

WALLEYE POND STOCKED



About 320,000 walleye fry, not quite one centimeter long, were placed in the Mason County Walleye Association's pond Monday afternoon.



Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Technician Supervisor Scott Heintzelman, right, releases the fry from bags carried in coolers to the Mason County Walleye Association's pond. The fry will be raised for the next five to six weeks before survivors are released into area lakes. The hope is to plant some in Hamlin Lake.

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Walleyes in Mason Co. Pond could be headed to Hamlin Lake

BY BRIAN MULHERIN

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PERE MARQUETTE TOWNSHIP — Tucked away in a corner of the county that few visit, 320,000 walleyes are getting used to life in the Mason County Walleye Association's pond.

The fish, each less than a centimeter in length, arrived in six foam coolers on Monday at the pond, where they'll spend the next 38 to 42 days eating and growing.

The MCWA keeps the plankton count in the pond up and by the time the fish are large enough to start feeding on other fish, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources will be back with a stocking truck to put the fish in lakes around the state.

DNR Fisheries Technician Supervisor Scott Heintzelman said Hamlin Lake will almost definitely be one of those lakes, but it depends upon the yield from the Mason County pond and the DNR's I-75 pond.

"Hamlin is on our list of top priorities," Heintzelman said. "Houghton Lake is also on our list of top priorities."

Heintzelman said the I-75 pond will get almost a million fry to rear into fingerlings.

The fish will be traceable for the first time in recent years because they are marked with oxytetracycline. If managers want to determine if Hamlin Lake is getting natural production, they could do a survey of the lake in the next couple years and check the vertebra of the fish caught for a mark left behind by the antibiotic. Any fish of the same age as these fish without the mark would be naturally reproduced fish.

"We know we have some natural reproduction, but we don't know what level," Heintzelman said.

For the next five weeks, those who like to fish for walleyes might want to hope for a gradual warming trend.

"It'd be nice to get a moderate, slow warm-up," Heintzelman said of the optimum fish-growing weather. "We'd like to get the plankton up in the pond, but not have it scorching so we're killing our plankton every four or five days. The long range forecast looks good."

Heintzelman said beach weather in May might not be good for the young walleyes.

"It would be bad if we got to 80 or 90 degrees and the pond jumped up 20 degrees," Heintzelman said.

The DNR will be stocking more lakes in the future, but no stocking has been done since 2006 because of fears about VHS, a disease that kills fish.

"We're finally confident we can go back to our old protocol for raising walleyes," Heintzelman said.

He said filling recent staffing vacancies might also help bring production back up to normal levels.

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Scott Heintzelman prepares to release walleye into the pond Monday.

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DNR Fisheries Technician Supervisor Scott Heintzelman acclimates the walleye to the pond's water temperature.



Containers holding walleye fry were placed at the walleye pond Monday.