

Lake George Trout and Salmon Getting a Fresh Look

By Anthony F. Hall

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If the fishing on Lake George improves over the course of the next few years, anglers may have an unlikely benefactor to thank: RPI's Darrin Fresh Water Institute.

According to Dr. Sandra Nierzwicki-Bauer, the executive director of the Darrin Fresh Water Institute, the research facility has been awarded a grant from the Helen V. Froehlich Foundation to launch a study Lake George fish and their habitat.

"Fish and fishing are critical to Lake George, and thus far it's been a missing component of our work here," said Nierzwicki-Bauer. "Our capabilities for studying fish have grown through our work on other Adirondack lakes, and our goal is to deploy those capabilities for the benefit of Lake George."

Using hydroacoustics and underwater videography, Darrin's researchers will begin to assess the status of Lake George's lake trout and salmon populations, Nierzwicki-Bauer said.

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Jeremy Farrell, a doctoral candidate at RPI, will conduct the research as part of his Ph.D. thesis, said Nierzwicki-Bauer.

“The concept of the study is excellent,” said Bill Schoch, the Department of Environmental Conservation’s regional fisheries manager. “With traditional sampling gear, it’s really difficult to get hard data on either predators like lake trout and salmon or forage, such as smelt.”

That hard data will assist DEC in formulating policies for Lake George fisheries, said Schoch.

“With better data about fish abundance, our policies on stocking, size limits and creel limits will be refined,” said Schoch.

Nierzwicki-Bauer said she was pleased that the study would have practical applications.

“One of our goals at the Darrin Fresh Water Institute is to collect information that’s useful to policy makers,” said Nierzwicki-Bauer.

According to Emily DeBolt, the secretary of the Lake George Fishing Alliance, more precise information about Lake George fish populations, of the kind that the Darrin Fresh Water Institute’s studies are expected to yield, would have been of use to the DEC earlier this year, when it contemplated allowing smaller lake trout to be taken from Lake George.

“One of the reasons why people didn’t support that proposal was because they felt there wasn’t enough information about what was going on,” said DeBolt.

That proposal would have reduced the minimum length of a legal lake trout from 23 inches to 21 inches.

According to DeBolt, it was thought by some that the salmon population might benefit if fewer lake trout were competing for forage. That proposal has been shelved, said the DEC’s Bill Schoch.

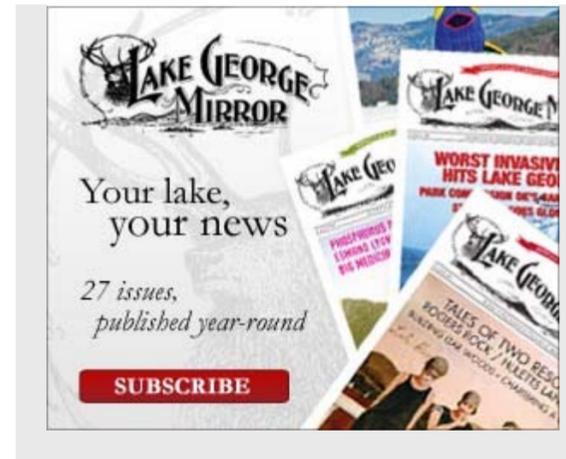
The study could also provide base-line data about the health of Lake George’s fish populations before more invasive species are introduced to the lake, said DeBolt.

“The Alewife and the Spiny waterflea, for instance, could have profound impacts on Lake George fisheries,” said DeBolt. “If and when they do arrive, we won’t be able to assess those impacts without detailed information about current populations.”

According to Nierzwicki-Bauer, a major component of the study will be a comparison of fish populations in healthy sections of the lake with those in the so-called “dead zones,” the water quality-impaired areas in the south basin.

“With that kind of data, we could have a much better idea of how land use practices are affecting ecological systems in the lake,” said Lake George Waterkeeper Chris Navitsky.

“Fish life is a major indicator of water quality,” said Peter Bauer, the executive director of The Fund for Lake George “We often hear from local officials that there’s no evidence of environmental damage to the lake. Perhaps the best way of telling that story is through the fish.”



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