

Cooperative Nurseries Contribute to Lake Erie Fisheries



photo-Albion Sportsmen's Club

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As the sun soaked shores of Lake Erie turn cooler each fall and the vibrant colors of autumn begin to take hold of Pennsylvania's north coast, steelhead and Brown Trout begin an annual migration into the tributaries of Erie County. Whether in pursuit of a trophy fish or fillets for the smoker, anglers from across Pennsylvania and the United States make the trek to the shores of Lake Erie and its tributaries to test their skills in landing steelhead and Brown Trout.

While many anglers know that the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) stocks the majority of steelhead and Brown Trout into Pennsylvania's portion of the Lake Erie watershed, many may not know that PFBC approved cooperative nurseries contribute to this stocking effort as well. Annually, PFBC stocks over 1 million steelhead and over 50,000 Brown Trout. Additionally, cooperative nurseries stock over 65,000 steelhead and nearly 55,000 Brown Trout for angling purposes. Without these combined stockings, the fisheries would not exist.

The PFBC currently has 149 sponsoring organizations and educational institutions that support 165 cooperative nurseries throughout Pennsylvania. Each sponsor is responsible for their own nursery, and some take on the task of sponsoring multiple nurseries. In Erie County, there are five sponsor organizations—3CU, Albion Sportsmen's Club, Presque Isle State Park, S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie and Wesleville Conservation Club. These organizations

sponsor a total of eight cooperative nurseries throughout Erie County, where steelhead and Brown Trout are raised and play a key role in PFBC's Lake Erie Steelhead and Brown Trout programs.

As cooperative nurseries sponsors, these organizations raise steelhead and Brown Trout, which are provided to them as fingerlings by PFBC State Fish Hatcheries, with the understanding that they are responsible for the care of the fish on a daily basis. Regardless of the weather, time of day or day of the week, the nursery volunteers are expected to care for the fish and maintain the nursery. Also, the financial burden of raising these fish is the responsibility of the sponsoring organization. This includes purchasing thousands of pounds of feed, payment of utility bills, purchasing equipment for the nursery and making infrastructure improvements as needed. The nursery volunteers are also responsible for stocking steelhead and Brown Trout when the conditions are right and the fish are ready to be released.

The largest of the sponsor organizations in Erie County is 3CU, which sponsors four cooperative nurseries, where steelhead and Brown Trout are raised. There are two nurseries that solely raise steelhead—the Mission and Mitchell nurseries. The Mission Nursery is unique in that it is a shared site with PFBC and is operated by the Fairview State Fish Hatchery. The Ro-Ze Nursery is dedicated to raising Brown Trout, and the Peck Nursery is a split facility that raises steelhead and Brown Trout concurrently. The location of the Peck nursery allows for steelhead to be released directly into Bear Run, a tributary to Walnut Creek.



This map shows the location of each cooperative nursery in Erie County.

The Albion Sportsmen's Club, located in southwestern Erie County, not only stocks Brown Trout into tributaries of Conneaut Creek, which makes its way into the Ohio waters of Lake Erie, but the club also stocks Brown Trout into local waterways for special fishing events such as children's derbies. Presque Isle State Park sponsors the Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) Nursery, which is a facility with several recirculating aquaculture systems. This system allows the water to be reused by utilizing bio-filters and ultraviolet filters continuously throughout the production cycle. This set up allows for indoor production of steelhead and Brown Trout, which are eventually stocked into Presque Isle Bay. One of the benefits of the TREC Nursery is the opportunity to educate people about the steelhead and Brown Trout fisheries in Erie.

The nursery, operated by the S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie, is located at the Erie Water Works facility along Erie's bayfront. The nursery is comprised of indoor, flow-through tanks with the capability to use water from Lake Erie and Presque Isle Bay. This allows Brown Trout raised by the S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie to be released in the waters of the bay before being stocked. The Wesleyville Conservation Club sponsors a nursery located along Twelvemile Creek in eastern Erie County, where they raise Brown Trout for the Lake Erie Brown Trout program and for special fishing events. The Wesleyville Conservation

Club provides Brown Trout stockings to the eastern portion of Erie County.

Cooperative nurseries have been contributing to the steelhead and Brown Trout programs in Pennsylvania for over 50 years. With the dedication of nursery volunteers, the steelhead and Brown Trout programs will continue to contribute to angling opportunities in Pennsylvania. ☐



photo- Brian McHail

Members of 3CU prepare the Peck Nursery for a Brown Trout stocking into Lake Erie.