



January 6, 2025

Dear Sponsor:

I hope this Cooperative Nursery Unit (CNU) update finds you well as we move into 2025. Following the trend of recent years, there were some personnel changes within the CNU over the past year. In April, Brian McHail left his position as Unit Leader with the CNU to take on his new role as Division Chief of Fish Production Services (FPS) with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). With Brian's new position in FPS, he now oversees the CNU, the Fish Health Unit, and the Water Quality Unit. This opportunity came about from Brian Niewinski being promoted to Bureau Director of the Bureau of Hatcheries. This has allowed me the opportunity to return to the CNU as Unit Leader from my previous position as Hatchery Manager at the Benner Spring State Fish Hatchery (SFH).

In October, Jessica Trefelner left her position with FPS and the Benner Spring SFH to take on the position as Administrative Officer for the Bureau of Hatcheries located at our Centre Region Office. Jessica was a crucial part of our operation and will be missed by all within FPS and the Benner Spring SFH. After Jessica's departure, PFBC staff conducted interviews and selected her replacement. Danielle Cain has been selected as the new Clerical Assistant for FPS and Benner Spring SFH. Danielle comes to us from the Department of Corrections, and we're excited to have her on board.

As always, fish health took up a lot of staff time and cooperative nursery sponsor resources in 2024. Just like in 2023, the CNU responded to a significant number of emergency inspection. In 2024, the CNU conducted 146 emergency inspections and 44 visits for the delivery of medicated feed resulting in over 34,000 miles of travel. Fish health issues were once again exacerbated by the drought conditions that plagued much of the state. This proved disastrous for many cooperative nurseries as these conditions worsened the effects of the normal pathogens we typically encounter. Some steps cooperative nursery sponsors can take to mitigate the effects of fish health issues associated with pathogens and environmental factors are to perform salt treatments (0.5% and 1%) to prevent and treat pathogen issues, diligently remove all dead fish in the nursery as dead fish are a reservoir for bacteria and pathogens that can infect otherwise healthy fish, reduce feeding during drought conditions, and maintain a clean rearing unit free of feces and uneaten feed. While these measure may not fully prevent fish health issues, they can aid in maintaining healthy fish and can allow for decreased mortalities over time. As always, if you are experiencing fish health issues, please contact the CNU and we will make a visit to your nursery to conduct an emergency inspection.

Unfortunately, due to scheduling constraints the CNU will not be conducting our spring routine inspections during 2025. While we would like to be out to visit all facilities again, the demands of New Zealand Mudsnail (NZM) inspections, emergency inspections, and gill lice inspections limit the availability of CNU staff. As always, do not hesitate to reach out to CNU staff if you need any assistance, we will gladly help in any way we can. The CNU will be looking to conduct our biennial Regional Seminars during the early portion of 2026, we will provide updates and information on these at a later date.

This mailing will be slightly different from previous years as we are going to send out the Annual Report paperwork in March following the due date of the Notice of Stocking (NOS). As a reminder, the NOS has replaced the tentative stocking report required by the CNU, but all NOS submissions are due to the PFBC by March 5th using one of the three submission options. The three submission options currently available are: HuntFishPA, PFBC-NOS-001 Paper Form, and PFBC-NOS-001 Adobe Fillable Form. The annual reports are due on July 15th, and when returning these please make sure all pages are filled out in their entirety and all pages (cover sheet, 2, 2a, and 3) are returned to the CNU.

Following the update to the Cooperative Nursery Sponsor Grant Program in 2022 the PFBC has been able to assist sponsor programs with some large-scale infrastructure projects at many nurseries. For organizations that are looking into larger projects such as replacing a raceway or intake structures make sure you are considering all permitting requirements as well. It's recommended that you work with your County Conservation District, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and local municipalities to make sure all permits and environmental impact studies are planned for. By looking into these ahead of time, costs for these permits can be included as part of the grant application. Also, make sure purchases are following the items/description as provided in Section 6 of the application and all receipts are accounted for. With some of the changes to the grant program, our flexibility to provide a change of scope is limited and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Under most situations the PFBC will request a refund for the unused balance of the grant funding.

While there is a lot of information included with this mailing, I encourage you to take the time to read through it. Please take note of the due dates for the various forms and reports. It is greatly appreciated when those forms and reports are sent in on time. If you have any questions or need clarification on anything, please reach out to the CNU.

The results of this program are unmatched and are a real benefit to the anglers of Pennsylvania. The CNU would like to thank all of you for your hard work and efforts that make the Cooperative Nursery Program what it has become today. I look forward to getting to work with all of you again. As always, if you need to contact me, feel free to call at 814-353-2239 or email at jokeslar@pa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Josh Keslar", written in a cursive style.

Josh Keslar, Leader
Cooperative Nursery Unit