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Kornkie's Column



Lake trout perplex experts

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Maybe it is too soon to worry, but the lake trout are causing a perplexing problems: they're growing big and fat, but not having babies.

40-million lake trout have been planted in the Great Lakes in the past decade, Keith Larson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service told the Midwest Salmon Seminar Friday at Michigan City, but so far there is no indication the the trout are reproducing.

At one time, before 1950, fishermen caught 15-million pounds of trout a year without denting the fish population.

Then the lamprey eel, slithering in through the Welland Canal, sucked the life out of the trout. Studies show that the few trout to survive the eels simple quit reproducing naturally in the 1950.

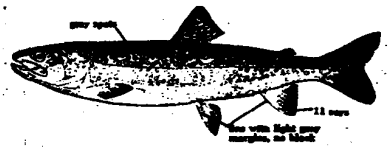
The federal government spent $30-million getting rid of the eel. Electric barriers and larvae toxicants kill the eels before they escape the streams where they hatch.

Once the 13-year research effort was deemed a success, the Fish and Wildlife people started to restock the the lakes with trout.

Five million more trout produced in three hatcheries in Michigan will be put into the lake this year.

The eggs are stripped from fish in Northern Michigan and put in holding tanks where they are fed high protein diets until they reach five-inches—inside of 16 months.

"Indications are that the trout are doing better than



every before," Larson said. "Smelt and alewives have extended their food sources and they reach maturity a year or two faster than they did 10 years ago. But they don't raise family of their own naturally.

"It might be premature to be worrying about reproduction. The early stockings are just reaching spawning age," Bob Rinehart, fish biologist said. "And we haven't really looked for young fish. If we pull out some young trout with no fin clips, then we can forget all these studies."

It was noted that there are naturally hatched coho salmon and steelheads showing up in Lake Michigan. Not many, but some.

The biologists admitted that the trout were merely dumped in the lake at convenient spots in the 1960s rather than placed over spawning reefs. It might be that the fish don't know where to go to lay eggs, since they seem to come back to first place they enter the water when spawning times arrives.

The Fish and Wildlife Service wasn't being careless. The logistics of planting a delicate fingerling on a spawning bed is expensive and dangerous.

Items that could be destroying the spawn are being studied. There are things like thermol release from power plants, dumping of dredge material in the open lake, and insidious contamination of eggs by DDT and PCB.

Raising fish in a laboratory is "more difficult than raising children," Rinehart said. The young fry are coddled there with the food dropped on top of them. Now tests are being run to see what happens when the food is polluted, as it often is out in the lake.

The Wildlife Service also spiked the natural spawning reefs with eggs last fall to see what happens.

Lake trout grow fat on diets high in DDT and PCB, but maybe the fish eggs can't tolerate what a grown fish can.

Meanwhile another problem is cropping up.

The lampreycide, called TFM, is not only soaring in price, but is in short supply. For 14 years it was price at $2.98 a pound, now it is $6.98 a pound and the German chemical plant that makes it can't get enough acetic acid to fill the order.

"The put-and-take operation is economically sound," Larson said. "We are sure to continue to put trout in the Lakes and enlarge the number we put in, but it would be good business if the trout would help by reproducing naturally."

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