

Hackettstown 110th Anniversary

By Craig Lemon, Hackettstown Hatchery Superintendent



Another decade of fish production at the Hackettstown Hatchery is in the books, yet it seems like only yesterday that the hatchery's centennial was celebrated.

Over the last ten years, the hatchery and its staff have dealt with several extreme weather events such as Superstorm Sandy (13-day power outage), Tropical Storm Isaias (rain and wind) and Winter Storm Orlena (30 inches of snow) plus a pandemic. As this story was being written, the flood gates on Trout Brook had to be opened after two back-to-back 5-inch rains fell from Hurricane Ida.

Since the Centennial Celebration in 2012, Hackettstown Hatchery staff have driven 167,000 miles and stocked more than 31 million fish, weighing a

total of 206,000 pounds. The hatchery has undergone numerous improvements, including ultraviolet water sterilization and alarm system upgrades, a green energy initiative to improve lighting, heating, and cooling in the intensive culture building and a new fueling station. Several new distribution trucks and a new boat were added to the fleet to safely transport both fish and our crew. A new 110-hp John Deere tractor has made a big difference in maintaining the miles of hatchery dirt roads and pond dikes. Major pond renovations (dredging and

grading) continue and are paramount to our successful operation.

Fish and Wildlife also negotiated a lease with Centenary University for one of our older buildings as a biology classroom and lab. The hatchery benefits from this relationship annually through the service of student interns.

Since 2013, Landlocked Atlantic Salmon have been acquired from Massachusetts' Roger Reed Salmon Hatchery in a trade for our surplus Northern Pike fingerlings. In return, New Jersey receives 6,000 five-inch salmon which are raised at Hackettstown to a catchable size. This program has produced 32,000 catchable-size salmon stocked across four waters. A historic state record was broken on June 2, 2018, by Runelvy Rodriguez, Lake Aeroflex, measuring 25¾ inches and weighing 8 lbs. 5 oz. Last fall, that record was broken by Joe Satkowski fishing Merrill Creek Reservoir, at 8 lbs. 10 oz.

Agency-wide, the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife has increased our emphasis on marketing, branding and social media over the last decade. Many hatchery stocking trucks are wrapped with colorful and flashy fish decals and promotional slogans to raise awareness of the state fish stocking programs. Social media has become an important tool to relay information while allowing users to voice their opinions and post their catch.

So, what makes the Hackettstown Hatchery great? That's easy. It's the 110-year history — the employees, grounds, stories, records and photos. It's the relationship with the town and its residents, the university, faculty and students. It's the diversity of daily work assignments, as two days are never the same.

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife's Hackettstown Fish Hatchery is also great because of the dedication and ingenuity of staff, past and present. And naturally, it's the 15 fish species raised here — from minnows to muskies — for our anglers.

Fish Stocking Do's and Don'ts

Why should I get a Fish Stocking Permit?

It is the law! Before you consider stocking any fish in New Jersey, you must first obtain a fish stocking permit from the Division of Fish and Wildlife. It does not matter whether the pond is public or private, connected to, or isolated from, a neighboring water, or if the waterbody is stocked by the state or a private club. **A fish stocking permit is always required.**

An application and information can be found at NJFishandWildlife.com/fishperms.htm#stocking. The application fee is only \$2.

Only approved hatcheries will be authorized for stocking. Hatcheries are required to submit annual fish health information, thus minimizing the potential for the spread of disease.

Fish Stocking Do's

- **Do** establish your stocking goal, whether it is to supplement an existing population, create a unique opportunity or restore a fishery (dredging or dam repair project).
- **Do** know your waterbody. Most fish require particular conditions, so understand your waterbody's habitat and water quality. Factors to consider include waterbody size, depth and substrate, and water temperature, oxygen level, pH and flow.
- **Do** get permission from the waterbody owner, as their signature is required on the application.
- **Do** avoid delays in the processing of your application by first reviewing the nine simple guidelines listed at NJFishandWildlife.com/pdf/fisheries_permitapp_info.pdf.

Fish Stocking Don'ts

- **Don't** purchase fish from a hatchery without obtaining a fish stocking permit.
- **Don't** transport fish from one waterbody to another.
- **Don't** assume your pond needs to be stocked, as most waters do not require stocking.
- **Don't** stock an invasive species (NJFishandWildlife.com/aquatic_invasives.htm).
- **Don't** assume common game species are harmless. Even they can cause ecological harm if introduced into the wrong locations.
- **Don't** release pet aquarium fish into a local waterway.

Stocking Programs Persevered Through the Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought many challenges to our lives over the last two years. The Division of Fish and Wildlife appreciates your support while our hatcheries continued to operate without significant impact on the great fisheries that you enjoy. All pre-pandemic fish stocking targets are being met or surpassed. Anglers can rest assured that the future of freshwater fishing in New Jersey is as bright as ever.

On March 15, 2020, the Hackettstown Hatchery crew had just completed the Northern Pike broodstock collection and was preparing for Walleye and Muskie egg collection when New Jersey announced the closure of state offices, directing most staff to work remotely.

Hold on. A hatchery is a fish farm. Like all farms, the animals (fish) must be fed, cleaned and cared for 24/7/365. Hatchery staff instantly adapted to the changing circumstances with innovation and perseverance.

Fingerling Hybrid Striped Bass stocked during the pandemic will provide great fishing for years to come.



The pandemic required social distancing protocols that would prevent further broodstock collection. How could we move forward with our fish rearing programs? Solution: By coordinating with our colleagues at the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, New Jersey traded our surplus Northern Pike fingerlings and Channel Catfish eggs in return for Pennsylvania's surplus Walleye eggs and Muskie fingerlings. Smart and efficient decisions like this helped to maintain hatchery production successes. Ultimately, over 1.6 million warmwater fish were stocked throughout late summer and into the fall of 2020. Comparable actions in 2021 resulted in 3.2 million warmwater fish being distributed for anglers.

Faced with similar challenges — and with raceways full of several year classes of trout — the Pequest Trout Hatchery continued to raise Rainbow Trout for all annual stocking programs. Over 500,000 trout were stocked before Opening Day during 2020 and 2021, compared with the 183,000 typically stocked during a regular pre-season. A total of 589,390 trout were stocked in the spring of 2020 and 597,150 in 2021. The annual spring baseline of 570,000 was exceeded in both of these pandemic years.

An accelerated stocking schedule allowed staff to move trout out of the raceways, onto trucks and into New Jersey waters as quickly as possible to reduce the number of loading days, thus minimizing close interactions among staff and with the public. If a virus outbreak were to occur among our staff, that would adversely affect the tightly orchestrated production cycle, putting future stocking seasons at risk.

Staff wore masks and remained socially distanced, including driving in separate vehicles for each stocking run. The decision to modify the season and not disclose specific stocking dates for individual waters was to protect staff and to reduce the density of anglers at any one place or time.

Our strategy of opening the Trout Season for catch and release prior to the usual Opening Day was designed to create a "soft opener" whereby anglers who are not focused on *harvesting* fish would get out early, thus reducing the concentration of anglers typically seen on the opener. Our early Catch and Release Season coincided with New York's opener, thus encouraging in-state angling at a time when interstate travel was discouraged.

This massive effort was carried out by dedicated staff from across our agency, especially those who raise and stock the fish. Anglers had mixed responses to the temporary changes. Some longed for the traditional program and a sense of normalcy while many expressed gratitude for the abundance of trout and the early Catch and Release Season. Overall, most anglers appeared to understand the issues, were grateful for the opportunity to get out and fish and were thrilled with the abundance of trout — not only during the pre-season, but also well into late May.

At the time this passage is being penned, pandemic-related uncertainties remain. One thing you can count on is that New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife continues to work for you, the angler, to ensure plentiful and healthy fisheries — now and for future generations.

HATCHERY-SUPPORTED FISHERIES

Courtesy of the Hackettstown State Fish Hatchery 2021 production highlights.

Muskellunge: 10–12" (7,641)

- DOD Lake (228)
- Echo Lake Reservoir (420)
- Furnace Lake (80)
- Greenwood Lake (2,882)
- Lake Hopatcong (2,406)
- Little Swartswood Lake (143)
- Mercer Lake (400)
- Monkville Reservoir (960)
- Mountain Lake (122)

Northern Pike: 6" (20,181)

- Budd Lake (1,880)
- Farrington Lake (2,900)
- Passaic River (3,420)
- Pompton Lake (3,068)
- Pompton River (2,463)
- Spruce Run Reservoir (6,450)

Surplus stocked in: Cranberry and Deal Lake

Walleye: 2" (95,360); 4" (24,262)

- Canistear Reservoir (7,000)
- Greenwood Lake (38,794)
- Lake Hopatcong (53,748)
- Monkville Reservoir (10,100)
- Swartswood Lake (9,980)

Surplus stocked in: Delaware River

Hybrid Striped Bass: 4" (48,583)

- Lake Hopatcong (26,880)
- Manasquan Reservoir (7,200)
- Spruce Run Reservoir (14,503)

Landlocked Salmon: 14" (3,199)

- Lake Aeroflex (579)
- Merrill Creek Reservoir (650)
- Tilcon Lake (510)
- Wawayanda Lake (1,460)

Channel Catfish: 6" (13,975)

- Nine waters

Channel Catfish: 12"

- Sixty-one waters (10,327)

Channel Catfish: 18"

- Twenty-five waters (1,005)

Plus thousands of black crappie, bluegill, fathead minnows and golden shiners in over 100 waterbodies throughout the state!

Raised with pride at the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife's Hackettstown State Fish Hatchery.



TROUT STOCKING

Raised with pride at New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife's Pequest Trout Hatchery

Spring

- Over 183,000 released for Opening Day — April 9, 2022
- Over 570,000 Rainbow Trout (avg. 10.5 inches)
- Spring stocking begins March 21, 2022
- An additional 8,000 breeders 15–21 inches (3–6 pounds)
- 85 streams and 87 lakes stocked statewide
- All 21 counties stocked
- Most waterbodies stocked at least 3 times
- Stocking continues for seven weeks following Opening Day!

Fall

- Fall Stocking begins October 11, 2022
- All large, two year old trout, measuring 14–16 inches
- 21,000 trout stocked
- 36 streams, lakes and ponds
- 1,000 rainbow trout breeders, averaging 20 inches
- Great fishing till next spring!

Winter

- November 21 and 22, 2022
- All large two year olds, measuring 15–16 inches
- Over 4,000 trout
- 18 lakes and ponds
- Great fishing all winter long!

Trout Stocking Hotline

609-633-6765

Trout Stocking Schedule — 2022

Scan this QR code with your mobile device to view New Jersey's 2022 trout stocking schedule or go to NJFishandWildlife.com/trinfo.htm



Warmwater Fish Stocking List

Scan this QR code with your mobile device to view New Jersey's warmwater fish stocking list or go to NJFishandWildlife.com/hacktown.htm#summaries



FREE Fishing Days

— June 4 and Oct. 22, 2022 —

No License Needed!
(see page 31)

3rd Annual Blairstown Fishing Derby

May 14, 2022 10am-2pm Rain or Shine



FREE!!!
Registration Starts @9:30AM
First 50 Kids Registered Get a Free Fishing Rod!

Must be 16 or younger to get fishing rod

Registration is at Footbridge Park
2 Fishing Locations :
Footbridge Park & Blairstown Powersports
Food & refreshments will be available for purchase. Vendors will be in the park.
Over 500 Fish to be stocked!!
Prizes for **BIGGEST FISH** in each age group!



To be a sponsor or for more info:

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