes with lemon zest, whole Kalamata olives and a sprinkle of Greek extra-virgin olive oil.

Note: Baking the fish on a bed of vegetables over the oregano gives the fish wonderful flavor, but allows the fish to keep its snow-white appearance. With the first bite, diners will be surprised to find their mouths bursting with oregano flavor. You can do this with other fish-friendly herbs like dill, tarragon, and basil.