

Fish Habitat Activities at Connors Lake: Ed Peters

Do you remember the morning of January 26, 2019? The day was clear and according to my thermometer it was -26 at dawn. Thankfully, it had “warmed” to almost -20 when I left the house to help out with a spawning habitat project on Connors Lake. After a hot cup of coffee and a donut at the Flambeau Forest Inn an enthusiastic group of us drove over to the boat ramp area at the north end on Connors Lake to spread 15 cubic yards of cobbles (fist sized rocks) on the ice in an area where Walleye have been seen spawning over the years. When the ice melts, these rocks will drop to the bottom of the lake in this area and hopefully augment the spawning success of Walleyes using this area. This was a joint effort of the Connors Lake/ Lake of the Pines Lake Association and the Walleyes for Tomorrow chapter from Phillips and other lake associations from Price County.

The concern is that even though spawning has been witnessed here, the fall surveys of young of the year Walleye have found lower numbers of small fish than are expected. Similar additions of rock to spawning areas in other area lakes, like Solberg Lake, north of Phillips have shown benefits to the numbers of young of the year Walleye that show up in fall surveys. Will this have the similar results for Connors Lake? Only time will tell. In addition, members of the Connors Lake / Lake of the Pines Lake Association will be working with each other and the fisheries staff of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to monitor the use of this spawning area and the population of small Walleyes that recruit to the population.

As an extension of this project representatives from six lake associations and Walleyes for Tomorrow met at the DNR office at Park Falls. The meeting was hosted by Jeff Scheirer, DNR fisheries biologist and featured Dr. Greg Sass and Dr. Stephanie Shaw who are both research biologists with the Wisconsin DNR. Both Greg and Steph have done detailed work on a variety of fish species and they presented some ideas on projects that could help understand what may be limiting the success of Walleye spawning in lakes here in Sawyer and Price Counties. They also cautioned that research takes time and careful evaluation to answer the questions that we are trying to address. To be statistically reliable, experimental manipulations need either a separate control or pre and post experimental study periods.

The group agreed that the next step will be for Greg and Steph to propose the details of a research project and for the representatives of the lake associations and Walleyes for tomorrow to ask their respective members to commit to participate in the research, along with graduate students and technicians working with the DNR. So, stay tuned for more information and action that can help us understand how we can solve challenges to the lakes and fish populations that we treasure.



Cobble (fist sized) rocks spread near a shoreline Walleye spawning area at Connors Lake on January 26, 2019 as part of a habitat improvement project.

When the ice melts, this spring, the rocks will drop to the bottom where it is hoped that this will improve the spawning success for Walleyes in the lake.