



## Fishing: Montour Run is the latest urban stream added to state trout stocking program

Sunday, January 26, 2003

By Deborah Weisberg

The state has added another urban stream to its trout-stocking list, while Pittsburgh International Airport officials ponder their next move toward greater pollution control.

Montour Run, on the Ohio River, is scheduled to get its first cohort of state-hatched rainbow and brown trout just before opening day, and again later this spring. That will augment what the Forest Grove Sportsmen's Association puts in each year.

It is a vote of confidence by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission in the stream restoration effort that began nearly a decade ago when changes were ordered in de-icing practices at the airport, and environmentalists gathered forces to make other watershed improvements.

"There's still some distance to go, but the stream has come a long way," said commission biologist Rick Lorson, who expressed concern that the harsh winter could take a toll on Montour Run, which is still rebounding from half a century of airport runoff.

Though the new airport was built with special de-icing pads, 60 percent of the material used on planes and virtually all of the de-icer used on runways still flows into Montour Run via Enlow Run and McClaren Run, according to Terry Pallas, the Department of Environmental Protection's water quality operations chief. Though materials are now less toxic than those used up to 10 years ago, runoff can cause a foul-smelling bacteria to flourish in spring as a white cottony mass on the surface of the water and as black septic areas on the bottom of the stream, threatening fragile aquatic life.

Lorson first electro-shocked Montour Run in 1991 and again five years ago, with mixed results.

There were fewer species the second time around -- 10 instead of 14. "That raised a flag," Lorson said, "though it could have been the drought." But there also were two new species -- the rainbow darter and the longnose dace -- bait fish which don't survive in badly degraded water. That was a good sign, said Lorson, and so was the presence of rainbow, brook and brown trout, planted for put and take each spring by the Forest Grove Sportsmen's Club on a 2.2 mile stretch starting at Hickman Road. Also in Montour Run's favor is its habitat and easy angler access. "It has a good riffle-pool ratio, and nice deep pools to hold stocked trout," said Lorson.

They were all reasons the state decided to stock, said Lorson, a longtime champion of urban fisheries. "We expect a high number of angler trips, maybe a couple of thousand visits this year, based on what we're going to put in, and the location of the stream. It's a pretty exciting prospect."

The same section the sportsmen's club plants will receive 1,120 rainbows, 480 browns and 10 trophy goldens, April 10. Another 900 will be added at midseason.

Montour Run is a transitional stream, meaning it supports both cool and warm water species. "We swam in Montour and fished for bluegill, smallmouth and carp," said Island Firearms' Wayne Lykens of his childhood in Robinson Township in the 1950s, just after the original airport was built. The mouth of the creek is a popular Ohio River fishing spot, with a diversity of species who sometimes find their way upstream. As water quality continues to improve, this should happen even more, Lorson said.

Montour Run winds for 12 miles from its headwaters in Findlay and North Fayette townships northeast to the Ohio River. It meanders from Routes 22/30, through Imperial, past the airport, under the Parkway West, and the Route 51 Bridge, to the river. Alongside is the Montour Trail, a \$20 million, 50-mile project that eventually will connect Coraopolis to Clairton and join the Youighioghney River trail in McKeesport.

It was during development of the trail in the early 1990s that Montour Trail Council co-founder Stan Sattinger, of McDonald Borough, noticed erosion along Montour Run. He helped form the Montour Run Alliance, which secured \$100,000 in state funds to identify the watershed's problems and raise awareness. A study confirming the stream's viability by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers water quality specialist Mike Koryak bolstered the Alliance's resolve and attracted other environmentalists. Two years ago, the Montour Run Watershed Association took the lead in restoring Montour Run, its feeder streams and adjoining land within the 47-mile watershed that includes Moon, Robinson, North Fayette, and Findlay townships, and Coraopolis.

Stream erosion and pollution remain equally serious problems. The MRWA spent half of a \$100,000 Growing Greener grant on installing big limestone boulders to stabilize the stream bank, and will invest the other half on mine drainage remediation, said Sattinger.

While mine drainage and the effects of urban sprawl are common problems on urban streams, in the case of Montour Run, they have paled in comparison to damage done by airport de-icing practices.

When the new airport opened, it included de-icing pads with drains and vaults to catch and store spent fluids -- but only from planes. De-icer was eventually switched from ethylene glycol, the substance used in car radiators, to propylene glycol, benign enough to be found in shampoos, said Kevin Gurchak, the airport authority's environmental compliance manager. But, as Pallas said, 60 percent eludes impoundment.

The airport also got rid of the highly toxic urea used, along with ethylene glycol, to de-ice runways--and the culprit in fish kills in years past -- in favor of de-icers like those sold in hardware stores for sidewalks, said Gurchak. However, all of it is allowed to escape into Montour Run, via McClaren and Enlow Runs.

Over the past two years, 200,000 gallons of potassium acetate, plus 110 tons of solid sodium acetate and sodium formate, have poured into the stream, along with much of the plane de-icer that escapes impoundment. The DEP is now considering an airport authority proposal for a more comprehensive fluid collection system, said Pallas. "It's hard to collect all fluids. The jet blast from planes alone spreads deicing material. We're happy with the airport's cooperation. But there's still work to be done."

"We hope it's not going to be bad enough to put off the stockings, or create an on-again, off-again stocking problem," said Lorson.

Gurchak and Pallas say it won't.

Meanwhile, the MRWA will continue with its efforts, especially mine drainage mitigation and plantings of trees that will help stabilize the bank and eventually shade water, enhancing habitat for trout. And water will undergo monthly testing. "The quality is impaired," said Sattinger. "We started doing bug counts, kicking up rocks and netting whatever we can stir up. Aquatic life is limited, but it has gotten better."

[Back](#)

---

Copyright ©1997-2010 PG Publishing Co., Inc. All Rights Reserved.