



photo-Earl Myers

PFBC's Cooperative Nursery Program



by *Earl Myers*
Leader, Cooperative Nursery Unit

You're traveling along a small Pennsylvania stream, and you observe several fish rising in a calm pool. The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) does not stock this stream, and the fish don't appear to be wild. How did they get there? It's very likely they were stocked by one of PFBC's volunteer groups that participate in the agency's Cooperative Nursery Program (CNP). These volunteer organizations are called "sponsors" and the rearing facilities they develop to raise the fish are called "nurseries." Most nurseries are rectangular concrete raceways; however, some are spring-fed ponds, while others are indoor tanks. Sponsor organizations receive fingerling trout from PFBC sometime after May, feed and care for them at their nursery and stock them as adults the following spring. The CNP is credited with supplying approximately 25 percent of the trout stocked in Pennsylvania. The majority of sponsors raise trout; however, there are a few that raise bass, catfish, Walleye or Muskellunge.

The earliest records of a CNP date back to 1932 when the United States Bureau of Fisheries (USBF) supplied fingerling trout to local sportsmen's groups to raise and stock in local waters. In 1962, the USBF became the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and relinquished the leadership role of the CNP to the then Pennsylvania Board of Fish Commissioners, later to be named the

Function of CNP

The CNP is a cooperative effort between PFBC and organized groups of Pennsylvanians to:

1. Provide increased fishing opportunities for public angling
2. Provide groups with an educational opportunity in culturing fish
3. Promote public involvement in PFBC programs
4. Increase PFBC involvement in local group fishing interests
5. Support local groups' initiatives to provide fish for special events

Pennsylvania Fish Commission (PFC), then PFBC. In October 1965, the PFC established the position of Cooperative Nursery Coordinator and officially began, as the title denotes, a coordinated program between the PFC and the sportsmen's groups committed to being cooperative nursery sponsors.

Today, PFBC's Cooperative Nursery Unit (CNU) manages 146 sponsors and 159 nurseries in 49 counties. Combined, these nurseries receive approximately 1.2 million brook, brown, rainbow and golden rainbow trout fingerlings (2- to 4-inch) from PFBC's Bellefonte, Benner Spring, Corry, Huntsdale, Oswayo, Reynoldsdale and Tylersville State Fish Hatcheries (SFH). In addition, one sponsor in Erie County receives Walleye eggs from Linesville SFH, while another



one receives steelhead fingerlings from Fairview SFH. Two of the 146 sponsors raise strictly warmwater species such as Largemouth Bass or Channel Catfish, while two others propagate both warmwater and coldwater species (trout). The Cooperative Nursery Program annually stocks an average of 1,000,000 catchable adult trout in nearly 600 streams, as well as 100,000 steelhead smolts into the Lake Erie watershed. In addition, two Erie County sponsors raise and stock approximately 40,000 Brown Trout, supplied by Linesville SFH, into Lake Erie for PFBC's near-shore Brown Trout program. Cabela's, in conjunction with co-sponsor Penn Jersey Muskies Inc., raises strictly Muskellunge from the Pleasant Mount SFH, at their store in Hamburg.

Some of the primary functions of the CNU staff are to coordinate requests and distribution of fingerlings from the hatcheries to the nurseries; conduct routine nursery inspections (spring and fall); respond to nursery emergencies to diagnose and treat sick fish; conduct six regional biennial training seminars; administer approval and distribution of funding under the "Sponsor Grant Program;" review, tabulate, and record all nursery report data and enter it into the CNU portion of the trout database and provide technical guidance to the nurseries on a daily basis.

Sponsors in the program are primarily sportsmen's groups, but there are four schools, two Boy Scout groups, two state parks, a youth forestry camp and one federal prison participating in the program. Any group with an interest in raising and stocking fish is encouraged to get involved in the program. It's also a great educational opportunity for youth groups and schools.

If your organization would like to participate in the CNP and increase angling opportunities in your local community, begin the procedure by contacting the CNU. We can guide you in your search for a suitable water source to supply the nursery and a receiving stream capable of accepting the discharge from your nursery.

Steps to become a cooperative trout nursery

1. Contact the CNU with notice of intent to join the program at 814-353-2228, or e-mail Earl Myers at earmyers@pa.gov.
2. Select a water source and secure access to the property (lease, etc.).

The Windber Sportsmen's Association, a cooperative trout nursery and the oldest member of the program at 82 years, sponsors the Windber Sportsmen Kids Derby.

3. Contact CNU and schedule an initial site inspection.
4. The CNU will monitor the site for one year to ensure the following continuous water quality standards:
 - Minimum dissolved oxygen of 6.0 parts per million
 - Minimum flow of 40 gallons per minute at all times
 - Maximum water temperature for trout of 65-degrees F or less
 - A pH of 6.0 to 8.5 standard units inclusive
5. PFBC staff will evaluate prospective nursery information for final approval.
6. Sign a Sponsor Agreement form acknowledging understanding of program policy.
7. Apply for a Sponsor Grant for assistance in funding a rearing facility.
8. Final inspection of the nursery before fingerling delivery.

As you can see, there are many opportunities to become a cooperative nursery under the guidance of the CNU. Raising and stocking fish is a great activity for sportsmen's groups, schools, clubs, water associations and just about anyone with an interest in increasing angling opportunities in their local waters.

The CNP is an invaluable component of PFBC and an integral part of our mission to provide angling opportunities. Through the program, we have established a partnership with the angler, working together to achieve a common goal. We encourage the public to visit one of our 159 nurseries across the state. Get involved with a nursery in your area or consider partnering with PFBC and forming a new one.

To find more information about the CNP and a list of current cooperative nurseries, visit PFBC's website at www.fishandboat.com/coopnurs.htm. ☐