

Cooperative Nursery

Partnerships

by Spring Gearhart

photos by the author



The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission has been partnering with sportsmen's clubs and other organizations through its Cooperative Nursery Program since 1932. In 2005, volunteers from the 171 cooperative nurseries throughout Pennsylvania raised and stocked over 3 million fish.

Five years as a nursery

For the Stony Creek Anglers Club, a non-profit organization in Norristown, being a cooperative nursery is about passing on the tradition of fishing to the community.

The Stony Creek Anglers Club was started in 1997 and joined the Commission's Cooperative Nursery Program in 1998. Stony Creek Anglers Trout Nursery has been in operation since 2001. "We are the only cooperative nursery in Montgomery County," says Ray Duff, club treasurer.

Currently, there are 320 active members in the club with 15 members involved in the daily operation of the nursery.

"I enjoy the fellowship, and it's amazing how an idea affects so many lives. It's good for the soul," says Stew Longacre, board of directors member.

The Stony Creek Anglers Trout Nursery is located on the Norristown State Hospital grounds and is part of the Norristown Farm Park. With a 10-year lease from the Norristown State Hospital and the Norristown Farm Park, one of the club's goals is to maintain open space in an otherwise urban area. "We lease 5½ acres from the state hospital," says Charles Wood, club president.

New beginning

Members of the Stony Creek Anglers Club decided they would start

a fishing club and establish a trout nursery if they had the commitment of 50 people. "We held our first meeting by word of mouth. It was attended by over 100 people, and we had a commitment that night to move forward with plans for the fishing club and nursery. It took us about four or five years to get the nursery started," says Charles Wood.

Operation

The general operation of the nursery is one of the biggest challenges the club faces.

Stony Creek Anglers Trout Nursery utilizes two wells from the old Norristown Hospital reservoir as its water supply. One well is used as a back-up well. There are four wells. At a later time, the additional wells may allow for expansion of the nursery. The nursery also has a back-up generator

and an auto-dialing security system to advise the club of emergencies.

Before it was drained due to safety concerns, the reservoir held 5½ million gallons of water. Due to unfavorable nitrogen and oxygen levels, the nursery degasses the water using a series of buckets filled with rings. As the water splashes down through the buckets and rings,

At a Glance

Nursery's Name: Stony Creek Anglers Trout Nursery

Operated by: Stony Creek Anglers Club

Established: 2001

Years in Operation: 5

Chapter Membership: about 320

Active Nursery Operation Membership: about 15

Type of Fish Raised: rainbow trout and brook trout

Quantity Stocked: 9,000 trout each year



Members involved in the operation of the nursery include (back-left to right) Charles Wood, Jim Watters, Stew Longacre, and Bob Emery; (front-left to right) Jim Ingham, Kelly Alleback, and Ray Duff.

Stony Creek Anglers Trout Nursery



Stony Creek Anglers Club degasses the water using a series of buckets filled with rings to make nitrogen and oxygen levels favorable.

nitrogen gas is forced out and oxygen is added. A regenerative blower system with ceramic diffuser stones also aids in the oxygenation of the water.

"The water temperature stays at 52 degrees all year long. The consistent temperature helps our trout grow bigger and better," says Ray Duff.

Steps built into the raceway maximize water flow and aid in aeration. The raceway is gunnite, a type of concrete that does not require forms when building. It is the same material used in swimming pools. The raceway has eight 200-ft. pens. Each pen holds around 1,000 to 1,200 trout.

The club receives trout fingerlings in July. Then the fingerlings go through a rest period of three days, which includes salting. Salting relaxes

inches per month. When stocked, the trout are 18 months old and about 13½ inches long.

Trout are fed twice a day, in the morning by hand and later in the day with a 24-hour automatic feeder box, which is set in the morning.

The nursery maintains a 5 percent or less trout mortality rate. "The most important part of operating a trout nursery is keeping the fish healthy," says Ray Duff.

Stocking

Members stock the following creeks: French Creek, Stony Creek, Kepner Creek, Towamencin Creek, Perkiomen Creek, Pennypack Creek, and Skippack Creek. They also stock several ponds including the Bob White



Trout are fed twice a day, in the morning by hand and later in the day with a 24-hour automatic feeder box.

the fish, heals cuts, and promotes good health in the trout.

Stony Creek Anglers Club raises about 9,000 trout each year. This year the club raised 6,000 brook trout and 3,000 rainbow trout. The club's trout grow on average about 1½

Pond. However, most of the club's trout are stocked in Stony Creek. The club usually has 30 to 40 members who help at each stocking. These stockings supplement the Fish & Boat Commission's stocking program.

Support and funding

The community including the Norristown State Hospital and Morton (Bubby) Weiss, a local business entrepreneur and humanitarian, were instrumental to the success of the nursery. Morton Weiss, who loved the outdoors, was an inspiration to the club and to the community. He provided both input on the planning and operation of the nursery as well as funding. In addition, he willed \$5,000 to the club and its goals. "This project is a perfect example of how the community can work together to accomplish a goal," says Jim Watters, member. "It takes a lot of persistence and help from many people to be successful," adds Stew Longacre.

The Stony Creek Anglers Club primarily operates on membership dues. There are several types of memberships: Senior (over 65), adult, junior (16 and under), family, and honorary.



Stony Creek Trout Nursery's raceway is gunnite, the type of concrete used in swimming pools. Steps built into the raceway maximize water flow and aid in aeration.

Membership fees are senior (one time) \$30, adult \$20, junior \$10, and family \$25. The club also applies for grants, organizes fundraisers, recycles cans, and sells products such as shirts, hats, patches, and calendars.

Stony Creek Anglers Trout Nursery was awarded six cooperative nursery grants from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. These grants were used for a water system, a stocking tank and trailer, a back-up generator, and a degassing column.

Activities

Part of the club's mission statement is to improve the quality of Stony Creek for both fishing and recreational activities. For over 19 years, an annual clean-up day has been held each year on Stony and Kepner creeks.

Educating people in good sportsmanship and conservation practices is a priority of the Stony Creek Anglers Club.

Every Thursday during trout season, the club holds fishing outings for the patients of Norristown State Hospital. "It's our way of giving back to the state hospital," says Ray Duff. The club also holds an annual picnic for the patients.

A third-grade class visits the nursery each year to learn about stream quality and the benefits of stream-bank improvement.

"NorristownHighSchool's Environmental class uses the nursery and grounds for educational purposes such as composting and other conservation practices," says Jim Watters.

Stony Creek Anglers Club also teaches several Scout groups how to fish and assists these groups with service projects and merit badges.

In addition, they hold a fishing tournament for community residents to learn

how to fish as well as a bass tournament for children 12 years and under.

"There's nothing like a smile on a kid's face with a fish on a line," says Bob Emery, club member.

Teaching children the value of the outdoors and fishing as a life sport is very important to the club's members. "We have a lot of energy and wanted to leave a legacy for our children. They are the future of our sport," says Charles Woods.

The Stony Creek Anglers Club offers assistance to Coventryville Trout Club in Chester County. Coventryville Trout Club has been in the Cooperative Nursery Program for two years.

Members train local watershed groups in monitoring water quality protocols. Recently, the club finished

a streambank restoration project as part of its Adopt-a-Stream project to protect and improve fish habitat and combat erosion.

Some of the club's other programs include the Montgomery County Youth Field Day and blue bird trails in the Norristown Park. In addition, the club helps organizations such as the Variety Club Camp, Schuylkill River Sojourn, Grant-a-Wish, Norristown State Hospital patient programs, the Laurel House, and the Norristown Farm Park and the Farm Park Preservation Association.

The Norristown Farm Park offers nature, bike, and walking trails as well as picnic areas. Community fishing functions and community events such as art and craft shows are held in the park.

Recognition

Stony Creek Anglers Club has been recognized several times for its commitment to the community. They have received a stewardship award from the Montgomery County commissioners and a certificate of excellence from the Norristown State Hospital. The certificate of excellence was awarded for outstanding performance and lasting contribution of the club's patient fishing program. Recently, the club received a five-year service certificate from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission.

"The thanks and smiles are the most rewarding part of being involved in this effort. It's an instant connection with the community," says Charles Wood.

For more information on Stony Creek Anglers Club or to make a contribution, visit www.stonycreekanglers.org or write to: Stony Creek Anglers, P.O. Box 566, Eagleville, PA 19408. Contributions are tax deductible. ☐

