

YONKERS

Saw Mill River health is called no fish story

Biologist's lecture will focus on role of stream as incubator

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The Journal News

In its final bends through the city before heading underground near Getty Square, the sometimes trash-strewn Saw Mill River doesn't look like the most nurturing incubator for fish — yet it is.

That's the message the public will hear tonight at a lecture on the river's fish life at the Beczak Environmental Education Center. A survey shows that there are 16 species of fish swimming in the river, with the greatest number of species caught in Yonkers near the Hastings-on-Hudson border.

The 22-mile waterway's fish diversity is about average for a northeastern stream that runs through an urban area, said Tony Pappantoniou, the Lehman College biologist who will give tonight's talk.

"I am convinced that if we had a longer monitoring length over several years, there are probably more fish and a broader population," said Pappantoniou, who conducted the survey in 2003 with Saunders Trades and Technical High School students. "You want to see a diverse group of fish. That's a sign of a healthy body of water."

The most widely distributed species was the blacknose dace, found in nine of 11 sites stretching from the Yonkers Pier to the south end of the Chappaqua train station parking lot. The second most common fish was the white sucker in eight of the 11 sites.

The survey also found brown trout, largemouth bass, bluegill sunfish and golden shiner. Pappantoniou found six fewer species

If you go

Tony Pappantoniou's talk, "Suckers, Darters and Daces: Do Fish Really Live in the Saw Mill River?" will be held tonight at 7 at the Beczak Environmental Education Center, 35 Alexander St., Yonkers. Call 914-377-1900, or for directions, log on to www.beczak.org.

than were found during a 1989 survey, but he said the decline is due to the previous survey's longer duration, which may have caught more species.

The survey was part of a 2001 \$67,900 grant from the New York state Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Grants Program.

The Hartsdale resident said he and Lehman College's Laboratory for Marine and Estuary Research have surveyed the Bronx River for about five years and have found 45 fish species.

"The first year we found 12 species in the Bronx River because it was a short time period," said Pappantoniou, adding that the Saw Mill River deserves more monitoring.

The Beczak center has no plans to do another survey, but more could be on the horizon, said Cynthia Fowx.

"Now that Yonkers has the Saw Mill River Coalition ... maybe there is a possibility to work with them as they work on the daylighting project," Fowx said, referring to a proposal to uncover parts of the river that runs through downtown Yonkers.

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