

FEATURE

HATCHING BY DESIGN

Canadian group customizes hatchery efforts to meet needs of recreational fishery



The "Learn to Fish" programme brings new fishers into the sport to support conservation and sport fish culture.

BY MARGOT BRIGGS AND BRIAN CHAN

While British Columbia is known throughout North America as a province blessed with an incredible diversity of wild fisheries, in recent years the province has been engaging in a program that may be surprising to some observers: it has been using a series of freshwater hatcheries to create a customized sport fishery designed to meet the needs of the province's diverse and growing angling community.

While resident and visiting anglers relish the opportunity to try their luck with BC's world class wild salmon, halibut, trout, steelhead and sturgeon fisheries, the Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC has been using hatcheries to create purpose-built sport fishing opportunities that are tailor made for the needs of the different regions, ecosystems and user groups around the province.

The society and its predecessor have been raising fish and stocking lakes and streams for decades. This sort of

activity is common in many jurisdictions around the world. What is unique is the extent to which BC's five freshwater hatcheries have been customizing their fish production.

DESIGNER FISH

The society grows a number of different strains of fish according to local and regional fishing interests ranging from all-female triploids (sterile), normal or diploid, truly 'wild' fish, and domestic "catchables." The society works with provincial fisheries managers as well as considering angler feedback and other input so that lakes are stocked according to angler needs and desires.

But it doesn't end there. In conjunction with a variety of local partners ranging from municipal government to local angling or conservation clubs, the society will build fishing access in urban areas in the form of fishing piers, docks and lakeside paths and stock those lakes with fish that compliment the specific target use. The society monitors angler activity in both urban and remote locations through the use of digital cameras that record angler effort or use simple creel surveys. In addition, the society conducts in-lake assessments to ensure the right fish 'profiles' – size, population composition and number – are available.

RANGE OF SERVICES

The society also provides anglers with a range of on-line services aimed at helping them find the best fishing opportunity for their needs, angling ambition and skill level. Anglers can use the Fish Wizard program to identify a lake, explore its bathymetry, when it was stocked and with what strain of fish. Accomplished anglers seeking trophy fish can search for a challenging lake that is stocked with all-female triploids and accompanied by quality management regulations. Those looking for a family-friendly fishing opportunity can search for an accessible urban lake where novices equipped with inexpensive gear can catch a trout from the beach.

Moreover, the society provides a range of on-line fishing guides featuring tips and tricks, and has even harnessed the power of Google Earth to provide on-line lake locations that can be cross-referenced against a variety of other criteria to produce a personalize fish search.

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Sterile all-female triploid rainbow trout (72 cm, 5.248 kg) of the Blackwater strain. Photo by Theresa Godin

Finally, the society has been taking its programs “to the people” in recent years and making a real effort at angler outreach. Through the Learn-to-Fish program, it has provided practical hands-on training in fish biology, fishing techniques and etiquette to more than 30,000 youngsters and the young-at-heart.

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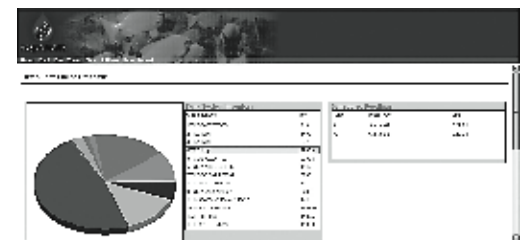
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