

Lake trout released by Coe Hill School



Coe Hill Public School students release small lake trout into Wollaston Lake after school on May 18. In a North Hastings Wildlife Association project, the fish fry were raised in a special set up at the school for five months where student took daily notice and interest in the progress to the release date. / JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

On Thursday, May 18 after school was out, a small troop of Coe Hill Public School students, parents, staff and members of the North Hastings Wildlife Association (NHWA) carried pails of small lake trout to be released into Wollaston Lake at Red Eagle Campground beach.

For the fourth year in a row, Coe Hill School has hosted this project, where fish hatchlings are donated by the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery, and then grown to release size in a 30-gallon aquarium in the hallway near the principal's office. This is not just any old aquarium, according to NHWA member and organizer Jim Bamford. Due to the needs of the fish, the aquarium must have air circulation, and a chiller to keep the water cool. The \$2,000 needed for the equipment was raised by NHWA in 2014 with a special fundraising dinner.

The original fish eggs are harvested by the Ministry of Natural Resources from Weslemekoon Lake, and hatched at the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery. This year, 100 tiny hatched fish (fry) were donated to the school project in early December to be carefully fed and monitored in the school aquarium for their five months before release. A total of 60 fish survived the five months. "That's pretty good," said Bamford, who holds a permit from the MNR for this project.

Due to the central location of the aquarium in the school, the students pass by the fish many times every day. Corrina Massey, school principal, noted that it was a big attraction for the students, who had lots of great questions and conversations throughout the time the fish were at the school.

In addition to raising awareness of the natural environment and conservation, students honed their counting skills and practiced calculating the percentage of surviving fish.

As for Bamford and the group of NHWA volunteers: "We plan to be back again next year," he said.