

Trout

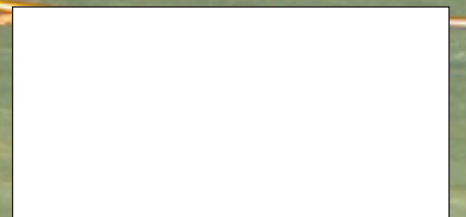


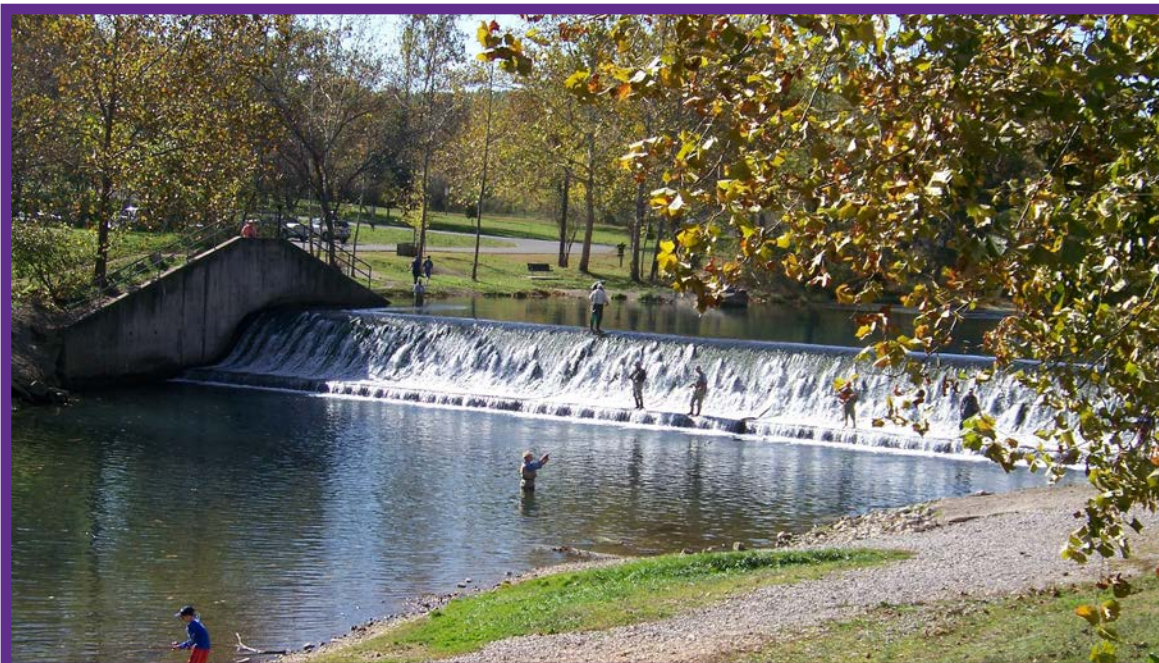
Talk

**From Eggs to
Lunkers**

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OCTOBER 2019





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From Eggs to Lunkers

Bennett Spring Hatchery raises about 350,000 trout every year

CHRIS RODEN • FOR TROUT TALK

In the wild, only one percent of trout eggs survive long enough to grow into trout.

At the Bennett Spring State Park Hatchery, the percentage is much higher but still not 100 percent.

Hatchery Manager Ben Havens said he and Assistant Manager Mike Perry and their crew would be ecstatic if 40 percent of the eggs successfully made it out the door to the raceways.

It is a cycle that begins each fall when spawning happens in the hatchery.

Havens said he keeps a couple thousand brood stock on hand, a mix of three-year-old females weighing in at three to five pounds and two-year-old males at a pound and a half.

The females produce an astonishing number of eggs, one thousand for each pound of body weight.

"A three pound female can give us 3,000 eggs," Havens said.

Consequently, a season's egg harvest is impressive.

"We look to take somewhere between one million and a million and half eggs during a production season," Havens said.

That helps him meet his commitment of 350,000 12 and a half inch fish for stocking the park, the Niangua and some urban areas.

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Hatchery Manager Ben Havens points to some trout eggs in his hand. As they begin developing, the eggs are placed in upwelling jars that stir the eggs much as the current would in a stream. Some of them have both eyes and will soon hatch.

Trout Talk photo/Chris Roden

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Hatchery harvests more than a million eggs



Trout Talk photo/Chris Roden

Ben Havens checks on the occupants of a Heath tray. The eggs are treated with a fungicide to keep them healthy.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

Of the 350,000 fish he must produce, 315,000 go to the Park, 30,000 goes to Kansas City for urban fishing and about 10,000 into the Niangua.

Spawning begins in September and runs through December. In January through April, he receives spring spawn eggs from other partner hatcheries.

Thanks to the spawns and existing fish, Havens said the park could have somewhere around 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 fish of different sizes from an inch to stocker size at any given time.

Havens was excited that 2020's March 1 will fall on a Sunday when historically the highest number of anglers visit the park.

He said from March 1 to October 1, the stream is stocked in some fashion on a daily basis.

How many trout are stocked in the stream is determined by a simple formula.

The anticipated number of anglers times 2.25 pounds of fish determines how many stocker fish of a certain weight are needed.

The anticipated angler total is figured by looking at the average number of anglers in years past.

Weather and area events may make hitting the correct number of fish difficult. However, shortfalls are corrected the next day while anglers get to enjoy any overstocking.

After the March 1 opening, Havens and his crew prepare for the year's three big fishing events: Veterans' Fishing Day in April, Kids' Day on the first Saturday in May and Ladies' Fishing Day on the last Saturday of September.

When Havens began at Bennett, only Kids' Day was observed. He implemented the other two signature events.

"For Veterans' Day we had over 300 veterans this year. For Ladies' Day last year, we had over 600 ladies. I expect it to be much, much bigger this fall," Havens said.

Havens said participation for Kids'

Day is unpredictable because of weather and competing weekend activities.

"Most of the season is pretty laid back. We're just in kind of a groove. We stock every night for the next day, we move fish, we clean fish, we take of the fish growing in the building until they're about four inches and are ready to come outside," Havens said.

They are placed in the raceways where they have ample space, feed and water. As they grow and crowd the raceways, the park crew moves them to other raceways for more space.

How much feed the fish receive is based on their weight.

"If they're not growing enough, we feed them more. If they're getting too fat, we might cut them back and put them on a little bit of a diet. It just depends on what's going on," Havens said.

Havens said he and Perry have the job of overseeing the crew in the day-to-day operations. Perry more often manages the crew while Havens juggles the paperwork, orders supplies and handles PR for the hatchery.

From Memorial Day to Labor Day, Havens has hatchery tours on the first and third Saturdays of the month for individuals and groups.

Havens said he and his crew get in a groove and get surprised by how quickly the big events arrive.

The heaviest stocking months are in the summer when from June until August the crew stock from 45,000 to 60,000 trout.

Once the fishing season ends on October 31, the "trout harvest" begins with urban area stocking.

Warm water hatcheries bring in stocking trucks and the park uses its own stocking truck for the harvest.

"Over the course of a day and half, we'll bring the trucks in, we'll load them up with stocker size trout and they'll disperse those fish in the mid-Missouri and Kansas City areas of the state," Havens said.

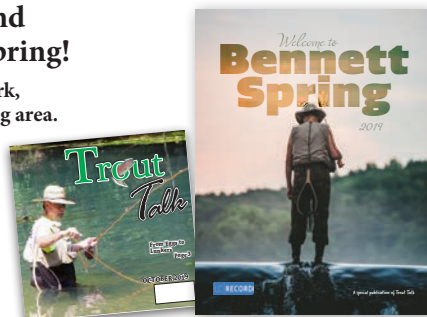
Havens said the trucks have oxygen and aerators to distribute the oxygen throughout the tank.



We are preparing to launch our brand new website dedicated to Bennett Spring!

Catch us November 1, 2019, to learn all about the park, activities and unique businesses in the Bennett Spring area. This is the place to go to plan your vacation at the spring. Feature stories about interesting people and places as well as the Trout Talk magazine will be uploaded for convenient viewing wherever you are.

Visit www.Bennett-Spring.com to plan your next vacation!



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"We can haul about 2,500 big stocker size rainbow trout on that truck. I'm sure it's a wild experience for them," Havens said.

Havens said because the fish are in complete darkness, they are not agitated by passing cars and trees and lights that a windowed truck would allow.

"There's things we can do to calm them down. You can put a little salt in the water at a certain percentage. It's kind of like an aspirin. It calms the nerves a little bit," Havens said.

Havens said the trout are transported once or twice a month November through March for the urban winter fishing season.

Friday through Monday beginning the second weekend in November to the second weekend in February, the winter fishing season happens in the park.

In those cooler months, catch and release fishing with a fly rod is allowed from 8 a.m. through 4 p.m. in any zone in the park.

"There are some anglers that that's they only time the come to Bennett because they don't want to hassle with the crowds of people that they perceive we have," Havens said.

However, even in the park's peak fishing season in the summer, crowds can be avoided.



Trout Talk photo/Chris Roden

Greg Lambeth holds the basket that Clayton O'Quinn will fill with foot-long trout. Lambeth emptied each basket load into another basket on the lower side of the bridge. From it, the trout are quickly pumped through a pipe to lower section where they will soon enter the fishing stream.



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"There's been a few mornings that I've walked over to come to work this week and there's been no one fishing at all," Havens said.

The Niangua River continues to be stocked twice a month the whole year round with 500-900 fish per month. The trout that avoid park anglers' lures join them.

Havens said he trades fish with other cold water hatcheries as needed because of flooding and such.

"We work together and try to help each other out as best we can," Havens said.

Havens lives in the park and shares on-call duties with Perry. They respond to requests by the crew in the park.

Havens said some of his nine-man crew is the park 24/7 throughout the year to see to the trout, including holidays.

"We rang in the New Year during a flood. We were all up at the intake and we honked the horn a couple of times and kind of looked at each other like 'Man! There are so many other places we would rather be,' but we were here helping the trout and keeping them safe," Havens said.

Anglers reap the benefits of Havens and his crew's work ethic.

While the percentage of trout eggs that survive in the wild is just one percent, the percentage of anglers who come to Bennett Spring State Park and enjoy themselves runs high.



Trout Talk photos/Chris Roden
Top left, Greg Lambeth empties a basket of trout into a huge basket that feeds a pump-powered trout pipeline. It runs to a section much closer to the fishing stream for weekend stocking. Above, trout exit the pipe and splash into a raceway for later transfer to the stream.

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A walk in the park

There's a lot more to do at Bennett Spring State Park than fish for trout

Each month Trout Talk features a different trail at Bennett Spring State Park.

This month we take a look at the Whistle Trail, which is named for the low-water bridge that connects the main park to the picnic area. The bridge is so named because of the large tubes that resemble whistles through which the stream water flows. The trail runs along the stream branch most of the time, but allows access to some bluff tops as well.

At the south end, the trail overlaps with Forrest Trail. Whistle Trail divides at the south end of the bluffs, with one side of the trail traveling along the top of the bluff and the other along the base and next to the water. After these two trails reconnect at the north, the trail ascends a steep bluff and then gradually descends toward the picnic area to the north of Whistle Bridge. A short travel through the parking area of the picnic area leads to the continuation of the trail. Traveling north on this section leads through a bottomland area and then hugs the bottom of steep hillsides until connecting at the north end with a parking area near the Niangua River. A bridge at the north end allows for an alternative loop that returns on the linear trail. Several areas along the trail offer good overlooks to the valley.

Much of the tread is narrow, rocky and can be slippery when wet. The trail ascending and descending the bluffs can be treacherous under wet conditions. Only daytime activities are now allowed in the area. Portions of the trail are inaccessible during high water. The length of the trail is one mile with an estimated hiking time of 45 minutes one way. The north trailhead is off of Bramwell entrance road at the bottom of the hill.



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Whistle Trail

Length: 1 mile

Blazes: Red

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Rating: Moderate

BENNETT SPRING STATE PARK AND SURROUNDING AREA



Get in the zone



Take a look at Bennett Spring State Park's rules and regulations

FISHING REGULATIONS

The spring branch is stocked daily during the regular fishing season, which is March 1 through Oct. 31. Daily permits are required to fish on the spring branch and zones are set aside for different kinds of lures. Permits are available at the park store. For more information, call (417) 532-4307.

ZONE 1: From the hatchery dam upstream to the end of the area. Only flies are permitted.

ZONE 2: From the hatchery dam to the whistle bridge. Only flies and artificial lures are permitted.

ZONE 3: From the whistle bridge to the Niangua River. Only soft plastic bait (unscented), natural and scented bait are permitted. All flies and artificial lures are prohibited, even if natural bait or scent has been added.

Zone areas are marked in the park and maps are also available in the Park Store.

Trout Fishing Hours

April: 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

May: 6:30 a.m. to 8:15 p.m.

June and July: 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

August: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

September: 7:30 a.m. to 7:15 p.m.

October: 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

PARK HOURS

Park Grounds: Sunrise to one hour past sunset, daily

DINING LODGE HOURS

7 a.m. to one hour after the whistle during trout season

NATURE CENTER HOURS

Feb. 25 through Oct. 31
10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday

Nov. 1 through Feb. 24 - Closed

PARK OFFICE HOURS

SUMMER HOURS (On-Season)

Feb. 25 through Oct. 31
8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday
Closed on state holidays

STORE HOURS

One hour before fishing officially starts through one hour after the regular fishing day ends according to the regular schedule daily during trout fishing season at the park

Fore...

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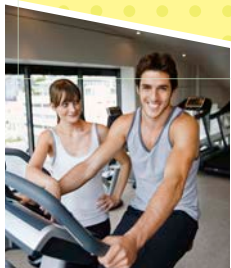
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