



BUREAU OF FRESHWATER FISHERIES MONTHLY REPORT



December 16, 2024 – January 15, 2025

Shawn Crouse, Chief
Craig Lemon, Superintendent
Edward Conley, Superintendent
Christopher Smith, Supervising Fisheries Biologist

Ross Shramko, Principal Fisheries Biologist
Scott Collenburg, Principal Fisheries Biologist

Dominick Mercurio, Crew Supervisor Bldg. Maintenance
Tyler Tresslar, Crew Supervisor, WMAO
Nicholas Healy, Crew Supervisor, WMAO
Brad Duckworth, Crew Supervisor, WW

Eric Boehm, Sr. Fisheries Biologist
Justin Rozema, Assistant Biologist
Samantha MacQuesten, Assistant Biologist
Kyle Civalier, Biologist Trainee

Thomas Bissonnette, Technician I
Shaun Young, Technician II
Charles Sedor, Technician II
Nick Ruberto, Technician II
Doug Cutler, Technician II

Matthew Gadek, Sr. Wildlife Worker
Chris Sherwood, Sr. Wildlife Worker
Andrew Hutnik, Sr. Wildlife Worker
Travis Nitko, Wildlife Worker
Lynsey Bell, Wildlife Worker
Thomas Goetschkes, Wildlife Worker
Brooke Wakefoose, Wildlife Worker
Abby Bronico, Wildlife Worker
Robert Huth, Wildlife Worker

Ross StCerny- Agency Representative 1

Seasonals: Chris Cohen, Robert Huth, and Cheryl Weeks

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

2024 Freshwater Fisheries Annual Report / Federal Aid Report Preparation – Continued with the work needed to complete the 2024 Freshwater Fisheries Annual Report and the 2024 Federal Aid Report by entering and editing all the data collected from this year's sampling efforts. This work is ongoing. (staff, F-48-R-30)

2025 Spring Trout Stocking – Began working on the 2025 Spring Trout Stocking Season with the new trout stocking coordinator and other regional biologist duties related to Spring Trout Season. (Civalier & Shramko)

INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT (State Funding)

Staff met with members of the NJ AISMP Core Team as well as NJDEP GIS specialists on December 18th to discuss next steps in implementing the AIS Management Plan. The main topics of discussion were updating our website and exploring different reporting platforms for both public and professional use. (MacQuesten)

Invasive Species Management – Conference - Staff attended the Northeast Aquatic Plant Management Society Annual Conference in Saratoga Springs, NY from January 7-9. The conference featured technical presentations and workshops focused on active management of aquatic plants and algae, as well as opportunities to network with other professionals working with AIS. (MacQuesten, F-48-R-30)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (State Funding)

Drought Response Advisory Group – Multiple meetings were held to discuss permitted and proposed modified passing flows related to water supply and the current state of drought in the state of NJ. Shawn Crouse, Chief of Freshwater Fisheries, and Scott Collenburg, Principal Fisheries Biologist, provided recommendations and comment on potential impacts to fisheries based on potential flow modifications. Despite the recent rain and snowfall accumulations there was not enough to change the current water supply conditions and New Jersey remains in a drought warning. The public is strongly urged to continue voluntary water conservation practices. The Drought Response Advisory Group meets every Friday. (Collenburg & Crouse)

Round Valley Trout Association (RVTA) Habitat Improvement Proposal - The Round Valley Trout Association (RVTA), has assembled a committee of 15 dedicated members, to develop and implement a habitat improvement plan for Round Valley Reservoir that will enhance existing fish habitat through the placement of habitat enhancement structures. The goal is to maintain and enhance existing habitat that will offer favorable conditions for sustainability. The committee is working toward increasing fish habitat and establishing a sustainable baitfish population through ongoing collaborative efforts with NJDEP Fish and Wildlife, Parks and Forestry, and NJ Water Supply Authority. RVTA is proposing to deploy 50-200 Christmas trees into the Round Valley Reservoir to create habitat. Christmas trees were donated by Clinton Twp. The Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries is still awaiting approvals from State Parks. (Collenburg)

State Wildlife Action Plan Habitat Associations - As part of the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) time was spent reviewing the actions that we would like state and federal agencies,

local governments, academic organizations, non-profit partners, businesses, and the public to take, to best improve outcomes for our Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) over the next 10 years. Part of the review was prioritizing which actions, within each region, we foresee has being the highest priority. Biologists from the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries that helped in prioritizing these actions from the perspective of freshwater fish were Scott Collenburg, Justin Rozema, Eric Boehm, and Kyle Civalier. (Collenburg, Boehm, Civalier, & Rozema)

Freshwater Permits - Reviewed Land Management Reviews (LMR's), water lowering permits and fish stocking applications and contacted applicants as necessary to obtain required information. Responded to requests from the public for information on fish stocking and water lowering permit programs. (staff)

WMA Fishing Tournament Permits –Issued fishing tournament permits to local fishing organizations. Reports have been steadily coming. Began receiving requests of tournaments in 2025 (Smith)

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH (NJ F-48-R-30)

Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) Meetings – Staff participated in several EBTJV meetings during this month. (Shramko)

Musconetcong River Restoration Partnership Meeting– Staff participated in multiple meetings with the Musconetcong Watershed Association to discuss work performed and planned within the Musconetcong River Watershed for two major projects; The Warren Mills Dam Removal Project & a potential project on Mine Brook aiming to remove multiple dams / barriers to fish movement. (Shramko)

Skillful Angler Program: Received and reviewed 12 Skillful Angler applications from anglers. Applications reached 432 for 2024 and have started to come in for 2025. Completed the 2024 Skillful Angler Summary report and sent it to I&E to post on the website. Certificates and patches have been created and are in the process of being mailed out to the winners. (Civalier)

PEQUEST TROUT HATCHERY (Ed Conley)

Inventory Data

<u>Stocking Program</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Average Daily Length Increase</u>	<u>Conversion</u>
Spring 2026 RBT (3 months old)	2.5"	0.024	1.21
Spring 2025 RBT (15 months old)	9.9"	0.020	1.70
Fall 2025 RBT (15 months old)	10.5"	0.021	1.39

Flow Rates – December 2024

5.08 inches of precipitation fell during the month of December.

Production Well Pumping Rate Average for December was 6,103 gpm with an average 8.79 million gallons per day pumped during the month.

The potable well pumped 11,366 gallons for the month of December.

Quarterly Water Diversion reports were submitted.

Fish Culture Activities

Inventory on 2026 production stock was completed at this time. Most are currently being fed by hand 8 times a day with some tanks on automated feeders. They are currently on #2 crumbles and 1.5 mm feed. The Nursery tanks were also reset at this time with approximately 650,000 Rainbow trout. Adjusted flows in the Nursery building. Tanks are being cleaned by all shifts. (Pictured to the right are 3-month-old Rainbow Trout).



Monthly inventories of the Spring 2025 production stock (48 pools) and the 2025 Fall Program fish (2 pools) were completed during this time. Feed quantities have been adjusted to regulate growth rates to reach our final goal of 10.5 inches for the Spring Stocking. These fish are being fed by the feed truck 4 times a day with 5.0 mm feed. Screens are being cleaned twice a day and basins weekly.

Pequest Maintenance

We received a new Campbell Scientific CR1000XE datalogger for Well#1 and are currently trying to get it to communicate with the alarm panel in the nursery. The radio on Well #3 failed on 12/23/24 losing signal to the alarm panel. We temporarily switched the one from Well #6 that is currently down until we can program a new one.

We drained and cleaned (3) pressure tanks on the domestic water to see if that helps with the running issues on the UV system. This was completed at the end of December. We will have to see if cleaning of the pressure tanks helps with the issues or if it is unrelated, and if the units will run for extended periods without error messages now. The extension of the on-line time to March 1st, 2025, was approved.

Received the purchase order for the rebuild Well #6 rebuild and electrical update towards the end of December. The vendor ordered parts which will hopefully arrive by the end of January. We are hoping to have them start work ASAP when parts are in.

Miscellaneous Activities

Submitted paperwork for hourly workers in preparation of the 2025 Spring Trout stocking season.

Completed the 2025 Aquaculture Census on 01/02/25.

Staff prepped snowplows and cleaned up from a few winter storms during this time period.

Newer staff completed scheduled Fish & Wildlife Experiences to learn about various Fish & Wildlife Programs on 12/18/24.

Hackettstown State Fish Hatchery (Craig Lemon)

Intensive Culture (Inventory)

<u>Species</u>	<u># Fish</u>	<u>Avg.”</u>
Landlocked Salmon	3,200	6.1”
Muskellunge	5,955	9.8”
Largemouth Bass	3,000	5.3”
Largemouth Bass (Ark.)	2,500	3.9”
Hybrid Striped Bass	1,600	6.9”
Gambusia	50,000	1.5”

Stocking Totals (December 16 – January 15)

No stocking during this period.

Intensive Culture

Landlocked Salmon

Currently culturing 3,200 fish about 6.1” in two 2,000-gallon tank. Staff clean and feed them daily. These fish will be stocked around November 1st at 15 inches.

Muskellunge

Currently culturing 5,955, 9.8-inch fingerlings in two 2,000-gallon tanks. They will be overwintered on a dry pellet diet in 52°F spring water. Planning on switching them to live forage soon. These fish will be stocked in the Spring.

Hybrid Striped Bass

Currently culturing 1,600 6.9-inch fingerlings in one 2,000-gallon rectangular tank. These fish will be raised through the winter and be moved outside in the spring. They will be on a dry pellet diet in 52°F water.

Largemouth Bass

Purchased 2500 three-inch dry food trained Largemouth Bass from Keo Fish Farms to grow intensively until next spring. These will be part of the PERCH program in two to three years. Staff inventoried our NJ Largemouth Bass and came up with 3,295 pellet trained five-inch fingerlings. These will also be overwintered intensively and put outside in ponds for future PERCH program fish. All the fish are doing well and are in 52°F water.

Gambusia

Currently culturing 50,000 Gambusia and Fathead Minnow mix in three 1,000-gallon tanks. These fish will be reared over the winter in 52°F spring water and fed a dry mash diet.

Intensive Production Work

We are currently pumping 478gpm of 52°F spring water. Both cool and warm water are recirculation systems are shut down for the winter. Water levels in the spring houses have risen following the past few weeks of rain and snow. Staff have cleaned all the modo feeders in the building. Currently working on new hanging feed structures for the tanks.

Extensive Culture

Channel Catfish

Broodfish are being overwintered in Pond 92. Overwintering three-year classes of catfish for the PERCH Program in Ponds, 74, 89, and 90.

Hybrid Striped Bass

240 sixteen-inch fish were moved to Pond 89 for future PERCH Program fish. The 2023 holdovers are overwintering in Pond 90. Estimated 1,300 Hybrids and 1,828 Lmb moved to Pond 90 from Pond 30. Fish looked nice and the polyculture seemed successful.

Largemouth Bass & Smallmouth Bass

All bass broodstock ponds have been harvested and the adults returned to Pond 50 overwinter.

Hatchery Extensive Pond Work

Staff are cleaning up and organizing all the pond gear – screens, plugs, slides, boards in the storage building. Wedges have been cut for this season. All seines and nets have been inspected for holes and repaired. Ordered a couple new seines. Putting together a list of concrete repairs to inflow and outflow structures. Working on repairing the Pond 77 inflow bubbler pipe and pad. The old pad was removed. New PVC parts have been placed. Waiting for water to flow to observe how it will work. Brush hogging many of the pond banks with the skid steer.

Information & Education

Provided information and photos for four GoFishFriday's posts 184-187.

1,665 likes, 75 comments, and 235 shares. Answered as many questions as possible on these posts.

CBT/CBTM Projects

A CBTM project was created for the dredging and regrading of Pond 90. Twelve loads of stone were delivered finally after waiting on paperwork issues. The CBT Project for Boiler Replacement has moved to the next step. An engineering consultant has been chosen, and a 2nd TEAMS meeting took place. The contractor has made a site visit to gather information and measurements. They have also reached out via email a couple of times.

Winterizations

Staff did a great job and finished up oil checks and parts and maintenance on all 12 vehicles, plus 2 Kubota UTV's and a John Deere tractor. Staff pulled the distribution tank off the large tanker and striped the old wooden bed off it. They cleaned up the steel frame and repainted it with Rustoleum. New treated lumber was purchased and coated with two coats of water proofing. The tank is ready to be remounted. Land mower trailers were cleaned and resealed with water proofing.