

Hatchery fishing for a new school of volunteers



Bancroft This Week stopped in at the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery to see what volunteers are working on as the lakes thaw. From left, volunteers Vic Bodnar and Ron Howson load brown trout into a tub in the back of a truck. These fish are to be stocked at Eels Creek. / JAKE STOREY Student reporter

By Jake Storey

On a cloudy Tuesday morning, volunteers at the North Hastings Community Fish Hatchery prepare to release 1,480 brown trout into their new habitat. Tuesdays are the busiest day at the hatchery. A team of six men scoop nets full of fish and transfer them into large buckets, loaded into the back of a truck.

‘This is our first time releasing brown trout,’ said Ron Bowman, the hatchery’s fish culture manager. ‘We’ve got an overcrowding situation in one of the tanks. So we’re putting the brown trout in Eels Creek. We can get them into Eel Creek now because the water’s open. So that will free us up one tank and we can start splitting up some of the fish in the other tanks where we have overcrowding.’

The hatchery is run almost entirely by volunteers. With stocking season here, they’re looking for more.

When asked how many people they needed, longtime hatchery volunteer Hendry said, ‘As many as we can get. There’s a lot of duties around here.’

He added, ‘The hatchery is at capacity right now. We have over 20,000 fish.’ With so many fish awaiting release into the local waters, the requirements to maintain the site can be high.

The number of fish at the hatchery has pushed the volunteers to get an early start on the releasing them into the water, according to Bowman.

‘Normally, we wouldn’t start stocking for another month? We have to wait until there’s no more than a five degree separation between the temperature in the tank and the temperature of the lake where we’re going to stock them.’

The hatchery has been in the area for over nine years and is in need of assistance to ensure its success and longevity.

One of Hendry’s concerns is the fact that majority of the volunteers they have on a week to week basis are getting older.

‘I’m the youngest guy here and I’m 52. Most of our volunteers are in their 60s. It makes me worry for the future of the hatchery.

What’ll it be like in 10 years? That’s why we’re trying to encourage younger people to get involved.’

‘Volunteers come in mornings and afternoons each day of the week,’ Bowman explained. ‘They feed the fish and clean their tanks.

There’s also systems checking and testing on the tanks for dissolved oxygen content and water temperatures.’

There are close to 30 volunteers on the hatchery’s list, but during this crucial season, many of them are down south for the winter.

‘We usually manage to get to the job done,’ added Bowman. ‘We have a lot of help from the MNR [Ministry of Natural Resources

and Forestry] and their biologists. If we run into a situation or a problem with the fish, we can always call on their people ? We talk to them on a fairly regular basis and they give us their expertise.?

?What makes our hatchery unique is that we recirculate the water, which results in higher water temperatures and much bigger fish,? said Hendry. ?Our fish are four to five times larger than fish grown in traditional, flow-through hatcheries.?