

## Conditions, fishing improving in North Fork Creek

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BROOKVILLE — The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commissioner recently announced that pre-season trout stocking will resume in the Hetrick Run region of the North Fork Creek for the first time in more than a decade.

Don Crytzer, a member and former president of the North Fork Watershed Association, saw the announcement as yet another sign of improvement in the stream's life conditions.

What are the other indications?

"The pH is lower, the aquatic life is improving again, and the trout are staying around longer," Crytzer said. "We're making strides, but we still have a lot of work to do."

Allen Woomer, area fisheries manager of the Fish & Boat Commission, said the area had been stocked all along, "but we had stopped stocking pre-season. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were some problems with the acidity in the water."

Those problems meant that the fish would leave the stream shortly after being released into it. Crytzer explained how a high acidic level can negatively affect fishing conditions.

"When you have a low

pH, the water dissolves more minerals into water, which affects fish," he said. "Aluminum dissolves, which is our most common mineral."

The watershed association, formed in 2000, combatted the high acidity levels with more than 2,000 tons of limestone in the headwaters of the stream, Crytzer said. He said the headwaters were the worst areas because further downstream, there is more farm land, which farmers regularly treat with lime.

The acidity levels in the headwaters have been improving since 2007, and fishing has improved each year since then, Crytzer said. The watershed association conducted a series of observations, one of which included an independent stocking of rainbow trout in the headwaters area.

"In July (2010), two of those rainbows were spotted by Jones Bridge," Crytzer said, adding that the Fish & Boat Commission does not stock rainbow trout. "That was great because typically, fish didn't stick around too long at all. The fact that they were rainbows meant they were left from what we had stocked."

The watershed association also studied larval and nymph activity in another area of the headwaters, and found repro-

ductive and development action much more prevalent in 2010 than in 2009.

"Last year, we found a tremendous amount of small larva in the stream," he said. "It was amazing how much difference there was. You could see it coming back because we've started to reverse effects that acid rain has been having for decades."

The association treated the headwaters, where the most acidic water was located, in hopes of improving the quality of the whole stream. The result of that treatment is that fish will stay in the stream after they are released, which means that pre-season stocking will be worthwhile.

Woomer said pre-season stocking would have been pointless in prior years because the fish would have left the stream by the time trout fishing season began.

"The main thing is, when you can stock pre-season, there are fish in the stream on opening day and opening weekend," Woomer said. "That's a big day for people. It's almost like a holiday for some people."

"In a stream like that, which doesn't have reproduction that really amounts to anything, it's all stocked fish," he said. "Until there is the stocking, there just isn't any action there."

Crytzer said the watershed

association's endeavors have allowed fishermen to notice an immediate benefit, but the effects will still be apparent 50 years from now. He also expects the fishing to be good this year.

"In 2008, we aggressively treated pre-season, and the trout stayed for a couple of days," he said. "We had a little more success in 2009. We expanded to more tributaries. We are seeing the effects of what we are doing. There are improvements every year."

"From 2000 to 2007, the fishing was just plain rotten, and there was almost no trout left in the North Fork by opening day," Crytzer said. "Last year, a lot more fish were caught than what we had before. I've been fishing since the late (19)60s, and I've seen days where it was better than in the past. Those were good water days."

"We are gaining ground. They should catch fish the first day," he said. "Last year, for the first time in the 2000s we had a good day in that section."

The watershed association is now in the process of applying for environmental awards, but perhaps the real trophies will be reaped on opening day.