The Detroit News
DETROIT, MICH.
D. 690,682 SUN. 843,539

MAR 14 1976

In the Open

State isn't giving up on Atlantic salmon

By JAMES A. O. CROWE
News Outdoors Editor

THERE WILL BE AN ATLANTIC SALMON RUN we can fish over in the Boyne River this summer, and, despite the loss of all the fry hatched from Boyne River eggs this winter, efforts to establish "the king of game fish" in Michigan continue.

The death of some 9,000 smolts, hatched from the first eggs taken from Michigan Atlantics, was, of course, a setback.

"But we have lots of options open, and we're not giving up yet, by any means," Dr. Wayne H. Tody, Department of Natural Resources fisheries chief, told me the other day.



JAMES A. O. CROWE

No one knows just what killed the smolts, but, for lack of a better suspect, PCB's are mentioned.

Those are the industrial chemicals, properly called polychlorinated biphenals, which have been found in high enough levels in Lake Michigan lake trout and other fish to ban them from the commercial market.

All that is known for sure is that, as James Copeland, supervisor of the Wolf Lake Hatchery near Kalamazoo, reported, the smolts appeared healthy when they hatched around the first of the year. But between the second and fourth week, they started to die, and eventually all were gone.

The 9,000 smolts came from the eggs of the lone four female Atlantics which survived after making their spawning run up the Boyne. All the other Atlantics, except for a few males, died in the river before eggs and milt could be taken.

It had been hoped the eggs would start a strain resistant to whatever it is that is killing the salmon.

Even so, Dr. Tody said, "We'll have around 30,000 Atlantic salmon parr to release this spring."

Prime target for fly fishermen

THE PARR, JUST OVER A YEAR OLD and measuring around four inches, are dumped into the river and "imprinted" with it as their home. True to salmon nature, they return to their home stream two and three years later as 10 to 20-pound adults, ready to spawn. The runs usually start in late May and continue through much of the rest of the summer, making the Atlantic salmon a prime target for fly fishermen.

The parr to be released this spring were hatched from eggs imported from Quebec, as were most of the nearly 62,000 Atlantics which have been released in the Boyne since the start of the program in 1972.

MONS 037144

However, some 3,000 Gullspang strain fish, imported from Sweden, were included in the release last spring, and on those fish and their successors hangs much of the hope for the eventual establishment of the species in Michigan.

"The Gullspang," said Dr. Tody, "is a fresh water strain, spending their adult life in inland lakes. The Quebec fish spend most of their adult life in salt water. This alone holds out promise the Gullspang will be better able to adapt to Great Lakes conditions."

He added that the Swedish strain grows bigger and stages its spawning run later in the summer so the fish won't have to spend so much time in the rivers.

One of the theories for the difficulties of the salmon in the Boyne River so far is that they enter the three miles of stream as early as late May and have to spend more than three months there before they ripen to the actual spawning stage. This crowding may be producing a stress factor that is contributing to their die-off.

Some 10,000 more Gullspang salmon are expected to be ready for release in the spring of 1977, along with 30,000 of the Quebec strain.

Lake Superior may get some parr

DR. TODY SAID IT IS PLANNED to release only some 20,000 of this year's crop of salmon parr in the Boyne this spring, leaving 10,000 to try out in some other river.

"Probably, we'll try them in some Lake Superior stream just as an experiment," he said. "The PCB level is lower in Lake Superior, and if the salmon survive better up there, we'll know more than we do now about the effect of the PCB's."

The Two Hearted River has been frequently mentioned as a candidate for the experiment, but Dr. Tody said it's been all but ruled out. It is too big and has too many little tributaries, he explained. The returning fish could be lost. Fisheries biologists are looking for a small stream where it would be easier to trap the returning salmon when it comes time to collect their eggs and milt.

This summer's run of adult fish into the Boyne may not be as heavy as the last two summers, Dr. Tody warned. There is some evidence that fish of the 1973 plants did not do as well in Lake Michigan as the 1972 fish which staged the last two runs.

But, in any case, the Boyne, up to the old power dam which blocks it three miles up from the mouth, will be open again to "catch and release" fly fishing for the returning Atlantics from June 1 through Sept. 30.

There are only three miles of stream to fish, the prospects are of hooking fewer fish and we can't keep any of them anyway.

Still even that much of a chance to fly cast over a 20-pound Atlantic salmon close to home is a real privilege we all can be grateful for.

MONS 037145