

Migisi Fish Hatchery

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By Paul Cormier

For many years, Leonard Dokis has looked out over Riverview Marina, and then past it, and out to the islands and bays reaching into the horizon of the Upper French River, waiting for that that moment in the Spring when the ice breaks up and sinks into the blue black waters.



He walks the roads and paths of the marina and shoreline, carefully surveying the boats, the docks, the trees, the wind and the ever changing water levels to see what damage winter has wrought. It is the ritual of spring at the marina. But there is one thing on his mind that is not so obvious, his natural love for the pristine wilderness and his commitment to it, because as he looks out, he is thinking about the spring spawn on the river and playing his part in the cycle of nature. For over 20 years now, Leonard has operated the Migisi Fish Hatchery which he created

with some funding and support from the Ministry of Natural Resources back in 1989. Today, and for the past few years the MNR no longer funds such initiatives but that hasn't stopped Leonard.

Migisi Fish Hatchery (Migisi means Eagle) for the most part is a smallish weathered building that sits on the gravel road near the edge of the marina, but it hides a wonderful story and a burgeoning pride. The pride is in Leonard's eyes and his smile when he talks about it. He is proud of the fact that he designed it and if you have had a chance to see it, it really is ingenious.



The process all starts in the early spring when Leonard, with the help of Wayne & Nick Restoule set up nets on walleye spawning beds down the river. This year was a good year, but that's not always the case since it's hard to tell when the walleye are congregating and sometimes the fish come late to the spawning beds or they spawn early under the ice after a particular long winter.

Once the fish are found through trial and error, the fish are netted and brought into the marina where the males and females are separated into wire mesh holding pens. Each day Leonard and Don Chartrand inspect the pens and the fish to tell if they are ready to spawn.





Once the fish let him know they are ready he takes each female and gently rubs her belly that is pregnant with eggs and she releases her eggs into a shallow bowl of cold water. The male is brought in immediately, usually within a few seconds of the female emptying her eggs and his belly is gently rubbed until he fertilizes the eggs. This must be done within a few minutes or so of the female releasing her eggs or they will not fertilize.

Leonard then uses a special feather to gently stir and fertilize the eggs. He then takes the fertilized eggs and pours them into a tall transparent cylinder, kind of like a giant test tube where water and oxygen are being circulated to encourage the maturation of the eggs into fry.



The whole system Leonard uses is unique because he created his version of the system after observing other methods, with the help of the MNR. Two large elevated water tanks are filled with water from the lake and they feed the gravity fed water circulation system for the eggs to ensure fresh, cold, oxygenated water is constantly circulating around the eggs as they mature into fry. The system can hold up to 12 cylinders, each one containing about 125,000 eggs. This year seems to be a banner year over 750,000 eggs in the hatchery. This is about the same number as last year, 2009.



Once the eggs are fertilized they turn from a pink colour to a darker colour and they begin to absorb their egg yolk as they mature. As each egg matures they swim up the cylinder to the top with the circulating water and empty into a small trough filled with water flowing from each cylinder. The fry empty into tank at the end of the system where all the fry congregate. Once the fry have matured they are then taken out to the Upper French River and released on spawning shoals. In years past to help the lower French River and

when funding was available from MNR some fry were taken by truck in large tanks to a fish pond on Keso Bay Road. This pond could hold up to 700,000 fry. The fry were left in this pond until they mature into fingerlings over a few weeks. Once they reached the stage of maturity approximately 2 ½ inches they are ready for the return to the river. Usually about 60% of the eggs survive to the fry stage.



Each year, Leonard decides when they get returned to the river and gets help from Dan Chartrand to release the fry into the Upper French River. Leonard is proud of the Fish hatchery and despite the fact that the Ministry of Natural Resources no longer funds such initiatives; he continues to operate the fish hatchery. Thanks Leonard, I think we all benefit from your efforts!