

A new home for fish

By [Darcy Cheek](#), Recorder and Times
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Smoke drifts from an ice fishing shack in the Johnstown bay on Tuesday. A new fish habitat project is taking place just to the west at the end of the bay (DARCY CHEEK/The Recorder and Times).

Fish in the Johnstown bay will have a new place to roam this spring.

A fish habitat creation project is underway on the west end of the bay and is expected to be done by May, said Michelle Cavanagh of South Nation Conservation.

"After months of planning, we're excited to begin construction," said Cavanagh, who was at the Johnstown bay/Port of Johnstown site briefly on Tuesday.

The weather was a little too cold for work on Tuesday but much of the construction has been done, particularly the creation of a deep pool.

"It's just to create some area for some of the bigger game fish," said Cavanagh of two pools that will be linked to the wider expanse of the bay.

The wetland expansion project also includes the implementation of some aquatic plants like water lilies, pickerel weed and wild rice, which will help oxygenate the area and improve the habitat.

The arrival of zebra mussels in the St. Lawrence River has decimated areas of bigger game fish habitat, so the goal of the big ponds is to attract species like northern pike, walleye and small-mouth bass.

"There's not a whole lot we can do about," said Cavanagh of zebra mussels. "But the bay itself is not too heavily infested."

Creating a healthy habitat also meant the removal of a few bad weeds.

"We've even removed some invasive plants, like purple loosestrife," said Cavanagh.

South Nation Conservation will monitor the wetland during construction and in the spring and fall for the next three years to determine which species are using the habitat.

The goal, said Cavanagh, is to create a sustainable habitat that will in turn help fish populations and, therefore, create more fishing opportunities for the public.

The idea is to have it open to the public," she said, adding that a walkway with trees and shrubs planted along the bay will run from the western shore to around the northeastern pier of the port terminal.

"The (Port of Johnstown) really wanted to have something like this on-site," said Cavanagh.

The Port of Johnstown project is just one of two fish habitat projects planned to replace areas taken up by the port's wharf expansion on the south side of the facility.

A larger project, close to six acres in area, will take place near Morrisburg at Riverside Heights.