

Lake Ontario's pacific salmon fishery starts at Ringwood Hatchery

Stouffville-based government hatchery is entering its 20th year

The Ministry of Natural Resources' Ringwood Fish Culture Station has a rather inconspicuous presence.

Although the fish hatchery is hidden view along the west side of Hwy. 48 and just north of the Stouffville Sideroad, it plays a significant role in the province's sport fishery scheme.

Now in its 20th year of operation, the Stouffville-based facility is the nerve centre for the province's salmon fishery in Lake Ontario.

SALMON FROM BOTH SHORES

"Ringwood is unique in that we're the only government hatchery that raises Pacific and Atlantic salmon," noted Lisa Miller-Dodd, Ringwood's operations co-ordinator since 1997.

Nestled on a 100-acre parcel of land, the Ringwood hatchery has reared coho and chinook salmon since its inception.

The coho program was stopped eight years ago due to a ministry decision before resuming in the fall of 1997.

And, in the winter of 1991, it took on the responsibility of rearing Atlantic salmon as part of a ministry experimental program.

Ringwood's uniqueness doesn't end with the species of fish being reared.

Its ability to rear fish successfully stems from a unique feature it has through its ground water source.

Housed in one of the facility's two existing structures, the aeration building receives water from three artesian wells.

"It's good because it's all flow through water," said Miller-Dodd of the water management arrangement.

"We don't have to pump water. If a power outage occurred, we're not affected at all."

The other building, known as the production house, is divided into an egg receiving room, early and advanced rearing rooms.

In the chinook salmon program, Miller-Dodd notes eggs are collected around Oct. 1 from fish returning to spawn in the Credit River.

Once the eggs and milt are collected, fertilization is carried out in the egg receiving room.

It is at this point when Miller-Dodd says the Ringwood facility becomes a beehive of activity and remains that way until early to mid May when most of the fish seeded.

Since the revival of the coho salmon program, the ministry received eggs for rearing from three different sources including the Salmon River in New York State, two rivers in Michigan and Blue Jay Creek on Manitoulin Island.

This fall, however, Miller-Dodd said the ministry will attempt to collect its own eggs out of spawning fish returning from the Credit River.

It is also hoped with the coho pro-



Mike Hayakawa

gram's revival that the strain of fish will be one that makes an early return to the rivers instead of past strains that returned in late November and even into December.

Miller-Dodd noted that when the egg collection crew were seeking chinooks in the early fall, some coho were present.

With the Atlantic salmon at Ringwood, Miller-Dodd revealed the eggs originate from the Normandale Hatchery.

In this program, Miller-Dodd revealed these fish are raised as either advanced fry (weighing one gram in weight and are stocked in late April) or delayed fry (weighing less than one gram and are not fed hatchery food but are stocked into rivers when natural feed is present, such as during the black fly season).

TOURS GIVEN AT RINGWOOD

What is carried out at Ringwood is not done in secrecy.

Within the production building is a visitor centre which was originally opened in 1986 and closed in 1993 due to a shortage of ministry funding before re-opening in 1998. The centre has pictures depicting the life cycles of salmon and two aquariums, one with chinook and coho salmon in fingerling stages.

The room also allows for the viewing of the rearing tanks.

While the ministry dictates what numbers of salmon are to be stocked annually, Miller-Dodd revealed a total of 555,000 chinooks, four to five months old, were reared and stocked in late April through early May ranging from St. Catharines at one end of Lake Ontario to Prince Edward County to the east.

As well, 53,000 yearling cohos were reared and stocked this spring into the Credit River.

This fall, she estimated the Credit River will receive another 120,000 fingerling cohos.

In the Atlantic salmon program, 102,000 advanced fry were placed in the Credit River this past spring. Another 119,000 delayed fry were seeded into the Credit River, Cobourg Creek, Wilmot Creek and Barnham House Creek.

Anyone wishing to visit Ringwood can do so on a year-round basis Monday to Fridays. When the staff are working weekends from December until late April, the centre is also open on weekends.

Those wishing to take a tour of Ringwood can do so by calling 640-6204.

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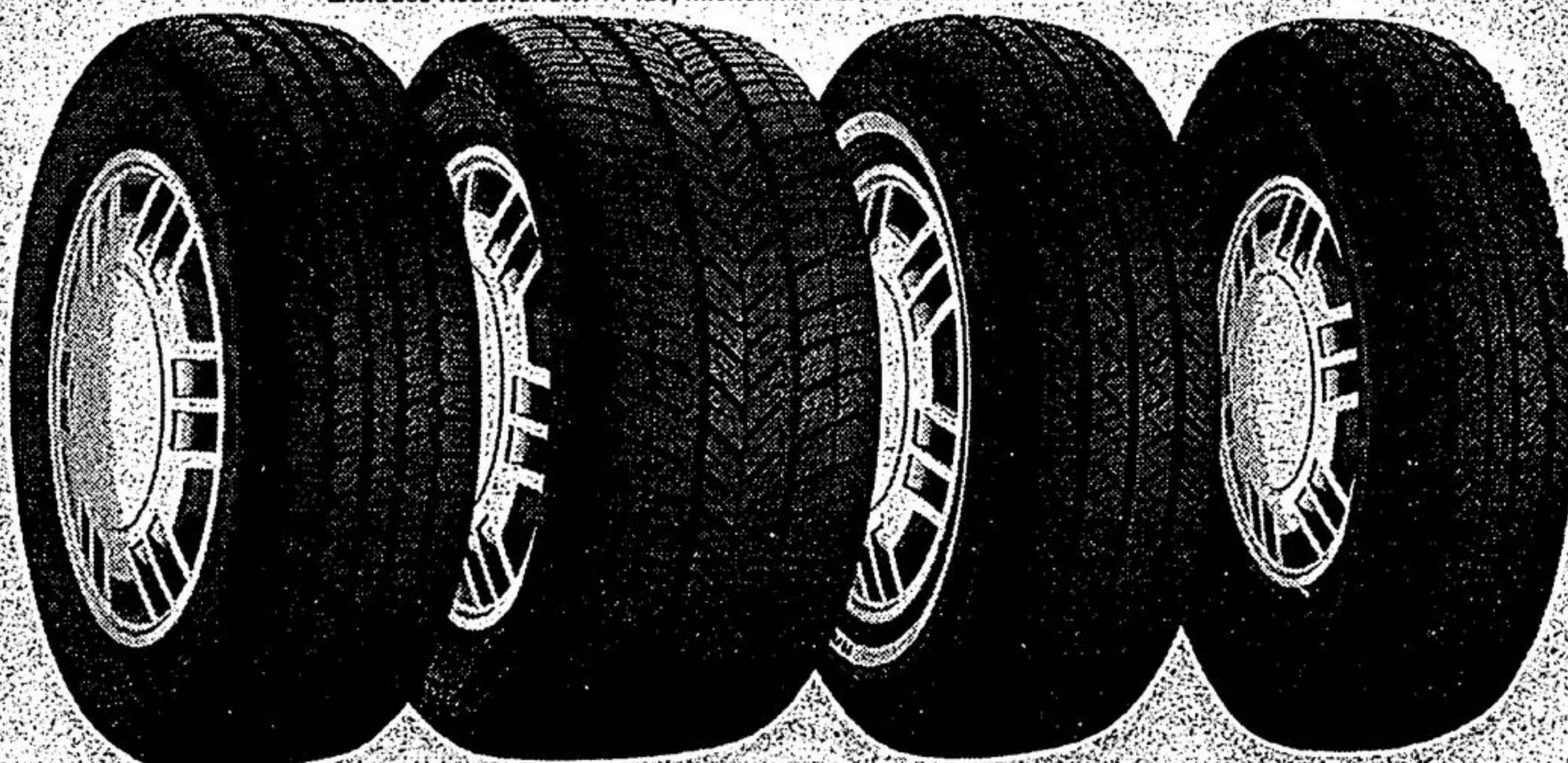
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