



Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

Bureau of Hatcheries
Division of Fish Production Services
Cooperative Nursery Unit
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December 4, 2020

Re: Cooperative Nursery Unit Update

Dear Sponsors:

2020...what a year! As I sat down to write the Cooperative Nursery Unit (CNU) update last December, I wouldn't have even imagined how 2020 has played out. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted us all in some way and that holds true for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and our cooperative nurseries. Luckily, the CNU was able to make it through 2020 healthy and fully staffed, with Josh Keslar and John Cingolani as Fisheries Technicians and Patty Kachik as Clerk Typist.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted us all in various ways and it directly impacted cooperative nurseries as well. The early days of the pandemic resulted in sponsor organizations changing their daily feeding schedules along with their scheduled stocking dates in order to abide by COVID-19 mitigation guidelines put in place by state and local government officials. Sponsor organizations were limited in their fundraising efforts and in many cases couldn't host their annual fishing derbies due to group gathering restrictions. The CNU answered countless questions regarding what could and couldn't be done because guidelines changed rapidly and varied quite a bit regionally around the Commonwealth. I feel everyone did a great job adapting to the daily guideline changes and how it impacted each individual cooperative nursery and their daily operations.

The COVID-19 pandemic really threw a monkey wrench into sponsor organization events such as fishing derbies and rodeos. The PFBC's Bureau of Law Enforcement (BLE) was required to suspend all Special Activity Permits (SAP) in 2020 until COVID-19 mitigation efforts allowed for such events to occur. I appreciate everyone's flexibility to do so and for working with BLE staff to adhere to the changes with each SAP. If we are in this same situation in 2021, please work with CNU and BLE staff to ensure there are no issues with your SAP and be flexible with moving dates for events as needed. As with the 2020 fishing derbies and rodeos, please follow all Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines for hosting such events in 2021. Additionally, as we work through COVID-19 issues in 2021, it is imperative that each sponsor organization send in their **Tentative Stocking Schedule by March 5th** and their **Annual Report by July 15th**. This needs to be done so the PFBC can make sure there are no stocking conflicts with PFBC stockings, resulting in unneeded large group gatherings, and that the PFBC knows when and where fish are being stocked.

Our Mission:

www.fish.state.pa.us

To protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities.

A major task assigned to the CNU in 2020 was to conduct a complete evaluation of each cooperative nursery and the infrastructure present at each site. This came about as a result of a meeting involving PFBC Commissioners, PFBC staff, and a cooperative nursery looking for advice on renovating their nursery and how to fund such a major project. It was determined that the best course of action was to evaluate each cooperative nursery to determine if there are any immediate infrastructure needs or any impending needs. The results of the cooperative nursery site evaluations will be used to explore alternative funding options, aside from the Sponsor Grant Program, to allow for projects involving significant costs. The CNU was given a very short period of time to complete this task, essentially 2 months, during our busiest time of the year. I appreciate all of your help with completing this task. My hope is that this will lead to additional funding opportunities for major infrastructure improvements at cooperative nurseries when they are needed.

The weather in 2020 was not very conducive to raising trout. There was a relatively warm, dry winter and spring, which didn't set our cooperative nurseries up well for the summer and fall. Much of the Commonwealth experienced drought conditions at some point during the summer, with many regions experiencing drought watches and warnings that persisted into the fall. These warm and dry conditions caused numerous fish health issues and even resulted in one cooperative nursery not being able to receive their 2020 fingerling distribution. In 2020, the CNU conducted 96 emergency inspections for fish health related issues and delivered medicated feed as part of the Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) protocol 40 times. This made for 136 total visits to cooperative nurseries for fish health related issues in 2020, which is up quite a bit from the 116 total visits in 2019. These visits resulted in approximately 22,000 miles travelled, up from the approximately 20,900 miles travelled in 2019.

The CNU continued with gill lice inspections in the fall 2020 and will continue into early 2021. The gill lice inspection process has gone well, however CNU staff did find gill lice at one cooperative nursery. Unfortunately, this resulted in the depopulation of approximately 6,500 trout from the nursery. As a reminder, the ban on holding commercial and/or non-PFBC provided fish in cooperative nurseries is still in effect and needs to be followed. Regardless of the situation, this ban needs to be followed by all members of your sponsor organization. Please make sure the members of your sponsor organization know about this ban and the consequences of placing non-PFBC provided fish in your cooperative nursery. If you have any questions regarding gill lice or the non-PFBC provided fish ban, please contact the CNU.

The CNU was able to conduct a few routine nursery inspections in 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down those efforts. The 2021 routine nursery inspections may or may not be conducted depending on COVID-19 related restrictions. For those of you that have not gone through this type of inspection, the CNU will conduct some basic water quality analysis and get an average length of the yearling fish in the nursery. This information is valuable when determining water quality and fish growth over time at all cooperative nurseries.

New for 2021, the CNU worked with PFBC Information Technology (IT) staff to develop an online stream section map for cooperative nursery sponsors to use when filling out their Tentative Stocking Schedules and Annual Reports. This will be very useful when determining stream section numbers and stream section limits. In addition to stream section information, Class A Wild Trout Waters can be searched, making it easier to determine where those waters are located in your area. This gives cooperative nursery sponsors another tool to prevent them from inadvertently stocking a Class A Wild Trout Water. In this mailing, you will find an informational packet on where to find the new online stream section map and how to use it. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact the CNU.

Finally, the CNU would like to thank all the nursery managers and volunteers for working through the many COVID-19 related issues in 2020. Your ability to adapt and make changes on the fly really showed how well adept you all are at the various aspects of raising and stocking fish as part of the Cooperative Nursery Program. On behalf of the PFBC and the anglers of Pennsylvania, I thank you and truly appreciate your hard work and dedication.

As always, if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me at the phone number above or at bmchail@pa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian McHail".

Brian McHail, Leader
Cooperative Nursery Unit

cc: B. Niewinski