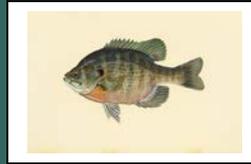


D. Raver

Fish Stocking?



Seining to catch young-of-year fish to assess reproduction



A well balanced fish population has a range of fish sizes and ages.



Stocking striped bass hybrid fingerlings at Lums Pond.



For more information on fish stocking contact:

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What is the first question that many anglers ask? “When was this pond/river/creek stocked last?” Historically, most anglers kept their catch and there was a greater need to maintain fish populations through stocking. However, with the widespread popularity of catch and release, stocking is not usually necessary except for specific reasons.

When is stocking needed and how do you know? First an assessment of the fish community is conducted to determine species composition, growth, reproduction and condition (‘plumpness’). One method that Division biologists use to sample Delaware’s freshwater fish populations is an electrofishing boat. The fish collected are measured, weighed, and counted. A range of sizes and ages is indicative of a balanced population. If low numbers of juvenile fish, particularly largemouth bass and bluegill, are noted, additional sampling will be scheduled. This involves using a beach seine to capture young-of-year (less than 1 year old) fish between July and September to assess successful reproduction. If natural reproduction is poor, stocking may be scheduled to supplement the population.

Poor reproduction is common in some of Delaware’s freshwater tidal streams such as the Nanticoke and Broadkill Rivers. The negative impact of tidal currents and heavy silt loads on nest-builders such as largemouth bass can reduce success. Largemouth bass fingerlings are stocked annually into these two river systems. Adult bass are collected from the Nanticoke River and allowed to naturally reproduce in small ponds at a hatchery. The resulting fingerlings are collected and stocked into the rivers.

Another common reason for fish stocking is due to a catastrophic event such as a dam wash-out or emergency water level reduction in preparation for an approaching storm (to minimize flooding). Reducing the water level or draining the pond can result in the escapement of a large number of fish. In those cases, stocking is necessary to rebuild the fish community.

Some species do not reproduce well naturally and must be stocked to maintain a population. This is the case with striped bass hybrids which are stocked periodically into Lums Pond to provide an additional gamefish for the angling public in this heavily fished pond.

If the fish community is well-balanced, stocking additional fish can result in slow growth and poor condition. The fish are competing for resources and if the population is too dense, there is less food available. For example, too densely populated largemouth bass can greatly reduce the prey population (such as sunfish) and result in underweight bass with slower than average growth. Conversely, overpopulated sunfish can impact the recruitment of bass because they eat bass eggs and fry. It’s a delicate balance!

So, the next time you wonder if your favorite fishing pond or river was last stocked, ask instead if the fish population is balanced and the habitat suitable. If they are, then there is normally no need for stocking due to the tremendous potential of natural reproduction.