



January 8, 2024

Dear Sponsor:

I hope this Cooperative Nursery Unit (CNU) update finds you well as we move into 2024. As with previous years, there were some personnel changes within the CNU over the past year. In May, Josh Keslar left his position as a Fisheries Technician with the CNU to take on a new role with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) as the Benner Spring State Fish Hatchery Manager. Josh's time with the CNU provided him with the necessary training and experience to transition to his new role with the agency. Seeing Josh move on was bittersweet because we are all excited for what the future holds for him, but we are also losing a key member of the CNU. The opportunity for Josh to move into the Hatchery Manager role at the Benner Spring State Fish Hatchery was the result of Doug Hess being promoted from Hatchery Manager to Southern Fish Production Manager. Doug will be closely involved with trout production at our State Fish Hatcheries and his knowledge of trout culture and cooperative nurseries will hopefully result in improvements and increased efficiency for our State Fish Hatcheries and cooperative nurseries.

When one door closes, another opens, which is what occurred when Josh accepted his new role with the PFBC. Elizabeth James was promoted from a seasonal Fisheries Technician to a full time Fisheries Technician, filling the position vacated by Josh. We are all excited to see Elizabeth grow in her new role with the PFBC. With Elizabeth moving into her new role with the agency, we were able to fill the position vacated by Elizabeth with Amber LaGrelus. Amber will begin as a seasonal Fisheries Technician in early May 2024, with her season ending in early January 2025. We will provide additional information, such as contact information, for Amber when she starts with the CNU in May 2024. With the addition of Amber, the CNU will be fully staffed with myself, John Cingolani, and Elizabeth James.

The staff movement did not stop there, in June 2023, Vanessa Walker left her Administrative Assistant role with Fish Production Services (FPS) to take a position with the Pennsylvania State Police. Vanessa's skill set and hard work was an asset to FPS and the CNU and we will definitely miss her at the PFBC. After Vanessa's departure, PFBC staff conducted interviews and selected her replacement. More information will become available when the selected candidate begins with the agency.

At the July 2023 Quarterly Commission Meeting, the PFBC Board of Commissioners approved the Chapter 71a proposed rulemaking, which enacted Chapter 71a as an official regulation on January 1, 2024. As part of the new Chapter 71a regulation, anyone stocking fish into waters of this Commonwealth is required to submit a Notice of Stocking (NOS) to the PFBC prior to stocking. As such, cooperative nurseries are required to submit a NOS to the PFBC prior to stocking their fish. The CNU hosted five regional meetings around the Commonwealth this past fall to discuss the NOS requirement and how to fill out a NOS form. Since then, several letters were sent to cooperative nursery sponsors with information regarding the NOS requirement. Additional information is included with this mailing and the NOS requirement will be part of the 2024 CNU regional seminars, which will begin in January and finish up in March 2024. A separate mailing was sent to cooperative nursery sponsors with a meeting schedule and RSVP. If you did not receive the meeting schedule and RSVP, please let me know

and I will get it to you. When sending in your RSVP, please include any topics you would like for staff to cover during the seminars. We will do our very best to include them in our presentations.

As always, fish health took up a lot of staff time and cooperative nursery sponsor resources in 2023. The CNU responded to a significant number of emergency inspections in 2023. Most were the run of the mill pathogen issues that we normally see. However, those fish health issues were exacerbated by drought conditions associated with below average precipitation and above average air temperatures. These conditions started in early spring and persisted into late fall. This was a recipe for disaster for a lot of cooperative nurseries. Some steps cooperative nursery sponsors can take to mitigate the effects of fish health issues associated with pathogens and environmental factors are to perform salt treatments (0.5% and 1%) to prevent and treat pathogen issues, diligently remove all dead fish in the nursery as dead fish are a reservoir for bacteria and pathogens that can infect otherwise healthy fish, reduce feeding during drought conditions, and maintain a clean rearing unit free of feces and uneaten feed. While these measure may not fully prevent fish health issues, they can aid in maintaining healthy fish and can allow for decreased mortalities over time. As always, if you are experiencing fish health issues, please contact the CNU and we will make a visit to your nursery to conduct an emergency inspection.

New Zealand Mudsnaills (NZM) continue to impact Pennsylvania's waterways, along with PFBC State Fish Hatcheries and cooperative nurseries. As NZM are found in additional waterways, it's important to take precautions and follow biosecurity protocols in an attempt to slow their spread and to reduce the likelihood they make their way into your nursery. Maintaining nursery specific equipment, such as nets, buckets, and boots, is always encouraged. Cleaning and inspecting your stocking equipment for NZM is also something that should be done after each stocking. Soaking equipment in hot water (>120°F) for at least five minutes is an effective disinfection method. Another, highly effective disinfection method is freezing equipment for at least six hours in a freezer. This Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) can be easily moved by unsuspecting anglers, which makes it a threat not only to cooperative nurseries, but to the Commonwealth's aquatic resources.

While there is a lot of information included with this mailing, I encourage you to take the time to read through it. Please take note of the due dates for the various forms and reports. It is greatly appreciated when those forms and reports are sent in on time. If you have any questions or need clarification on anything, please reach out to the CNU.

On behalf of the PFBC, I thank you and your sponsor organization for all of the time spent creating angling opportunities for the anglers of Pennsylvania. As always, if you need to contact me, feel free to call at 814-353-2225 or email at [bmchail@pa.gov](mailto:bmchail@pa.gov).

Sincerely,



Brian McHail, Leader  
Cooperative Nursery Unit