



BUREAU OF FRESHWATER FISHERIES MONTHLY REPORT



January 16, 2024 – February 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

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Tyler Tresslar, Crew Supervisor, WMAO
Nicholas Healy, Crew Supervisor, WMAO
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Justin Rozema, Assistant Biologist
Samantha MacQuesten, Assistant Biologist
Kyle Civalier, Biologist Trainee

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Shaun Young, Technician II
Charles Sedor, Technician II
Nick Ruberto, Technician II
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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 and Cheryl Weeks

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

2025 Spring Trout Stocking – Staff worked collaboratively on trout stocking coordination and provided training and guidance to the new trout stocking coordinator on stocking procedures, signage, allocations, and other required documents. Reviewed and provided feedback on the first draft of the trout stocking schedule. Staff coordinated with Pequest Trout Hatchery and the Bureau of Land Management. They updated the 2025 Trout signs and sent them to I&E for printing. The selection of Bonus Broodstock Lakes was finalized, and trout stocking numbers were provided to I&E for posting on the website. (Civalier/Shramko)

2024 Federal Aid Report & Year-End Report Preparation – QA/QC was performed on various surveys, including Turkey Brook, Trout Brook Hacklebarney, and Willow Grove Brown Trout removal work. Staff completed summaries for the 2024 Federal Aid Report, including data entry, survey table updates, and summarized assigned sections. Staff finalized and uploaded Federal Aid write-ups to SharePoint. Created and organized stream survey tables for the Year-End Report appendix. (Staff, F-48-R)

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

Public Virtual Fish Code Meeting – On January 16, we held our first of three virtual fisheries meetings. We presented the proposed 2026 Fish Code changes. There were 95 attendees, which is more than when we previously held these meetings in person. There were opportunities for questions and comments throughout the meeting. All but one comment was in support of the proposed changes. (Staff)

Bass Fishing Seminar - Presented at an event hosted by I&E and Fishing R3 staff at the Batsto Visitor Center on January 25th. Sixty people attended the presentation, where they were introduced to BFF's Black Bass management and stocking, as well as fishing tips to become a more successful bass angler in New Jersey. Anglers were engaged, asked questions and provided positive feedback. (Smith/Boehm)

Northern Pike Fishing Seminar - Presented at an event hosted by I&E and Fishing R3 staff at the Middlesex Public Library, Middlesex Borough on 2/8/25. Approximately 30 people attended the presentation, where they learned about BFF's Northern Pike stocking program, Northern Pike behavior, seasonal movements, and fishing tackle recommendations for targeting the species. Attendees were very engaged, asked a multitude of questions, and provided positive feedback about the creation of an event targeting current anglers. (Rozema)

Edison Fly Fishing Show - Attended the Edison Fly Fishing Show on 1/24 – 1/25 to assist in running a booth with other Fish and Wildlife staff from I&E and Law Enforcement as well as the mobile education trailer. Answered various questions and interacted with attendees from the public. Many people were happy to see Fish and Wildlife present and were interested in discussing a variety of fisheries-related topics. (Rozema)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (State Funding)

Classification Rule on 5-acre lakes – Through review of changes to the GIS layer for NJDEP's Surface Water Quality Standards (SWQS) provided by NJDEP's Bureau of Environmental Analysis, Restoration and Standards (BEARS), inconsistencies in the application of the "five acre rule" (7:9B-1.15(b)5ii and iii) were discovered. Principal Fisheries Biologist, Scott Collenburg, met with BEARS staff on February 11th to provide context and support for this rule. BEARS staff will adjust and make edits to NJDEP's SWQS shapefile to accurately reflect the correct classification within lakes and ponds. (Collenburg)

Drought Response Advisory Group – Multiple meetings were held to discuss the current state of the drought in New Jersey. Scott Collenburg, Principal Fisheries Biologist, provided comment in relation to any concerns with the fisheries resource. 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. January has been dry and has not improved much with rainfall being 51-75% below the average rainfall amount. Stream flows in the south are generally below average. Forecasted precipitation for February looks wetter and will hopefully improve conditions. The public is strongly urged to continue voluntary water conservation practices. The Drought Response Advisory Group meets every Friday. (Collenburg/Crouse)

Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) and Tri-State Brook Trout Initiative – Participated in multiple EBTJV meetings, including discussions about catchment data updates and brook trout restoration projects. Attended a meeting with the EBTJV coordinator regarding the Tri-State Brook Trout Initiative. (Shramko)

Overburdened Communities & Fisheries Management – Assisted with gathering information on Overburdened Communities and the trout stocking program at 179 waters for internal review. 42 of the 86 lakes and ponds (49%) are in overburdened communities. 59 of the 93 rivers and streams (63%) are in overburdened communities. When combined, 56% of our trout stocking program is within overburdened communities. This evaluation did not account for stocked waters that are adjacent (within a very close distance from) overburdened communities. (Shramko)

Fish Habitat Restoration – Attended meetings with Columbia Dam removal partners to discuss potential journal publication efforts. Engaged in discussions with Raritan Headwaters regarding their interest in Brook Trout habitat restoration efforts. (Shramko)

Invasive Species Management – Participated in meetings with Connecticut DEEP staff and Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Information Systems staff to discuss potential database and invasive species reporting platforms. Developing reporting and database platforms are a high priority and critical need identified in the NJ AIS Management Plan. (Macquesten/Smith/Crouse)

Musconetcong River Restoration Partnership – Engaged in discussions with several partners on the Warren Mills Dam removal project and committed to ensuring American Shad passage is documented through angler reports, underwater video, electrofishing spot checks, and eDNA sampling. Participated in conversations about the feasibility of multi-year standardized

electrofishing efforts. Also had many meetings and discussions about Mine Brook in Mount Olive Dam removals. Musconetcong Watershed Association (MWA) is applying to the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) for funding to remove 2 dams on the Brook Trout stream Mine Brook (Mt. Olive). I have been assisting MWA with the application per the job duty requirements of the state of NJ representative for the EBTJV. Also spent time writing and getting an agreement from other bureaus within Fish and Wildlife to supply a letter of support for this project. (Shramko)

NAACC Assessments – The Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries completed assessments on a total of 319 crossings in 2024, (some with multiple structures) in relation to habitat that was identified as important to native Brook Trout or wild Brown Trout and freshwater fish species that are soon to be listed as Endangered or Threatened (i.e. Bridle Shiners, Ironcolor Shiners, and Slimy Sculpin). Staff are currently working on finalizing a report detailing management implications. Locations were identified where crossings created severe barriers to wild Brown Trout movement and isolated native Brook Trout populations. Information like this can be used to determine the best course of action. (Collenburg/Huth)

Newly listed Freshwater Fish Species – On January 23rd the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries biologist, Scott Collenburg, and Chief, Shawn Crouse, met with staff from NJDEP's Watershed Management Unit to discuss the best management practices (BMPs) and potential timing restrictions related to Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern freshwater fish species that were recently listed on January 6th. The Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries agreed to formulate BMPs and timing restrictions in relation to these species. (Collenburg/Crouse)

Raritan Headwaters Association – On February 7th biologists, Ross Shramko and Scott Collenburg, met with staff from Raritan Headwaters Association to discuss restoration projects in the South Branch of the Raritan River. Of particular interest were discussions with Lake Solitude Club on a potential project inside the Ken Lockwood Gorge. (Collenburg/Shramko)

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Species Profiles - As part of the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) time was spent creating species profiles for freshwater species that are listed as Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern. These species profiles will provide life history information as well as information in regard to their current status and actions related to SWAP. (Collenburg)

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) Action Prioritization - Participated in ENSP's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) process of prioritizing various actions related to benefitting fish species of greatest conservation need (SGCN). (Boehm, Civalier, Collenburg, Rozema)

Lower Passaic River Diamond Alkali Superfund Meeting - Participated in a meeting on 1/21 hosted by the US EPA and Tetra Tech (contractor) to familiarize other stakeholders with the project area, including BFF, BMF, OER, DEP's Divisions of Science and Research and Contaminated Site Remediation and Redevelopment (CSRR), NOAA, and NMFS. Discussion was had on the proposed literature review that will be taken on by Tetra Tech. This review aims to gather fisheries and water quality data surrounding the project area to better inform all involved parties on current conditions within the project area (upper 9 miles of the tidal Passaic

River). The data summarized in this planned review will be used to inform of the potential timing restrictions applied or exempted for the superfund project and work. (Rozema)

Skillful Angler Award Program: Received and reviewed 23 Skillful Angler applications from anglers. Applications reached 23 for 2025 and are coming in steadily. (Civalier)

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. A few projects required significant lowering that necessitated fish salvages. The applicants were provided with a list of consultants to complete the salvage. (Staff)

WMA Fishing Tournament Permits – Continued to receive fishing tournament permit requests for the 2025 season. A total of 137 tournaments have been scheduled to date, with more anticipated over the next couple of weeks. A summary of the 2024 tournament results will be completed later this spring. (Smith)

STAFF & ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

Personnel & Seasonal Staffing – Worked with staff on personnel actions and bureau needs. Discussed 2025 field work responsibilities with staff including seasonal staffing needs with an immediate focus on the spring trap-net season staffing requirements. (Shramko)

Training & Technical Support – Continued training Kyle Civalier, the new trout stocking coordinator on trout stocking duties. Assisted Hackettstown Hatchery Staff with data extraction from FishTrack for website updates and stocking summaries. Provided guidance on SharePoint access and file updates. (Shramko)

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 (4 months old)	3.2"	0.018	1.27
Spring 2025 RBT (16 months old)	10.5"	0.020	1.91
Fall 2025 RBT (16 months old)	11.4"	0.027	0.95

Flow Rates – January 2025

0.47 inches of precipitation fell during the month of January.

Production Well Pumping Rate Average for December was 5,505 gpm with an average 7.93 million gallons per day pumped during the month.

The potable well pumped 10,890 gallons for the month of January.

Fish Culture Activities

Inventory on 2026 production stock was completed at this time. All fish are now being fed by automated feeders now. They are currently on 1.5 mm and 2.0 mm feed. Also, about 135,000 surplus 3-inch rainbow trout was given to Hackettstown Hatchery for forage. Put sides on the tanks in the Nursery building to keep the larger fish from jumping out.

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.

Had a preliminary in-house stocking preparation meeting for the upcoming 2025 Spring Season. Staff are also starting to purchase supplies, preparing equipment, and getting stocking trucks ready for the Spring stocking season.

Pequest Maintenance

Installed the new Campbell Scientific datalogger in Well#1 and programmed it to communicate with the alarm panel in the nursery. Installed a new radio on Well #6 and programmed it to the alarm panel as well. Programming on both was very time-consuming, we had to reach out to the manufacturers several times to match the new equipment to the older program on the alarm panel.



William Stothoff Company pulled the old equipment out Well #6 in preparation of installing the new equipment for the and electrical update once all the parts are in. (pictured to the left).

We are still trying to figure out the communication error issues on the domestic UV system. We are trying to coordinate a person from Portasoft, ATS, and one from DOIT to come out on the same day and figure out the issue, whos' end the problem lies, and to determine a resolution. Cleaning of the pressure tanks seem to help with the running errors of with only having one error message since. This was completed

at the end of December. We received an extension of the on-line time to June 1st, 2025, to finish tracking the communication issues and repair them.

Completed a plow repair, and repaired cable and slide on the feed truck. Sent a couple large trucks for annual safety inspections. Installed new heater and a couple of relief valves on the flow meter in well house #6.

We had several alarms due to power fluctuations and low water alarms in the production wells due to drought conditions. Wells were adjusted to recover levels.

Miscellaneous Activities

2/5/24, discussed status and answered questions about active CBT projects with Jason Freeborn.

Started working on the NJ F-50-D-32 Fish Culture and Stocking Program Interim report for 2024 calendar year.

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

Hackettstown State Fish Hatchery (Craig Lemon)

Intensive Culture (Inventory)

<u>Species</u>	<u># Fish</u>	<u>Avg.”</u>
Landlocked Salmon	3,200	6.3”
Muskellunge	5,955	9.9”
Largemouth Bass (NJ)	3,000	5.5”
Largemouth Bass (Ark.)	2,500	4.1”
Hybrid Striped Bass	1,600	7.2”
Gambusia	50,000	1.5”

Stocking Totals (January 16 – February 15)

No stocking during this period.

Intensive Culture

Landlocked Salmon

Currently culturing 3,200 fish about 6.3” in two 2,000-gallon tank. Staff clean and feed them daily. Normally we would fin clip them and split them into 3 tanks this month, but low spring flows are keeping us from doing that. We need some precipitation to recharge our springs. These fish will be stocked around November 1st at 15 inches.

Muskellunge

Currently culturing 5,955, 9.9-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 7.2-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. Staff just switched them from 3.0 mm to 5.0 mm feed.

Largemouth Bass

Purchased 2,500 three-inch dry food trained Largemouth Bass from Keo Fish Farms to grow intensively until next spring. These will be part of future fishing program in two to three years. We are also culturing 3,295 pellet trained 5.5-inch fingerlings (NJ). These will also be overwintered intensively and put outside in ponds for future program use. Both lots of fish are doing well and are in 52°F water.

Gambusia

Currently culturing 50,000 Gambusia (Mosquitofish) in three 1,000-gallon tanks. These fish are being reared over the winter in 52°F spring water and fed a dry mash diet. They will be used by County Mosquito Commissions in the Spring as Biocontrol measures for mosquitoes. They are brought indoors in the Fall, because they do not overwinter well in the wild.

Intensive Production Work

We are currently pumping 478 gpm of 52°F spring water. Both cool and warm water recirculation systems are shut down for the winter. Water levels in the spring had risen but are currently slowly falling back down. Staff increased the 52°F pumps recently and spring water levels fell just overnight. Staff have cleaned all the modo feeders in the building. Currently working on new hanging feed structures for the tanks. During the growing season last year one of the makeup valves in the pump room broke while being adjusted. It was bypassed and staff used a PVC ball valve just downstream. Staff took apart the broken valve and one of the other good valves to compare. A small stainless pin had snapped which controls the handle to change flows. Staff ordered four new pins and O-rings. Both unassembled valves were thoroughly cleaned and put back together. Plans are to clean the other two.

Extensive Culture

Channel Catfish

Broodfish are being overwintered in Pond 92. Overwintering three-year classes of catfish for future fishing programs in Ponds, 74, 89, and 90.

Hybrid Striped Bass

240 sixteen-inch fish were moved to Pond 89 for future programs. The 2023 holdovers are overwintering in Pond 90. Estimated 1,300 Hybrids and 1,828 Lmb were moved to Pond 90 from Pond 30. The 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 to 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 of 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 five GoFishFriday's posts 188-192. 2,208 likes, 27 comments, and 119 shares. Answered as many questions as possible on these posts. Completed entering all 2024 stocking data in Fishtrack and Sharepoint. Provided these number to I&E for the website. Putting together a PowerPoint presentation on Channel Catfish Production for the upcoming fisheries forum on 2/20. Completed an in-depth version of the hatchery Annual Report. Going to summarize it for the Federal Aid report.

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. All bills have been submitted, and the project is in the closeout stage. The CBT Project for Boiler Replacement has moved to the next step. An engineering consultant has been chosen, and a 3rd TEAMS meeting took place. The

contractor made a second site visit to gather information and measurements. They have also reached out via email a couple of times.

Budget/Purchasing

Totaling up all spending from 2024. Waiting on salary and utility figures to finish up. Working with Ross on getting vendors to update their DPA paperwork. Putting together multiple PB119's for fish food, fertilizer, pond dye.