

SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE MILK CRATE NURSERY FISH HABITAT INFORMATION

In 2017, two separate fish habitat projects were initiated at Smith Mountain Lake specifically to create nursery habitat for fry and juvenile game fish. The goal of this effort is to create new nursery habitat to replace nursery habitat lost to shoreline development. One of the two initial projects involves building habitat structures created from plastic milk crates. The project began with discussions between a group of local anglers and fisheries biologist at the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF). The angler group identified lake residents who consented to having artificial habitat structures constructed of plastic milk crates installed at their private boat docks. VDGIF purchased the construction materials with a portion of funds provided for fish habitat projects by Appalachian Power Company (Appalachian). The angler group built the structures and assisted VDGIF personnel with the installations.

Milk crates are bundled into six crate units. Each dock typically receives 2-4 units (12-24 total crates) that are attached to dock pilings, in 3-5 feet depths, under stationary portions of the structure but not under floating docks or boat lifts. Occasionally docks are not suitable for this installation due to available depths, configurations, or bottom contours.

Preliminary feedback indicates that the milk crate structures installed during the summer of 2017 and 2018 were readily being used as habitat by juvenile game fish during late spring/early summer periods. VDGIF, with the support of Appalachian and the Habitat Technical Review Committee for the Smith Mountain Project, is seeking to expand the milk crate nursery fish habitat project.

Individual lake residents who simply wish to have the milk crate structures installed at their private boat dock by VDGIF personnel and volunteers, with no further commitment/obligation themselves, **may provide their consent using the attached form.**

To maximize efficiency and volunteer participation, the milk crate habitat structures will be installed when a sufficient number of participant docks have been identified within a relatively close geographic area of the lake. Thus, installation of the structures will NOT necessarily be on a first come, first served basis. The number of structures installed in any given year will be limited to available resources.

Notes:

- Some docks are not appropriate (too steep or shallow, no poles for attachment at correct depths, large amounts of habitat already in close proximity)
- Applicants may not receive crates due to supply.
- Attempts are made to place crates out of view as much as possible. Crates placed in 3-5 ft. of water based on full pond, 795'.
- DGIF will be periodically placing crates under docks during the summer months (July-Aug) as time permits and until all the allotted crates for the year have been placed.
- Attempts will be made to contact and explain as to why those who applied but did not receive crates (ran out of crates, dock/lot too steep, etc.).

- Applicants should expect 1-4 bundles of crates (6-24 total crates) per dock. Actual numbers will depend on availability, dock configuration, proximity to other habitat, etc.

Individual residents may also submit an application to Appalachian for a permit to install other types of fish habitat at their private dock. Note that installation any type of structure under this option is solely at the expense and labor of the dock owner. Applications may be submitted online at the following website. <http://www.smithmtn.com/Resources/InstallFishHabitat.aspx>