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JERRY SKRYPZAK/Contributed photo

Central Tech students complete a porcupine crib for Lake Erie.

Pennsylvania fish cribs are biodegradable

The Pennsylvania porcupine crib was the first artificial habitat structure designed in the commonwealth that used new, long-lasting biodegradable materials. By 1993, the porcupine crib had replaced most other off-shore structures, which had been made of coarse brush and tires, in 99 percent of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission-approved habitat improvement projects in Pennsylvania impoundments.

By the spring of 1995, more than 2,000 Pennsylvania porcupine cribs had been placed in commonwealth reservoirs.

Porcupine cribs are long lasting, deep-water, complex structures designed as a refuge-type habitat where abundant, deep-water, submerged aquatic vegetation is lacking. They provide protection for juvenile fish and improve

recruitment of panfish and game fish. Their construction uses rough-cut, true-dimensional, green (fresh-cut) hemlock or poplar and eight two-core eight-inch concrete blocks, which weigh 35 pounds each.

Structures are submerged in 10- to 15-foot depths along the bottom contour, parallel to the shore. Normally, 10 to 20 porcupine cribs are placed in a row or alternating row pattern, with four- to eight-foot spaces between individual structures. A typical placement density is 20 structures per acre.

All fish structures placed in Pennsylvania waterways require state and federal permits and landowner permission. You can download a fish habitat management pdf at http://fishandboat.com/water/habitat/lake_fish_hab.pdf

— Anna McCartney



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Neighborhood Art House students admire their sunflowers.

Sunflowers brighten neighborhood's corner

Our Green Team at the Neighborhood Art House has adopted the lot at the corner of East 10th and Parade streets. We plant flowers, pull weeds and mulch the flower beds and we want to plant more trees to clean our air. We also participated in the International Coastal Cleanup and picked up a lot of litter in our neighborhood, especially cigarette butts.

I joined the Green Team because I wanted to help make the world better. Besides, it is fun to experience working with other kids. Our Green Team plants flowers, tells people about recycling and asks them to please not litter.

— Rickaylah

We like sunflowers because they are pretty; they make us feel good. We feel special when we are with the sunflowers. They are bright and they make us think of the sun. Some of us planted the seeds in July and now they are five- to six-feet tall!

— Nizjanna Bryant, Tamir Magar, Rickaylah Ransom and Lucy Ventura

We joined the Green Team because we like to do good work. We want to make the world better and we love the environment. We want the Earth to be beautiful and we think that we can make people around us happy and help them enjoy their environment.

— Tamir, Lucy and Nizjanna



JERRY SKRYPZAK/Contributed photo

Led by PA Sea Grant Maritime Educator David Boughton, and with direction from a PA Fish and Boat Commission habitat specialist, a group of S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie volunteers and Central Tech students assemble porcupine fish habitat structures.

Hopes for habitats

Artificial homes will aid lake fish populations

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Human activity has reduced the adequate cover and specific habitats that fish need for breeding, feeding and spawning so they can survive and thrive.

So a group of volunteers, led by PA Sea Grant Maritime Educator David Boughton, converged on Lampe Marina on Oct. 2 to build structures to replace lost natural spawning areas in Lake Erie. Directed by Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission habitat specialists, 25 S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie volunteers and Central Career and Technical School teacher Brian Dilusio, 15 students assembled 20 porcupine fish habitat structures in just two hours. An Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority operator loaded the 400-pound structures onto the specially equipped PFBC boat, which moved the structures into Lake Erie and placed them in position.

The benefits to the students, to anyone who enjoys fishing in Lake Erie and to the organisms that call this area home are plentiful. Boughton, who works with area schools to involve students in real-life learning, said: "Working with PFBC and the S.O.N.S., the students learned the value this project brings to local fish populations and the community."

Jerry Skrypzak, S.O.N.S. president, was impressed with the group. "It was an absolute joy to work with the Central Tech students. Their attitude and work ethic was remarkable," he said.

Volunteer-made lake fish habitat projects, which have been part of habitat management for more than 20 years, normally have a three- to nine-year life span, but a few have been in use for 20 years. The engineered structures, which will

mimic the natural environment, could result in healthier, more diverse fish communities. That's good for the fish and for anglers — and for the local economy, which relies on tourism and fishing.

Input from local angler groups, such as the S.O.N.S., has been critical in determining habitat preferences and appropriate locations for artificial habitats. The S.O.N.S. also provided financial support to purchase materials for the project.

Improving fish habitat is not new to the S.O.N.S.; the group constructed and deployed more than 300 similar structures in Presque Isle Bay between 1995 and 2000. This latest round includes the first sites outside of Presque Isle Bay, specifically, the Hammermill cribs area and the South Channel fishing area. A copy of the map showing habitat placements in and around the bay can be downloaded from the PFBC website at http://fishandboat.com/water/habitat/mgmt_plans/lake/presque_isle.pdf

Ben Page, chief of the Fish and Boat Commission's Habitat Management Division, and Skrypzak were excited about extending the range of habitat structures outside of Presque Isle Bay. This initiative is part of a three- to five-year project to lay out habitat structures in designated areas to provide safe havens for breeding and cover to young fish populations.

For more information about habitat improvement, visit <http://fishandboat.com/habitat.htm>.

To become involved in PA Sea Grant education programs, contact Boughton at dbb11@psu.edu or call 720-0746.

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DAVID BOUGHTON PA SEA GRANT

Central Tech students work with S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie to build porcupine cribs.



SARA STAHLMAN PA SEA GRANT

Porcupine cribs are loaded onto a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission "structure boat," which will haul and submerge it in Lake Erie.



JERRY SKRYPZAK/Contributed photo

This boat is in the process of submerging a porcupine crib at a pre-determined site in Lake Erie. All structures placed in state waterways require federal and state permits, and landowner permission.

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Check out these websites to learn more:

<http://fishandboat.com/habitat.htm>
www.habitat.noaa.gov/protection/
www.paseagrant.org/

The sports section of the newspaper often has articles about fishing in local waters and sports groups that work to protect them. Why is this important?

Do you think people care about protecting fish habitat? What about you? Use the websites listed on today's page to learn more about protecting fish habitat. Are you doing anything to improve or protect the environment? Share your ideas for possible publication in the weekly "Your space" feature. Send them to axm40@psu.edu.

