

This is what is on the PFBC Page for Big Spring. Dr. Austen has said in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette that we will never know whether it was the hatchery or the habitat that destroyed Big Spring! Really. Read this and then judge for yourself what these people will admit to!

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[Information Paper](#)

[Big Spring Fish Culture Station](#)

[Background](#)

* Beginning in 2002, Big Spring Fish Culture Station (FCS) produces no adult trout for stocking in the waters of the Commonwealth. The last trout were moved from the hatchery during the week of November 5, 2001.

* The Big Spring FCS is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and operated by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

* Big Spring FCS is located on the headwaters of Big Spring Creek in Cumberland County.

* The hatchery produced adult and fingerling trout to provide recreational angling opportunities.

* Big Spring FCS began operations in 1972.

* Production of adult trout began at Big Spring in 1972. Since then, nearly 20 million adult trout have been stocked from the hatchery providing millions of days of recreational angling and hundreds of millions of dollars of economic benefits.

* During its years of operations, Big Spring Fish Culture Station was in compliance with the numerical effluent limits set in its discharge permits.

* The exceptional recreational significance of the fishery below the hatchery was recognized in 1992 when a small section of the headwaters of the stream was classed as an exceptional value waterway.

* For 2001, the hatchery produced over 700,000 adult and about 60,000 fingerling trout for stocking in waters open to free public fishing.

* The annual economic impact for the Commonwealth of the trout stocked from Big Spring FCS exceeds \$20 million.

* The hatchery employs a staff of ten permanent and 2 seasonal employees.

* The hatchery's most recent annual operating budget was about \$725,000 (\$500,000 personnel/\$205,000 operations/\$20,000 fixed assets).

* The temporary closure of Big Spring FCS was done to demonstrate the Fish and Boat Commission's commitment to addressing concerns about impairment of Big Spring Creek related to the hatchery discharge. These concerns were expressed as part of the process for renewal of the site's discharge permit. The Department of Environmental Protection did not approve an interim operations plan for the hatchery, and this led to closure of the facility pending the installation of a recirculation hatchery in the future.

* The Big Spring Fish Culture Station (Cumberland County) is now closed to public visitation. Although active state hatcheries are open to visitors, the Big Spring facility is now in an inactive status.

* The hatchery operated under an NPDES permit issued by the Department of Environmental Protection.

* The PFBC has acknowledged that discharges from the hatchery must be improved since they, coupled with other factors, have had chronic negative impacts on Big Spring Creek and its environs.

- The hatchery has never been cited for exceeding conventional effluent (numerical) limits set forth in its NPDES permit.

- The hatchery staff have never been accused of intentional or negligent actions to pollute or damage Big Spring Creek or its environs.

- Discharges from the hatchery have not resulted in a fish kill or any other acute impacts on the Creek.

Fish and Boat Commission staff will continue to work at the hatchery site for some time. Some of the work will involve preparing the hatchery facilities for inactive status. In addition, the Fish and Boat Commission expects to use facilities at Big Spring for work on equipment for other hatcheries and other fabrication, construction and storage projects. The temporary discontinuation of trout production at Big Spring did not result in the involuntary layoff of any staff. Staff are being assigned other responsibilities within the Commission, and some will continue to have their headquarters at Big Spring.

Big Spring Creek originates from a large limestone spring one mile north of Stoughstown, Cumberland County, and flows northeast to its confluence with Conodoguient Creek near the borough of Newville, PA. The stream is 5.1 miles in length and has a drainage area of at least 12.9 square miles. The watershed with possible influences on the spring source may be larger than the stream's identified drainage area. A variety of land uses occur throughout the drainage basin including, agriculture, aquaculture, and residential development. This stream can be characterized as a fertile limestone stream of low gradient and low velocity. A small section

(less than 700 feet) of Big Spring Creek near the headwaters is classified as an Exceptional Value (EV) water by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection; the remainder of the stream is a coldwater fishery.

The history of the fisheries on Big Spring Creek is open to varying interpretations. Everyone agrees that a significant wild brook trout fishery existed on parts of the creek in the 1940's and earlier. Prior to construction of the Commonwealth hatchery on Big Spring Creek, at least two commercial hatcheries operated on Big Spring Creek. The wild trout fishery has been limited to a small section near the spring for many years.

Sediments in the creek downstream from the hatchery are not exclusively of hatchery origin; there were sediment issues in the creek long before the hatchery opened. The hatcheries have contributed to changes in the location and structure of wild trout populations. It appears that changes in the creek habitat and changes in dam maintenance activities of local farmers who flushed sediment from behind dams also contributed to changes to the structure and location of wild trout.

Over the years, many sections of Big Spring Creek have regularly been stocked with trout. There are non-point sources of pollution on Big Spring Creek. People who are most familiar with Big Spring Creek and its environs relate that changes in the stream and its fisheries occurred long before the PFBC hatchery opened. As early as the mid-1970s, fisheries managers had noted that brown and rainbow trout were encroaching on the reproducing brook trout populations. The size of the area where wild trout are concentrated diminished after the opening of the state hatchery, but it is unlikely that hatchery discharges were the predominant cause. Habitat changes and fish movement after removal of the so-called "fish barrier" from the headwaters area may have contributed to this change.

Fisheries Management

The Fish and Boat Commission is responsible for the management of the fisheries of Big Spring Creek. The PFBC has imposed Catch & Release Fly-Fishing Only (CRFFO) regulations on a section of the Creek. CRFFO regulations are a social program recognizing the heritage of fly-fishing on certain streams. The special regulation area was very popular with trout anglers. The "Ditch" area supported an outstanding population of large brown and rainbow trout. A September 2000 survey resulted in capture of 301 brown trout (3" to 26") and 247 rainbow trout (3" to 24"). There was a very good brook trout population in the Ditch area, with 257 individual brook trout (2"to 18") being captured in September 2000.

Substrate Restoration Study

The PFBC has undertaken preparation of a study plan to examine issues related to the substrate in Big Spring Creek in the area immediately downstream of the hatchery. On December 12, 2002, the Fish and Boat Commission hosted a public meeting to provide a briefing on the concepts for habitat restoration efforts in a one-half mile section of Big Spring Creek from the lower end of the "Ditch" downstream to the site of the old fish barrier.

Wastewater Improvements

The PFBC acknowledged that the existing discharge from Big Spring FCS must be improved. In 1998, the PFBC contracted for an engineering review of the Big Spring waste treatment system. The PFBC hired two independent consultants to assess the waste water system and prepare conceptual designs. The PFBC acknowledges that discharges from Big Spring FCS contribute to (but are not necessarily the sole contributor to) impacts on the benthic macroinvertebrate community of Big Spring Creek. The PFBC is continuing to pursue operational and facility changes at Big Spring FCS to address concerns over the impacts of hatchery effluent on Big Spring Creek. The PFBC has changed the feed formulation at Big Spring and reduced the amount (poundage) of feed by nearly 35%. The PFBC has added oxygenation and improved seals on the raceway cleanouts.

Capital Budget

Act 208 of 2002, passed by the General Assembly in November 2002, includes \$8.25 million to upgrade water treatment and renovate station buildings and utilities at the Big Spring FCS. The Fish and Boat Commission has no plans to proceed with a capital project at Big Spring FCS. The PFBC has stated publicly that it will not even consider moving forward with any projects at Big Spring until after a minimum two-year moratorium on hatchery operations followed by an evaluation of impacts, public participation and input from DEP. Any plan to reactivate the permit for Big Spring would require approval of DEP.

DEP has suggested that any hatchery at this site be a no-discharge recirculation facility. The amount (\$8.25 million) included in the capital project bill was based on the Big Spring Recirculation Study conducted by FishPro. It assumes reconstruction of the facility as a recirculation hatchery. Current cost estimates for a recirculation facility of this type are slightly higher than the amount included in Act 208.

Interim Operations Issues

The last trout were stocked from Big Spring FCS during the week of November 5, 2001. The hatchery is now on an inactive status with respect to trout production. On June 25, 2001, the PFBC announced that it decided to withdraw its proposed interim operations plan for Big Spring FCS and to curtail trout production at the hatchery beginning with the fall/winter 2001 and spring 2002 stocking cycle.

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