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CRAIG MORGAN/CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Premier County Lake Angling Enhancement Plans Underway or Ask and Ye Shall Receive

<HED SUGGESTION>

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Lake Habitat Improvement staff are joined by members of the Friends of Schuylkill Parks and Recreation and Sportsmen’s Advisory Board Members while assessing potential Fish Improvements for fish and anglers

BY CRAIG MORGAN

OUTDOORS WRITER

When Dale Moyer, a Sweet Arrow Lake angler who grew up overlooking the lake, approached a member of the Friends of Schuylkill Parkas and Recreation (FSPR) and Sportsmen’s Advisory Board (SAB) a few weeks ago (when turning in a $100 tagged trout) about a ‘better and safer’ way to access the lakes shoreline, he may not have realized what he set in motion. Sweet Arrow Lake and the associated County Park amenities have become a premier area attraction. That area not only for surrounding Pennsylvania county folks but also some out state visitors.

The boating enthusiasts, especially kayakers and kayak anglers has exploded. ‘The Lake’, as know by locals has always been mainly a warm water fishery. Bass, Crappie, Bluegills, Perch, Catfish, an occasional Musky, Pickerel and loads of Carp join the myriads of waterfowl, Bald Eagles and Osprey fishing or enjoying the waters. A contingent of Carp fishermen claim the lake as one of, if not the go to lake, in the area. Crappies abound and are growing, and are fun for kids and adults to catch.

It wasn’t until the lake became a County Park, after 2001, that trout were stocked. The administration of the lake was turned over to the PA Fish and Boat Commission (PAFBC); a boat access ramp and parking were installed and numerous fish habitat structures including Porcupine Cribs and Rock Rubble Piles were sunk in the lake. The first trout stocking was done by the Northern Swatara Co-op Trout Nursery located on the Evanchalk farm located less than a mile upstream of one of the lakes tributaries. Later, the PAFBC included the lake on its list of trout stocked waters.

About 12 years ago a group of anglers began a fundraising campaign to stock more trout including lunkers (18-to-26-inch trout). The lake was eventually included in the PAFBC Mentored Youth Trout Day and the Friends of Schuylkill Parks and Recreation and Sportsmen’s Advisory Board to the County Commissioners not only enhanced that day for youth but also created a Year-Long Fishing event complete with tagged prize-winning fish. The lunker stocking expanded with huge community support and the lake is stocked with over 220 lunkers annually. This makes Sweet Arrow Lake a ‘hot spot’ destination for many anglers.

Fishing by Boat is popular but shore anglers ‘rule the day’. The lakes shoreline is expansive but access and ease of fishing leaves a lot to be desired in many locations. Sweet Arrow Lake Road runs alongside the lakes northern shore with limited parking areas and difficult access over guardrails. Other ‘good’ fishing spots have steep banks to navigate. “During peak fishing days the shoreline fishing areas are pretty crowded’, said Dave Haubenstine, SAB member. In addition, parking along Sweet Arrow Lake Road and having to cross the heavily traveled road is a challenge, especially having to crawl over the guardrails.

Dale Moyer to the rescue. Dale asked if anything could be done to create fishing ‘platforms’, so anglers could at least set a bucket or chair and access the lake easier. The SAB and FSPR called the PFBC for assistance. A recent visit set in motion a new plan to enhance angling at the lake. The PFBC staff combined a trip to monitor Channel Catfish Nesting Boxes which were installed in the lake a few years ago. \*Note – Preliminary study results indicated the catfish used the nesting boxes almost immediately, however, there has been little evidence of small catfish fry indicating a possible predator problem

So, the planning crew cruised the lakes shoreline recently looking for areas to enhance the angling. Rock saw-tooth type deflectors were the go-to choice to create a jagged edge fish habitat, protect the shore line from erosion and create a smooth flat surface for anglers to access utilizing different size rock and stones. A pier type walkway along the entire lake shore along sweet arrow lake road and safe access to that trail would be the solve all. However, the cost and permitting would be cost prohibitive to the groups. Therefore, the groups, plan to contact Penn Dot to consider allowing ‘breaks’ in the guard rails where the defectors are built so anglers can get off the roadway in a more safe and efficient manner.

So, the initial plans are in motion. Grants will be sought and the FSPR will consider matching funding. The goal is to have all things in place to begin construction next year; Plans, Permits, Funding and a contractor. A brief 3- or 4-foot lake draw down is expected after peak fishing and raining season.

\*Note- Lake dredging is still certainly on the front burner and the county is working towards a plan. One good news report suggests that the lake may legally be restored to its original water size. Even though the groups agree that the existing quality wetlands would not be touched their concern was the potential for the existing pads to be classified wetlands and a significant water body loss if those wetlands could not be dredged. It appears that the county now has more time to seek funding to save the lake.

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