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Gullspang eggs expected

Atlantic salmon program slowly gaining momentum

Still baffled by the mysterious die-off of Atlantic salmon returning to the Boyne River to spawn, the Department of Natural Resources may face a new Atlantic problem — where to raise 75,000 to 100,000 smolts produced by brood stock.

Harry Westers, hatchery specialist, says the DNR has about 280,000 Quebec strain eggs in hand and expects to take another 20,000 from brood stock at Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery this week.

"AND WE expect to have 50,000 to 100,000 Gullspang eggs from about 3,000 healthy brood stock imported from Sweden as 'eyed' eggs in 1973," he explains. The Gullspang strain has been landlocked for centuries while the Quebec fish are an ocean-going strain.

Westers says the 3,000 Quebec brood stock have furunculosis "quite bad" but he says the bacteria, which had developed an immunity to sulfa, is believed to again be vulnerable to the drug after five years of using terramycin. And their eggs look okay.

The department also has 4,000 Quebec strain future brood stock at Oden State Fish Hatchery from eggs taken from about 120 Domtar females — fish that have gone through the entire two year hatchery cycle in Michigan without being released in the wild. He says there are also about 30,000 Quebec smolts being readied for plantout next spring — probably in the Boyne.

MEANWHILE, THE department has Atlantic salmon experts from Ontario investigating why adult fish returning to the Boyne are dying before spawning — after being trapped below Kircher Dam.

Westers says the researchers are believed to be looking for environmental toxicants in Lake Michigan which may affect the systems of the fish. Ocean-going Quebec strain Atlantics and the landlocked Gullspang strain both normally live to spawn several times.

The lake is known to be contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), DDT and other pesticides, he notes. "And who knows what else they're going to find out there."

WHILE THE department has been experimenting on a small scale with the Atlantics for several years, it has never had the eggs to plan an Atlantic program comparable to the Pacific salmon program.

But, for the first time it is faced with the possibility of having as many as 400,000 eggs which could mean at many as 100,000 smolts by plantout age, Westers explains.

And to produce those fish will mean a cutback of other species — probably brown or rainbow trout, he says. A staff decision is expected soon.

BUT WESTERS speculates that cutbacks wouldn't have to be significant on browns and rainbows — the DNR rears about 1 million each along with 500,000 steelheads each year.

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