

Program sparks teens' interest in fishing

By [Bob Frye](#), TRIBUNE-REVIEW OUTDOORS EDITOR
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About the writer



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Something unusual happened to Linn Run this month.

The stream — which flows through the state park of the same name just east of Ligonier — gets stocked with brook trout twice each spring by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. This year, it got a third load of fish.

These brookies, though, came from another source.

Eighth graders at Ligonier Valley Middle School raised the fish from eggs and released them into the stream through the "Trout in the Classroom" program. It's a national initiative — 20 years in existence, though in Pennsylvania for just three — that uses fish to teach kids about the importance of clean water and a healthy environment.

"We're trying to get to the younger kids and not only get them interested in fishing, but teach them to be more conservation minded," said Monty Murty of Ligonier, a volunteer with the Forbes Trail Chapter of Trout Unlimited, which partnered with the kids on the Linn Run project.

The program got its start in the West using trout and salmon, but here uses brook trout, the state fish and one that requires a "clean, pristine environment to survive," said Emily Gates, Pennsylvania Trout's outreach coordinator for the program.

"Students who learn what it takes to raise fish in school can then look outside their window and see the conditions that are out there, and make the connection between what they see and what we need in nature, and know that we have to be thinking about things like that," she said.

Schools that sign up for the program get about 300 brook trout eggs in November. Students raise the fish until spring, then stock them in an approved trout water.

It's not easy.

There's some expense involved — a little more than \$1,000 per project — so Trout Unlimited, the Fish and Boat Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Education provide money through grants. Schools are eligible for \$500 each. They're expected to come up with the rest of the money on their own.

There's a lot of work involved, too. The trout's water has to be changed daily, Murty said, even over school holidays, which means volunteers like himself often get called upon when the students aren't around. That water must also be kept suitably cold with a chiller, and students must regularly vacuum the substrate in the tank to remove fish waste.

Students seem to relish the challenge of nurturing eggs into fish, though, said Dave Andrews, a science teacher at Butler Junior High School, where students teamed with the Connoquenessing Watershed Alliance to raise brookies that have or will be stocked in Connoquenessing Creek this year.

"They loved it, absolutely loved it," Andrews said. "They enjoy it in the beginning, when we're talking about why some eggs were viable and others weren't, but when it gets to where they see fish, they get really excited."

Interest in the program has been growing rapidly. Eleven teachers were registered in 2006-07. That climbed to 47 last school year and 93 this school year.

Murty expects the program to continue growing, and for children and the environment to benefit.

"It's a really good program because it educates kids in a way that's fun for them," he said. "And, if teachers use the material that comes with it, it saves the ma lot of work, too."

GONE FISHIN'

A number of Western Pennsylvania school districts have operate a Trout in the Classroom program in at least one of their buildings. The list includes:

- North Allegheny and West Jefferson Hills in Allegheny County
- South Park in Washington County
- Albert Gallatin in Fayette County
- Armstrong and Freeport in Armstrong County
- Greater Latrobe and Ligonier Valley in Westmoreland County
- Indiana in Indiana County
- Butler in Butler County
- Shade-Central City, North Star and Berlin Brothers Valley in Somerset County
- Forest Hills in Cambria County
- Carmichaels and Central Greene in Greene County

Note: Teachers interested in starting a Trout in the Classroom project in their buildings have until June 30 to apply for grant money. For forms and more information, contact the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission at 814-359-5127 or ra-troutclass@state.pa.us or Emily Gates at 814-359-5114.