

Honor the Work



Respect the Workers

from Fish culturist, pg. 5

But they're smart: when I pull up in the morning, the herons leave. Then they come back in the evening after we're gone, and they stay here all night.

"One day, a bear came down the mountain from the Rockview prison grounds. He just walked across the bridge, right into the facility, and jumped into one of the ponds and grabbed a brook trout. Just like he'd been here all the time.

"We keep the rainbows, browns and brooks until they're 18 months old. We call them yearlings, but they're really about a year and a half old. We also have brood stock that we harvest eggs from during spawning season; they stay for a while. But generally, between March and May of each year, when the rainbows, brooks and browns are old enough, we load them up in the stocking trucks and stock the streams. The goldens stay here until they're three years old—we keep them until they get to be trophy-size fish."

Leo says he likes his job.

"You work alone a lot, pretty much unsupervised. It's nice when people come and visit, and you have someone to talk to. During football season, if it's a late game, this place is full of people.

"It's a pretty low-stress job, unless it's stocking time. That gets a little stressful, because you're worried about getting the fish out there alive. And you've got to

"It's a great job. You get to work in a nice environment, you're outside. Unless it's really hot or really cold, it's nice."

--Leo Slogasky

worry about disease problems, bacteria gill disease, making sure they get there okay."

Some might wonder whether Leo has any feelings toward the fish, whether he views them as his.

"I never thought about it, really. I mean, we're always trying to keep them alive, keep them healthy. I like to watch them grow up and make it to the next stage, the next size of feed. They're a product, a live

product, and we try to deliver the best-quality product we can. I never thought about having feelings for them."

Maybe not, but he is enthusiastic about taking care of them. There are fish at every life-stage, from tiny orange eggs fluttering around in the fiberglass incubation jars, to inch-long hatchlings who've grown just enough to lose their egg-sacs, to huge tro-

phy goldens. Leo points out one rainbow trout over two feet long.

"He's an escapee," Leo says. An escapee is a fish who somehow works his way from the big part of the tank into the blocked-off end that serves as the cleaning tank. The solids are pushed into this area by the flow of the water through the ponds and are cleaned out daily. "He's been here a while. He's about 30 inches long."

Leo then explains where all those solids, or "fish castings," go: into the extensive system used to clean the water before it goes back into Spring Creek.

"Some people might have a problem with the fact that we put our wastewater back into the stream, but when we put it in, it's clean."

There are two big waste ponds at the north end of the facility, where most of the solids sink to the bottom and are removed. The solids are then donated to the Rockview prison gardens, where the fish castings serve as fertilizer. The water goes through a filtration/treatment program, is sampled repeatedly, and only when it is clean is it put into the creek.

Leo now has to go back to checking the oxygen content of the ponds. "You know, I don't really think about how many different jobs there are to do here until someone comes and asks me about them. We do a lot of different things just in one day. And no two days are ever the same. You've always got new things to deal with, and I like that."

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