

# Brook trout under threat from aquatic invaders — ecologist

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By PAUL PICKREM

LAKE GEORGE — A Valley ecologist is concerned that invasive fish species such as smallmouth bass and chain pickerel are a danger to Nova Scotia's brook trout population and will totally change the ecology of lakes and waterways and the activities that people enjoy on them.

Kyle Hicks, an ecologist with the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute and the Clean Annapolis River Project, says the two fish species are commonly introduced to a new lake or waterway by people who don't know how detrimental they will be to their new environment.

As water temperatures continue to rise, he said, native fish like the brook trout become less energetic and compete less effectively for food and resources with the more aggressive newcomers. The invaders affect the food chain and lower the biodiversity of a lake because they can "become the predominant or even the only species," Mr. Hicks said. That can mean other animals and birds, like loons, can be less abundant.

"The problem and the solution lies with the anglers themselves," he said, noting that bass and pickerel are easier to catch and more fun because they are so aggressive.

"They are more fun on the fishing rod," he said.

Mr. Hicks said fishermen want to introduce them to their favourite lakes and rivers, even though it is illegal under the Fisheries Act and carries stiff fines. As well, the invasive fish can easily find their way from one stream or lake to another because so many waterways are connected.

But he hopes to enlist the help of sport fishermen and educate



**Ecologist Kyle Hicks fears that invasive fish species threaten the long-term future of Nova Scotia's brook trout and will change the ecology of lakes and waterways.**

(PAUL PICKREM)

them about the harm of introducing invasive species by initiating a volunteer angler program in which anyone catching a smallmouth bass or chain pickerel in an area where they hadn't been seen before would send a report to researchers.

"Anglers are really the key," Mr. Hicks said. "They can help us database the number of lakes or waterways in the province that are home to the two species. Without knowing that accurately, it will be hard to prevent the spread to critical habitat like Kejik National Park."

He said we need to keep the pristine brook trout habitats across the province free of invasive fish so native species will have a chance to survive.

Mr. Hicks has set up booths to distribute educational material at the South Shore Exhibition at Bridgewater and at a bass fishing tournament and plans to have a booth at the Annapolis Valley Exhibition in Lawrencetown, Aug. 13-18.

"Once the invasive species is established in an area, there is no way to get them out," he said. "So prevention is the key."

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