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Release of fish aims to aid lake

Staff Report

About 10,000 walleye fingerlings were released Monday into Otsego Lake at Three Mile Point in the village of Cooperstown, according to a member of an agency involved with effort.

The Otsego County Conservation Association provided \$6,000 this year to support the efforts of the State University College at Oneonta's Biological Field Station, said OCCA assistant director Teresa Winchester. About 40,000 walleye fingerlings will be released this summer at several locations in the lake, according to a release from OCCA.

The effort has been ongoing since 2000, with the support of the Gronewaldt Foundation, the state Department of Environmental Conservation and OCCA.

The Biological Field Station is restocking the lake to control the invasive alewife _ a species of herring _ and improve the lake's ecological balance, according to the release.

The walleye is a game fish historically popular in Otsego Lake, the media release said. By the 1970s, the fish had disappeared because of the accidental introduction in the '50s of the cisco, a fish that preys heavily on walleye fry.

In the mid-1980s, the alewife was illegally introduced into the lake, according to the release.

Since alewives are highly effective at consuming microscopic zooplankton, they decimated the larger plankton, and algae in the lake went unchecked, said Biological Field Station Director Willard Harman in the release. This led to reduced water clarity and lower oxygen levels in deeper waters, he said.

Harman did not return a couple of calls for comment.

Evidence of the success of the program _ which began in 2000 _ was seen in the fall of 2002, when the state Department of Environmental Conservation set out gill nets, according to a media release.

"We were at the numbers and size of the walleye," said Matt Albright, assistant to the director of the Field Station.

"The abundance of larger zooplankton has increased substantial, and their mean size is larger," Harman said in the release.

"Transparency and deep water oxygen declines are also somewhat improved after 15 years of gradual decline," he said.