

Industry Promotion Important At Big Brown Fish Hatchery

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EFFORT (Monroe Co.) — Charles A. Conklin II, founder and proprietor/president of Big Brown Fish Hatchery Inc., has been involved in aquaculture production and marketing since the young age of 11 when he made his first sale of fish he had raised.

The name Big Brown originates from that initial group of fish sold by young Conklin. He had names for 25 of the more distinct fish and had actually started to consider them as his pets. The fish he was fondest of was named Big Brown.

After graduation in 1984 from East Stroudsburg University with a biology major, Conklin returned to make the hatchery a full-time business. While thinking of a name for the business, he remembered that fish named Big Brown and the rest is history.

Conklin's enterprise produces more than 260,000 pounds of Brook, Brown, Rainbow, and Golden trout and about 20,000 Large Mouth Bass each year. The property consists of 31 acres that can be traced to family ownership back to the mid-1800s. Conklin not only operates Big Brown Fish Hatchery



This sign welcomes customers to Big Brown Fish Hatchery and Fish and Pay Lakes, Effort, where customers can enjoy catching large trout and bass raised at the hatchery. Photo by Deanna Cunfer, Carbon Co. correspondent

but also Big Brown Fish and Pay Lakes and Pocono Mountain Fish and Seafood. There are five full-time and five part-time employees.

While the hatchery harvests the eggs from their Brook and Brown trout for hatching, they purchase Rainbow eggs from the state of Washington. Since brood fish used for egg and sperm production are two to three years of age and most trout in hatcheries are sold by the time they are one year old, Conklin does not believe it is economical to keep your own

brood fish, but has not been able to find a reliable, steady source of Brown and Brook trout eggs. Another deterrent is the fact that once a fish has spawned, the fish meat gets soft and isn't as desirable for the prime fillet market.

Once experienced in har-

vesting the eggs and sperm, it takes approximately 30 seconds to handle each fish. Readiness to release the eggs can be determined by feel and sight—a skill that comes with experience. With 90 to 98 percent of the eggs being fertilized, the hatchery has an 85 percent hatch rate. Of those hatched, they have an approximate 70 percent survival rate. The 30 percent lost occurs between the time they are hatched and start to eat—at this age you don't have a lot of money invested in the fish.

If Conklin needs to buy fish from

other sources, he generally requires a health certificate as a preventive measure in avoiding possibly bringing health problems to his fish. Trout are normally tested for Whirling Disease, Red Mouth Disease, and for PCBs.

The hatchery and four lakes included in the pay lake operation are fed by stream water. Ideal water temperature for Rainbow trout is 59 degrees with Brook being 55 degrees. The greatest amount of feed consumed by the trout occurs in April and May. Like other hatcheries in the area, Big Brown purchases the bulk of their fish food from a provider in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Big Brown Hatchery has not experienced damage by runoff into their ponds from heavy rains but does test for pesticide levels which, when elevated, can cause widespread damage to the trout.

Without a doubt the biggest predator problem at Big Brown is the great blue heron. Sometimes there are as many

as 55 at a time at the 16-foot deep pay lake. An occasional otter or mink will pay a visit, with wild ducks stopping by as well. However, loss to birds is by far the biggest problem they experience.

Producing a quality product is only part of running a successful business. Just as important is being able to market that product. With the busy season for the sale of stocking fish starting the end of February when the orders start coming in, the crew works about 24 hours a day, seven days a week from March 15 through May 15, and still can't keep up with filling the orders.

Conklin has three trucks on the road making deliveries of live stocking fish to customers within a 200- to 300-mile radius. A tractor-trailer, a 33,000-pound truck, and a pickup truck with trailer are used to deliver the orders to customers. Orders of fish can total 2,000 pounds or more. Conklin can deliver large

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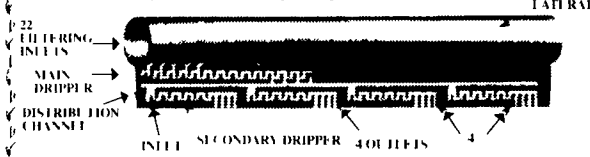
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