



The Tionesta State Fish Hatchery

Contributing to the Commonwealth's Fisheries



by Scott Morgan, *Manager*
Tionesta and Fairview State Fish Hatcheries

What do millions of Walleye fry, 750,000 steelhead and thousands of Muskellunge and tiger muskellunge have in common? They are all raised at the Tionesta State Fish Hatchery (SFH), one of 13 hatcheries operated by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) and owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Located strategically by the availability of high quality water, and logistically for stocking purposes, each hatchery's objective is to raise and stock different species of fish in order to enhance Pennsylvania's angling opportunities. The majority of these hatcheries raise cold water species, such as trout, while the rest are tasked with raising warm/coolwater species, like Walleye and Muskellunge, supporting many of Pennsylvania's lakes and rivers. The Tionesta SFH's distinct quality is its capability to culture both coldwater and warm/coolwater species because of its diverse water temperatures.

Tionesta SFH is located in the northwest region of Pennsylvania along the Allegheny River in the densely wooded mountains of Forest County, just 1 mile upstream from the picturesque village of Tionesta. Originally opened in 1929, the hatchery flourishes on 387 acres of state land operated by PFBC. The facility boasts nine earthen ponds that are primarily used for Walleye fingerling production, 64 exterior concrete raceways for steelhead, Muskellunge and tiger muskellunge production and a hatch house, which contains tanks and egg incubation units for hatching and

rearing young fry. The hatchery also has a visitor's center that is open year round, seven days a week. Inside, visitors will find an impressive 2,000-gallon, multi-level viewing aquarium filled with Muskellunge, Walleyes, Smallmouth Bass, Largemouth Bass, Bluegills and other fish native to local waters. Informational literature related to the Commonwealth's aquatic resources is also available for people of all ages. Hanging on the walls are mounts of trophy fish, many donated by local anglers, and the stories behind how they were landed.

Shallow wells and a small creek, Tubbs Run, supplies water to Tionesta SFH. These wells are in the Allegheny River aquifer, which has seasonal fluctuations of water temperatures like the river itself. It is this very unique water characteristic that sets Tionesta SFH apart from the other hatcheries across Pennsylvania. During the warm summer months, the Muskellunge and Walleye fingerlings at the hatchery flourish as temperatures begin to rise into the 60-degree F range as the young and hungry fish instinctively eat and grow. On the other hand, when the bright colors of the changing leaves in the hills of Forest County lead fall into winter, the temperature drops to levels that steelhead ultimately thrive in. Each year, this cycle repeats itself as the seasons pass, and the fish are hatched, raised and stocked into Pennsylvania waters.



There is a series of 40 raceways at Tionesta State Fish Hatchery used to rear steelhead fingerlings.

Tionesta SFH has gone through a lot of changes over the years. In the 1950s and 60s, stocking trout were raised in a series of dirt raceways and in concrete raceways along Tubbs Run. In the 1970s, renovations were made to the hatchery, and the dirt raceways were made into earthen production ponds for warm/coolwater production, mainly Walleye fingerlings and Fathead Minnows. By that time, PFBC had begun its Lake Erie Salmon Program, and the Tionesta SFH was raising both Coho Salmon and Chinook Salmon to be stocked into its tributaries. Eventually, the Lake Erie Salmon Program would be replaced by the Lake Erie Steelhead Program, in which Tionesta SFH plays a major role.

Annually, Tionesta SFH raises approximately 75 percent of the 1.1 million steelhead yearlings stocked into the tributaries of Lake Erie every spring. Once released, they migrate into the main body of the lake and return at 3-years-old ready to spawn. Unfortunately, they are not successful spawning in the shale bottomed Erie tributaries and need the hatcheries to keep this program going. Starting in November, staff from five regional hatcheries, including Tionesta SFH, converges to Trout Run in Erie to collect adults for spawning. These adult steelhead are transported to the Fairview SFH where the eggs are stripped and fertilized. Once spawned, the eggs are transported to Tionesta SFH to be hatched and raised to yearlings for the following season. The PFBC Lake Erie Steelhead Program is a success story, attracting anglers from all over Pennsylvania and generating more than 10 million dollars annually for the Erie area economy. For more information on the economic impact, go to www.fishandboat.com/images/fisheries/research/erietribs2004/000index.htm.

Tionesta SFH uses its nine earthen ponds and 24 exterior concrete raceways to support the warm/coolwater stocking efforts across Pennsylvania. Each spring, Tionesta SFH will receive Walleye eggs from the Linesville SFH to be

hatched and stocked as fry. While most of the fry will be released into Pennsylvania's waters, a small number are placed into the earthen ponds to be cultured for approximately 30 days. As the ponds are emptied, the 1- to 2-inch Walleye fingerlings are harvested and stocked in the wild for future angling opportunities. Approximately 6 million Walleye fry and 175,000 fingerlings are stocked each year from Tionesta SFH. Shortly after getting Walleye eggs, the hatchery receives Muskellunge and tiger muskellunge (a hybrid cross between the Northern Pike and the purebred Muskellunge) eggs from other PFBC hatcheries. Both species are hatched and

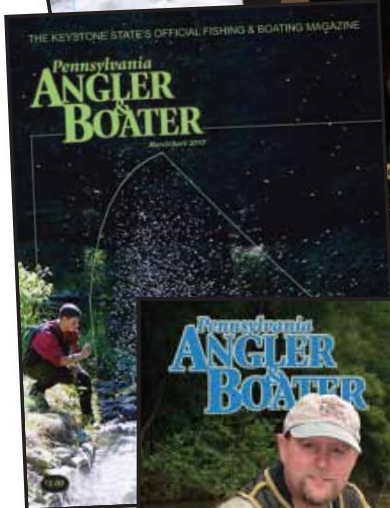
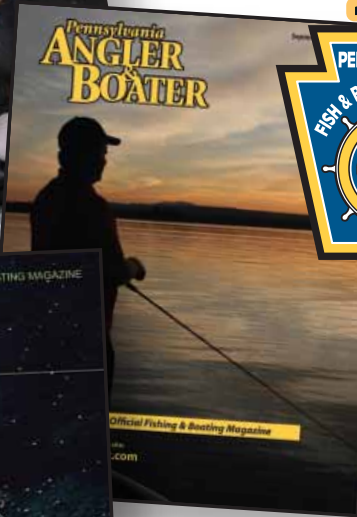
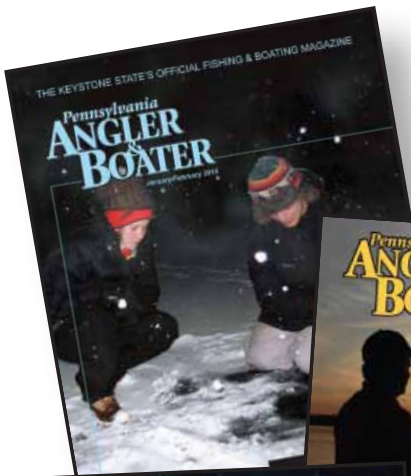
converted to a dry diet for grow out. This is a tedious and time consuming task, but one that is necessary for our Muskellunge production to be successful. Once large enough, the fish are moved from the hatch house to the outside raceways until late fall. At that time, Muskellunge are 8 to 9 inches in length and are stocked into waters across Pennsylvania. While many anglers are loyal to fishing for purebred Muskellunge, some enjoy the aggressiveness of tiger muskellunge. The Tionesta SFH stocks about 30,000 pure bred and 20,000 tiger muskellunge annually.

Tionesta SFH is just one of the hatcheries across Pennsylvania that provides robust angling opportunities to the anglers of Pennsylvania. If you are fortunate enough to find yourself visiting the scenic wilds of Forest County, stop in and staff will be delighted to give you a tour of our storied hatchery. And remember, the next time you experience the adrenaline rush of hooking a hard fighting steelhead, or if you are casting into the Allegheny River for Walleyes or Muskellunge, there's a good chance that Tionesta SFH stocked the fish on your line. ☐



Tionesta State Fish Hatchery Foreman Craig Lucas with an adult steelhead collected at Trout Run, Erie County.

photos: PFBC archives



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