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<<http://www.pottsmmerc.com/articles/2009/01/02/news/green/doc495e26524c605898871326.txt>>.

A fishy project

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By Journal Register News Service

SPRING-FORD -- Something fishy is going on at Evans Elementary School in Limerick where fourth-graders are raising hundreds of baby brook trout in a classroom aquarium with hopes of eventually releasing them into the wild this May.

Fourth-grade students in teacher Adria Angstadt's classroom are participating in a statewide initiative called Trout in the Classroom, which is a partnership of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and Pennsylvania Trout Unlimited. The purpose of the project is to teach children what type of habitat is critical for trout to survive in the wild, as well how important it is to protect area water sources so that fish can grow and thrive.

The Spring-Ford students will be responsible for feeding the fish and keeping the 55-gallon aquarium that they live in clean. Throughout the time the trout are in their care, the students will be monitoring water temperature, dissolved oxygen levels, pH levels, and nitrate and ammonia levels, and recording that data in class.

The eggs arrived Nov. 4 and have been kept in a small nursery basket hanging on the tank's wall. Currently, the tank is encased in insulation to keep out light and the temperature is kept chilly (between 50 and 55 degrees) — conditions that are meant to replicate those in the wild. Female brook trout typically lay eggs in sandy areas that are located in deep shade.

Once the small fry fish have survived off their sac (a small bag of nourishment provided by the mother trout) the fish will be released from their basket into the tank.

Students will begin feeding them food provided by the Fish and Boat Commission. They will continue caring for the trout until the spring.

Once the fish are between three and four inches long, they can be released.

Based on what they have learned about trout habitats, students and teachers will investigate which streams in the area will be most suitable for the fish.

The project is being funded by the Evans Parent Teacher Organization, as well as through a Trout Unlimited grant and the Fish and Boat Commission's Sport Fishing and Aquatic Resource Education grants.

The Friends of Mingo Creek group is also involved with the project because members believe it will help educate parents and local decision-makers about the importance of good water quality and the need to plant trees along the streams and head waters.

Alice Lang, who belongs to the Friends of Mingo Creek, noted that a waterway like the Mingo Creek cannot support trout because local development and storm water run-off have affected its temperature and other qualities.

"During heavy rain, rain water is heated several degrees before running off large parking lots and streets into the

Mingo Creek and raises the temperature of the creek so that only species of fish and insects that can tolerate higher temperatures can survive in the Mingo," said Lang.

"Residents that have small streams can help improve water quality by planting native trees and shrubs along the banks of the creek. The trees help to absorb some of the water and hold back sediment, cool the water in summer, and help to absorb some of the pollution before it enters the creek."

In addition to learning about trout habitats, students are learning about the fish's life cycle.

Students from across the state are participating in this project, and can share what they have learned online. Some schools are even using Web cams to record the development of their fish.

The development of Evans Elementary's fish is being charted through Angstadt's Web page, which can be viewed at http://www.spring-ford.net/staff/aangs/trout_in_the_classroom_info.htm.

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