

The Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery

***From Old School Fish Farm
to High Tech Fish Production***

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Inside the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery Visitor Center

On December 12, 1925, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Board of Fish Commissioners (the present day Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission), purchased 118 acres of land that included a cold water spring from Beth McCabe for \$15,001. This parcel of land is located in East St. Clair Township, Bedford County, near the small town of Reynoldsdale. Over the next few years, extensive excavation and construction were undertaken to harness the spring flow into concrete and earthen ponds as well as an indoor hatch house resulting in the establishment of the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery in 1928.

Guy Wells was the first superintendent of the hatchery. In addition to overseeing the construction of the facility, Wells and his staff began raising trout for stocking

throughout Pennsylvania. The first recorded stocking of Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery trout was into Cove Creek, Bedford County, in 1931. While trout continue to be the primary species of fish raised at Reynoldsdale, early records indicate that numerous other species including Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Walleyes, perch, sunfish, minnows and catfish were on site in the early years of the hatchery's existence. A memorandum from 1930 even mentions the raising of Bullfrogs at Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery.

The physical layout and operation of the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery remained largely unchanged until the late 1960s when a light-controlled brood stock (spawning adult trout) operation began inside the hatch house

building. Adult trout become “ripe” and ready to spawn after being exposed to natural variations of sunlight versus darkness, or photoperiod. By keeping brood stock in a room within the hatch house and artificially exposing them to more frequent changes in photoperiod, Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery staff were able to spawn trout as much as 3 or 4 months earlier than they normally would if they had been held in outside raceways. Eggs from these “light house” brood fish were supplied to other hatcheries throughout Pennsylvania that were plagued with colder water temperatures and unable to grow trout to desirable size during a normal 15- to 20-month rearing cycle. The success of the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery “light house” has led to this technology being implemented at two other Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission hatcheries.

Through the early 1970s, the administrative offices, laboratory and indoor staff facilities were located in the hatch house building. In 1975, a multipurpose building was added to the facility that housed staff offices, locker and lunch rooms, a garage and a two-story visitor center that includes a 9,600-gallon live trout viewing tank. The visitor center also includes an impressive display of historical fishing tackle, information about the history of the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery and an extensive collection of mammal and amphibian mounts donated by a local business man. Each year, between 15,000 and 20,000 people visit the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery.

As fish culture technology developed during the latter part of the 20th century, it became evident that the original layout of the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery facility was no longer providing the most optimal fish rearing

environment. The antiquated concrete raceways had begun to deteriorate, and fish in the large earthen ponds were difficult to care for and harvest for stocking. Beginning in 2013, plans were made to completely renovate the facility in order to optimize fish production and ensure good water quality downstream of the hatchery.

Construction began in 2014 and was completed in early 2016. The “new” Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery has 3,200 feet of concrete raceways that carry high-quality spring water to the fish faster, providing a better rearing environment. These new raceways also carry fish waste to a state-of-the-art water treatment system that can remove almost all particulate matter from the hatchery effluent flow before it is discharged. This is the same type of treatment system used by some municipalities to provide improved drinking water to their customers. According to the system manufacturer, it is the first time a hatchery has been outfitted with this technology. All of the new hatchery components are equipped with electronic monitoring and alarm capabilities to alert staff of potential problems 24-hours a day.

In addition to the countless accomplishments of the Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery staff over the last 88 years, the current employees did not miss one stocking throughout the extensive hatchery renovation. Due to a phased construction schedule, hatchery staff were able to split the fish rearing between old and new raceways and provide the anglers of Pennsylvania the fishing opportunities they’ve come to expect from this facility. The “new” Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery will continue to produce and stock about 200,000 adult trout annually as well as almost 350,000 fingerling trout for stocking and distribution to cooperative nurseries. ☐



Reynoldsdale State Fish Hatchery fish culturists loading trout from a new concrete raceway in 2016.