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[Otsego Lake to be stocked with walleye in hopes they will eat alewife fry](#)

By Tom Grace

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COOPERSTOWN "" In the quest to keep Otsego Lake healthy, the State University College at Oneonta Biological Field Station will again stock the lake with walleye fingerlings.

In June, tens of thousands of the young game fish will be released into the lake, with the hope they will consume alewife fry.

Alewives, which were illegally introduced to the lake in the 1980s, have upset the lake's balance, BFS Director Bill Harman said.

"The alewives feed on zooplankton, which feed on the algae in the lake," he said.

By eating zooplankton "" tiny animals that provide food for larger ones "" the alewives out-compete other fish species, causing their numbers to dwindle.

Plummeting zooplankton numbers also translate into algae blooms, reducing water clarity in the nine-mile-long lake. Then, when the algae die and drift to the lake's bottom to decompose, they reduce the oxygen content of the depths, harming the deep-water fishery, according to Matt Albright, the BFS's assistant to the director.

"There have been a number of bad consequences of having alewives in the lake," he said.

For about a decade, the field station has been trying to control alewife numbers with walleyes, traditional game fish in the lake.

The young walleyes, raised on fish farms, are released into the water soon after the alewives spawn, when alewife fry are the right size for a meal.

"There is a study by Cornell that indicates walleye will continue to eat alewives if they consume them when they're young," Harman said.

Albright said that when walleyes have been netted or occasionally found dead in the lake, researchers have found "they were full of alewives.

Perhaps because of this long-term stocking program, Otsego Lake "" James Fenimore Cooper's "Glimmerglass" "" was clearer last year than any time in recent memory, Albright said.

"We could see down seven or eight meters, instead of the two or three we were used to," he said.

However, in the past two years, divers have noted that zebra mussels are spreading through the lake, and these spiny mollusks filter and clean water (in addition to fouling water pipes and harming beaches).

"With the zebra mussels in there, we may never know how effective the walleye program has been at increasing water clarity," he said.

Harman said the walleye have helped improve the lake's overall health and diversity, as well as providing opportunities for anglers.

The Otsego County Conservation Association and Otsego 2000 contributed funds to make this year's stocking possible, he said.