

NL fish hatchery hatches out up to 70 million fry



Jeff Tellock, manager at the DNR's fish hatchery in New London, shows a pan full of tiny walleye hatchlings to Minnesota Master Naturalist students and their guests. From left are Colleen Thompson of Willmar, John White of Clara City, Megan Ahlness, 9, of Sleepy Eye, Darren Lochner, U of M Extension educator, and Tellock.



Minnesota Master Naturalist students listen to Jeff Tellock, manager at the New London Fish Hatchery. Behind Tellock are plastic 'batteries' filled with fertilized walleye eggs. From left are Angela Sondrol of Sunburg, Colleen Thompson of Willmar, Megan Ahlness of Sleepy Eye, Eliza Buchanan, 7, of Montevideo, Teresa Clark of Kerkhoven and Tellock.

By Dori Moudry
Editor

This is a busy time of year for the DNR fish hatchery in New London, with the walleye hatch in full force.

During the spring hatch two employees work at the hatchery full-time, while four others come in to help out.

Jeff Tellock, hatchery manager, spoke to a group of 10 Minnesota Master Naturalist students, their two instructors, and two guests during an April 21 field trip.

The New London fish hatchery has been a state facility for 30 years. It supplies walleye frylings and fingerlings to Kandiyohi County lakes, as well as to other lakes in greater Minnesota.

In addition to the indoor operation, where the fertilized eggs and newly hatched fish are monitored, New London has 17 outdoor ponds, ranging in size from one acre to 5-1/2 acres. Depth ranges from 4 feet to 7 feet.

In addition to walleye, the New London hatchery also is raising muskie. In the past, the local hatchery has raised small mouth bass and catfish, Tellock said.

"Some of the walleye frylings are harvested at a month to a month-and-a-half old," he said. "Most are raised

to larger fingerlings, 6- to 8-inches. We get anywhere from 10 to 30 fish per pound. Between 15 and 20 per pound is ideal. That's primarily what we stock in most of our lakes. In some of our lakes, we can stock fry right after they hatch."

The bigger the fish get, the more expensive they are to raise.

"We can do millions of fry for pennies," Tellock said.

However, smaller fry are more likely to be lost to predation, lack of food, and even to poor weather.

"It's mostly predation. Even a newly hatched minnow can eat walleye fry."

The New London hatchery gets its brood stock from Lake Koronis, Rice Lake, and Green Lake.

"We find a rocky, sandy area where they spawn, and we put a net out overnight. Most of the eggs we collect locally stay in our area. Some go to Windom, and some go to Ortonville.

We always put in 10 percent equivalent of fry as a minimum. For example, if we take out 100 quarts of eggs from Lake Koronis, we put in 10 quarts of fingerlings."

The New London hatchery has hatched out as high as 70 million fry, Tellock said.

"The percent of eggs that hatch varies depending on the year. This spring was really warm, with ice-out in March. The ice was out, but the day length and amount of light was too short. Getting eggs was a long, slow process, and it may have affected the quality of the eggs."

New London also receives a lot of walleye eggs from Lake Vermilion and the Pike River in northern Minnesota.

"Pike River is a much better natural egg producer, but their ponds aren't as productive," Tellock said. "They're the egg producer, and we're the fingerling producer."

Fertilization is performed at the hatchery, which can provide a much higher survival rate than in the wild.

"We separate the males from the females, and when they're ready to spawn, we take one of these shallow pans and two-to-three females. We squeeze their belly from head to tail, and if they're ripe, the eggs will flow out.

"Then we grab several males, usually three males per female, and squeeze the (sperm) out directly on top of the eggs. Then we add water and gently stir."

A substance that takes the stickiness out of the eggs is added to the slurry. In the

wild, fertilized eggs are sticky so they attach to surfaces in the water.

"You can't have stickiness (in the hatchery), or you get one big ball of eggs," Tellock said. "The eggs won't get oxygen, and they won't survive. Then, we float the eggs in a raceway. That washes off the mud and allows them to water-harden overnight. This takes a minimum of four hours. Once they absorb water, they are pretty tough and can be handled."

During hatching, the water should be as clean as possible.

"Our water comes from the Mill Pond. The intake is on the McBroom Construction side. The water goes through underground boxes and screens keep out most of the vegetation and fish.

"During egg hatch, we use a drain filter with a 100 micron screen. It rotates, and a spray bar cleans off the outside of the screen. When we're hatching eggs, we also use a UV light sterilizer. It's supposed to kill bacteria and viruses."

At the hatchery, up to 90-95 percent of eggs may be fertilized. The rate in nature is 5 percent. The fertilized eggs hatch out in a battery of plastic jars.

"The main thing we need



Photos by Dori Moudry

An enamel pan full of thousands of tiny, almost microscopic, walleye hatchlings at the DNR's New London fish hatchery.

to fight is fungus. The eggs actually are treated with formalin to prevent fungus from growing. The dead eggs are the white ones, and we siphon them off. We have some hospital jars where we try to get some damaged eggs to live."

Egg and fry rates are very similar. Typically, from local eggs, the hatchery will get anywhere from 111,000 to 120,000 per quart.

"They're on the battery for two-to-three weeks," Tellock said. "If the water is warm, it might be nine-to-10 days, but they're not as healthy. About three weeks is ideal."

When the tiny frylings first hatch, their mouth and eyes are not formed. They feed from a yolk sack until their mouth, eyes, and digestive system develop.

After the frylings hatch, they are put into the water raceways, and then seined out into 5 gallon plastic containers, if they are going to travel. Oxygen is pumped into the tops of the containers.

"They can go into the ponds after the day they hatch," Tellock said. "Usually, we bring them out after a couple of days.

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