Root River Steelhead Facility Summary Spring 2026

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Introduction

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) operates three salmon and trout egg collection facilities on Lake Michigan tributaries, including the Root River Steelhead Facility (RRSF). The RRSF is located three miles upstream of Lake Michigan on the Root River within City of Racine's Lincoln Park. The RRSF was built in 1992-1993 to help Wisconsin DNR manage Lake Michigan's trout and salmon fishery more effectively. Wisconsin DNR operates RRSF in spring for collection of steelhead eggs (rainbow trout; *Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

This basic report summarizes the number of fish processed during the Spring 2026 steelhead spawning migration at RRSF. The number of fish captured at RRSF is only a subset of the total 2026 steelhead migration in the Root River. There are a lot of factors that can affect these spawning migrations including stream flow, lake level, water temperature, stocking numbers, survival of stocked fish, harvest, dates of operation, etc. Many of these variables are uncontrollable. As the variables change, it has an impact on the number of fish available and processed at RRSF. Additionally, egg collection goals can also change yearly based on projected stocking quotas, Wisconsin DNR fish production needs and egg requests from other states or agencies. Therefore, any comparison to past years' processing numbers will not provide a meaningful measure of the overall return of steelhead back to the Root River.

Spring 2026 Summary

The Root River Steelhead Facility was in operation for five processing days between March 17 and April 13 during the spring 2026 steelhead migration. We captured 2,681 steelhead at RRSF in Spring 2026. Our biological sampling goals were met, and fish health inspections were conducted. The 2,681 steelhead captured was the second highest return since 1997. Steelhead were the only fish species captured at RRSF during the spring 2026 season. Additional information including the number of steelhead spawned, the number of eggs collected, and the number of steelhead passed upstream of RRSF can be found in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1. Number of fish processed at Root River Steelhead Facility during the Spring 2026 steelhead spawning migration.

	Captured	Spawned	Eggs Taken	Passed Upstream
Steelhead	2,681	1,652	3,065,979	2,521

Coded Wire Tag Recovery

Throughout the spring season, steelhead were sampled as part of an ongoing multi-agency, lake-wide study on natural reproduction and movement. Stocked steelhead have been implanted with small, coded wire tags prior to release, and tags were recovered from 188 fish at RRSF in Spring 2026. Analysis of the tags will provide fish managers with more information on movement patterns of steelhead in the lake, growth rates and the occurrence of "straying," when a mature fish returns to a stream other than the one where it was originally stocked.

Acknowledgements

The Department of Natural Resources would like to acknowledge the support of Salmon Unlimited in keeping RRSF operational. Special thanks also go out to the volunteers from Salmon Unlimited who open and close the facility's viewing window daily during operation.

Fall 2026

We plan on resuming operations at Root River Steelhead Facility in Fall 2026, once the fall spawning migration of Chinook and coho salmon begins.

An open house is scheduled for Saturday, October 10, 2026 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. This free family-friendly event hosted by Wisconsin DNR is open to the public. Look for more event details to be added to Wisconsin DNR's events calendar on our website.

More Information

For additional Lake Michigan fisheries information, please visit our website at: dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/lakemichigan

For fishing information, please visit: http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/lakemichigan/OutdoorReport.html

Contact:

Laura Schmidt
Senior Fisheries Biologist, Wisconsin DNR
600 E Greenfield Ave, Milwaukee WI 53204
Laura.Schmidt@Wisconsin.gov

Prepared by:

Jason Meacham
Fisheries Biologist, Wisconsin DNR
600 E Greenfield Ave, Milwaukee WI 53204
Jason.Meacham@Wisconsin.gov