Partnership Hopes to Catch... The Hatch of a Lifetime

by Matt Swayne

People who love to fish will tell you there is no feeling quite like the snap of a rod when a striped bass hits the line. It's a big, powerful, and smart fish that can sometimes outmaneuver or overpower even the best angler. You can ask Sparky Price who caught the current state record striped bass at Raystown Lake, a 53 pound, 12 ounce monster caught in 1994. To give you some idea, Price's trophy catch is about the same weight as an average bulldog and, according to lots of anglers, the striped bass has just about the same fight as that pugnacious dog breed.

While small and large-mouth bass are fairly common in Pennsylvania's other lakes and waterways, striped bass find optimal conditions in Raystown Lake. Deep water provides cool water, even on hot summer days.

For Tara Whitsel, a park ranger at Raystown, and members of the Pennsylvania Striped Bass Association (PSBA), the striped bass is a trophy fish for another reason. It's part of the lake's fishing heritage, one that a unique partnership of federal, state and public organizations work hard to preserve.

Photo by Liza Parks, www.Raystown.org

"The species itself is one of the most sought-after fish for anglers," said Whitsel. "A lot of that has to do with the size of the striped bass, but also because there are so few lakes in Pennsylvania where you can find the species."

Whitsel says that the PSBA is a critical partner in keeping the striped bass as part of Raystown Lake's unique angling legacy. The non-profit club was organized to preserve the striped bass in landlocked lakes, like Raystown Lake. Members have created their own nursery that will help augment the 100,000 fish that the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission already add to the lake each year.

Whitsel said that 100,000 fish may sound like a lot, but these 3-4 inch juvenile fish -- or fry -- don't all grow to be trophy-sized striped bass. It's also really expensive. In the past, groups have spent about $500,000 purchasing fingerlings to stock Raystown Lake.

Club members suggest that the nursery will not only add more fry into the lake less expensively, but that they can add larger and more mature 3-4 inch fingerlings, which can increase the chances of survivability. The PSBA invested in several 500 gallon tanks and larger 1,200 gallon tanks for various spawning methods, said Nelson Wert, a PSBA member.

"Through the assistance and under guidance of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commision, we start collecting fish for spawning in April and May," said Wert. "The spawning season for striped bass is usually finished by mid June."

The recent stocking effort is boosting members' confidence that the program will be successful. "I'd say we're having our first taste of success," said Whitsel.