

This is a very fishy story

text and photography by Walter Horylev

It was a cold and rainy afternoon Friday, April 14, but that didn't stop about 30 spectators from gathering to watch as 7,350 steel-head trout fingerlings were pumped out of a tank into two floating fish pens at Sandy Creek Marina. The Pen Rearing project has been going on for about eight years along Lake Ontario, from the Niagara River to Oswego and one location in Canada. Part of a NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) operation, the fish are transported in a tank truck from Salmon Creek Fish Hatchery in Altmer, NY.

According to Sandy Creek Marina's new owner, Bruce Butcher, the marina last participated in 2003. "We are re-establishing the procedure at this location," he said. "It takes a lot of community involvement, since the fish have to be tended six times a day for three weeks. Volunteers do all the work -- feeding, cleaning and tending the fish."

The Sandy Creek operation is unique because there is no direct access to the creek to pump the fish into the pens. "We enlisted the help of Boy Scout Troop 90 from Chili," Butcher said, "to assist in towing the pens to a location on Sandy Creek, just south of the marina channel, and anchoring them next to a new dock. There the fish will go through a smolting process which gives them a sense of place, a home. Those that survive should come back to this location to spawn."

The fish will double in size before being released. "The pens will be towed out into Lake Ontario where the water temperature is about 54 degrees," Butcher said. "By doing this at night, we'll minimize the impact of fish and bird predators."

Local project coordinator Bob Holden said that using the pens increases the survival rate of the yearlings by a factor of seven. The pens used in the project were constructed several years ago by students at WE-MO-CO." Additional help came from Interstate Batteries and Gander Mountain to donate equipment and help. Nothnagle Drilling Inc. helped load the pens into the water and Pizza Shack donated pizza for the scouts who helped prepare the site and build the new dock. The students in a SUNY Brockport class taught by Dr. Haynes volunteer their help in feeding and cleaning the pens.

Note: Photographer Horylev thanks Bob Holden and his son, Bill, who offered a boat ride which allowed a better vantage point from which to shoot these photographs.



Top, the fish are pumped into the pens. The boy scouts from Troop 90 in Chili and volunteers helped transport the fish pens to a newly constructed dock on Sandy Creek, just south of the Sandy Creek marina channel.



Troop 90 Scouts **Ryan Moses** and **Arvis Collins** tie down the top screen on a fish pen. The five feet wide by five feet deep by 20 feet long pens are constructed of metal piping and mesh, with poly tubes for floatation.



The first of two pens is maneuvered in place against the new dock and tied securely. Here the fingerlings will be fed and maintained six times a day for three weeks by a group of volunteers. After that time, the pens will be towed out into Lake Ontario at night, to avoid fish and bird predators, and the fish will be released.

