



VOLUNTARY PERMITS FEATURED PROJECTS: *Musky Program Improvements*

by Mike Parker

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While Pennsylvania is widely referred to as a trout fishing destination because of its wealth of both wild and hatchery-stocked trout resources, the Keystone State is quickly gaining another nickname from a growing number of anglers seeking a larger type of gamefish.

Welcome to “Muskyvania.”

As more and more anglers find success in catching Muskellunge in medium and large-sized lakes and rivers across Pennsylvania, much of the credit for this emerging fishery belongs to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission’s musky program. While some natural reproduction of these fish occurs, most muskies caught in Pennsylvania waters are stocked fish that were raised from eggs and spent the first year-and-a-half at the Linesville State Fish Hatchery, Crawford County.

Muskellunge, which can grow to trophy sizes between 40- and 50-inches over a decade, are stocked as yearlings, measuring an average of 12- to 14-inches long. The PFBC stocks approximately 30,000 muskies into 70 total waterways, with about 35 lakes or river sections receiving a new batch of yearlings every other year. Instinctual predators, muskies prefer to hunt for meals, and a hatchery diet of pelletized fish food must be supplemented with live minnows, which are expensive to purchase.

A custom diet is just one example of the special processes required to raise healthy muskies. Delivery of the minnows to the growing muskies requires special feeders, and heaters are needed to maintain consistent water temperatures in tanks and raceways. Along with raising the current generation of muskies, Commission hatchery staff and biologists participate in field work to monitor the success of the stocking program and overall populations.

In 2020, the PFBC generated \$38,960 from the sale of Voluntary Musky Permits to supplement the funding



of these improvements and research efforts throughout the 2021 season:

Inline Water Heating System Linesville State Fish Hatchery

Investment: \$15,285

The addition of this water heater will allow the musky program to have a heated water system independent of other fish culture activities at the facility. As a result, muskies can be raised in ideal flows and temperatures to maximize growth and survival.

Snap Feeders for Musky Culture Linesville State Fish Hatchery

Investment: \$8,750

These 10-foot elongated feeders can distribute feed to all the muskies in a tank at the same time, reducing cannibalism, feed waste, and improving weight gain of fish early in the culture process. Five additional snap feeders will be purchased.

Minnows to Feed Musky Fingerlings Linesville State Fish Hatchery

Investment: \$5,000

Since Commission pond space for minnow production is limited, 1,000 pounds of minnows will be purchased to supplement musky hatchery diet.

Fingerlings to Re-establish Shawnee Lake Bedford County

Investment: \$4,225

Musky stocking at this 451-acre lake was discontinued in 2005 due to frequent water level fluctuations and algae blooms. Biological conditions have improved at the lake and can support a quality musky fishery. Purchase of these fish from a commercial hatchery will reestablish the musky population until the lake can be reintegrated into the PFBC stocking program.

Equipment for Muskellunge Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) Study Statewide

Investment: \$5,700

This study, which involves implanting muskies with PIT tracking tags, will promote better musky fishing through the evaluation of musky stocking strategies and length limit and creel limit changes. □