

# THE WISCONSIN FISHING REPORT



Spring 2012

An annual publication of the Fisheries Management program

[fishingwisconsin.org](http://fishingwisconsin.org)

## Trout population reports for 2012

Trout populations have generally increased statewide, and the number of fish in all sizes examined have increased, since 1950, according to a University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point analysis released in 2011 and discussed in "A Trout Treasury," an April 2011 Natural Resources Magazine article. [<http://dnr.wi.gov/wnrmag/2011/04/trout.htm>]

Here are more detailed reports on fish populations and habitat projects on many waters open for the early catch-and-release season. State fisheries biologists filed them early this year for inclusion in DNR's 2012 Wisconsin Fishing Report.

### Northern Wisconsin

#### Barron County

Brill River – Located in the Northeast corner of Barron County, the Brill River has a moderate brown trout population and a low density brook trout population. With water temperatures being marginal trout are located from the Barron/Washburn county line down to 26th Ave. There are good numbers of brown trout in the 8- to 12-inch range with occasional fish reaching 18 inches. The Brill River offers opportunities for anglers who like easy wading and the chance to fly fish. This section of river is wide, shallow and open, great for dropping a fly along the grass river banks. - *Mark Stanley, fisheries technician, Barron*

#### Iron County

Trout anglers seeking solitude and opportunities at legal-sized fish, should consider exploring the Tyler Forks River area including some of its smaller coldwater tributaries. 2011 surveys on the Tyler Forks River and Erickson Creek found good natural reproduction of brook trout along with decent numbers of fish over 7 inches in the deeper-water areas. Thousands of acres of surrounding Iron County Forest Lands provide access to many miles of stream. - *Lawrence Eslinger, fisheries biologist, Mercer*

#### Langlade County

Brook trout numbers on the East Branch Eau Clair River are 138 percent above the long-term average and in 2011 were the second highest of all time based on 26 years of surveys. In the better sections, there is one yearling or older trout for every 11.5 inches of stream bottom (5,500 per mile)! Of course trout are not lined up nose to tail. They are in their usual lairs: woody cover, undercut banks, under overhanging brush and grasses, rocky runs, and riffles.

The crystal clear, numbing cold waters of the Evergreen River are home to quality naturally reproducing populations of brook and brown trout. Since 2009, a habitat improvement project has been ongoing between the old railroad bridge and the Menominee County line in southeastern Langlade County. Upon completion, almost 2 miles of trout habitat will have been improved, benefiting generations of trout and anglers alike. The work, funded by trout stamp dollars and donations from regional Trout Unlimited chapters, is about three-quarters complete and the trout are responding well to their new homes. Brook trout typically make up between 50 to 75 percent of the total trout population with fish up to 10 inches common and a few reaching 13 to 14 inches. Brown trout are common up to 14 to 15 inches with some occasionally pushing the 20-inch mark. - *Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo*

### **Oneida County**

Electrofishing surveys on Noisy Creek found high numbers of wild brook trout under 7.5 inches, with low to moderate numbers of larger fish. The largest trout captured was 11.9 inches. Bear Creek had low to moderate numbers of brook trout under 8 inches, and the largest trout was 11.3 inches. – *John Kubisiak, senior fisheries biologist, Rhinelander*

### **Polk County**

The lower section of Wolf Creek around County Highway G supports a nice brown trout fishery. Annual surveys over the last few years show good numbers of brown trout 8 to 12 inches with the occasional 18-incher. The brown trout are in very good condition and very plump. You might even want to adventure to the mouth of Wolf Creek where it dumps into the St. Croix River -- you could have a chance a catching a trophy brown trout. - *Mark Stanley, fisheries technician, Barron*

### **Sawyer County**

The Namekagon River, a federally designated Wild and Scenic River, is one of Wisconsin's largest trout streams. After several years of good spawning success, the Namekagon River from Hayward upstream to Telemark has far more wild brown trout than meet the eye. One in five browns exceeds 15 inches. Angling pressure makes these big trout wary, so be prepared to fish during low light periods and test your fly fishing skills by matching the hatch.

Brook trout are abundant only in some of the smaller, colder streams that feed the Namekagon. Anglers are asked to voluntarily release all brook trout caught in the Namekagon itself, as biologists strive to improve habitat to keep these speckled beauties in a system that is becoming too warm for them.- *Dave Neuswanger, fisheries supervisor, Hayward*

### **Taylor County**

Anglers should find trout fishing opportunities and convenient public access to the Big Rib River within DNR's Rib River Fishery Area, located about 10 miles southeast of Rib Lake. Anglers can fish from shore on several state-owned parcels or from the right-of-way along River Road. Fly fishers will enjoy the wide, open channel with little encroachment from tag alder.

In our August 2011 surveys at River Road and Hetland Drive, we captured brook trout and brown trout, including young of the year, juveniles, and adults, to confirm that the fishery continues to be sustained by natural reproduction under current harvest regulations that allow anglers to keep 3 trout at least 9 inches daily. Our capture rates of 228 to 278 brook trout and 64 to 92 brown trout per mile indicate a moderate adult abundance for both populations. The "Big Rib" offers a chance to catch legal brook trout as well as brown trout of memorable and trophy size. - *Jeff Scheirer, fisheries biologist, Park Falls*

### **Washburn County**

Sawyer Creek – Sawyer Creek is a small, coldwater stream located near Shell Lake. A 2011 survey found brook trout in the upper reaches and brown trout in lower sections of the stream. The brown trout population was moderate density but with large fish present, up to 18 inches. Anglers can find numerous access points through the Sawyer Creek Fishery Area. - *Jamison Wendel, fisheries biologist, Washburn County*

### **Lincoln County**

Trout numbers on the Prairie River increased 12 percent from 2010 to 4,900 per mile (4 inches and larger). This density of trout is the sixth highest in 21 consecutive years of surveys and is 118 percent of the long-term average. Brook trout numbers were up and brown trout numbers were down, but keep in mind that browns only make up about 6 percent of the trout population in this section of the Prairie (Gleason School Forest). About 20 percent of the brook trout are over the legal length limit of 8 inches and 5 percent are over 10 inches. - *Dave Seibel, fisheries biologist, Antigo*

### **Northeastern Wisconsin Waushara County**

The Mecan River downstream Highway 21 was improved with the addition of deeper overhead cover to benefit larger catchable fish. The project was a joint effort between Central Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Wisconsin DNR. This project will continue upstream of Highway 21 in 2012.

The West Branch of White River is one of the few streams in Wisconsin with naturally reproducing rainbow trout. Habitat improvement consisted of overhead bank covers, deflection wings and mid-channel boulders. Existing

brush and trees were also used to narrow the stream and establish some new spawning areas and cover. This project was completed in 2011.

- *David Bartz, fisheries biologist, Wautoma*

### **Shawano County**

Trout streams -- Surveys on several Shawano County streams indicate trout populations at moderate density and size. Surveys conducted on the North Branch Embarrass River show good numbers of brook trout in the 9-10 inch size range. - *Al Niebur, fisheries biologist, Shawano*

### **West Central Wisconsin**

#### **Adams County**

Beaver control measures were implemented with the removal of two dams on each of the Big Roche A Cri and Neenah creeks during 2011. Several locations along the Big Roche A Cri were sampled for trout during summer 2011 and showed brook trout present at all locations and adults ranging from 5 to 17 inches with an average length of 7 inches. Good natural reproduction of the brook trout was observed with many fish in the 3-inch range. Brown trout were captured in very low numbers at only a couple of locations. Neenah Creek was surveyed in 2011 upstream from the confluence of Peppermill Creek. The survey captured 163 brown trout ranging from 4 to 15.4 inches and averaging 8 inches. These results are similar to those found in the 2008-2010 surveys. The healthy population in this portion of the Neenah Creek is supported through natural reproduction and the habitat improvements done in 1983; a maintenance project is planned for 2012 to upgrade the 3,500 feet of improvements. -

*Justine Hasz, senior fisheries biologist, Wisconsin Rapids*

#### **Chippewa County**

Brook trout are present in moderate numbers in the upstream portion of Elk Creek near Highway T. Downstream near Highway N the fishery is dominated by brown trout and densities are high; anglers are encouraged to harvest small brown trout. The portion of stream near Highway 29 recently had intensive habitat work completed and a good number of slot-sized fish and some bigger are found here. A parking area on the north and east side of Highway 29 is available off Highway X (old 29) and the stream is very fishable for anglers looking for open areas and limited brush. A pleasant surprise was that downstream of Elk Creek Lake, a moderate density brown trout fishery was present with some larger fish available to anglers willing to spend some time learning this portion of stream. - *Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Eau Claire*

#### **Eau Claire County**

Otter Creek located in and south of Eau Claire has historically had a marginal trout fishery, however, recent surveys have indicated that brown trout natural reproduction is occurring and several year classes of trout are present. Densities are generally low, however, some larger fish can be found for anglers willing to walk and beat the brush. - *Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Eau Claire*

#### **Portage County**

A new habitat project began in 2011 on the Tomorrow River near the Richard Hemp Fishery Area upstream of the confluence with Poncho Creek and trout are likely already using newly installed luncker structures. When completed in 2012, the habitat project will offer an additional 4,000 feet of habitat. Brown trout numbers within the fishery area have rebounded from about 230 to about 600 fish per mile with greater numbers at some locations; brook trout numbers have also increased from about 100 to 175 fish per mile. These numbers are more in line with historical trends.

Habitat work also continued in 2011 on the Tomorrow River upstream of Lake Meyers Road to enhance access for anglers and improve habitat for fish. Funding is through a NRCS grant, and Trout Unlimited has purchased an easement along the stream as well. The project has brought together partners from NRCS, Frank Hornberg Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Bill Cook Chapter of the Izaak Walton League, DNR, and a private landowner. To date, a farm machinery crossing that was altering flow has been removed, creating a deeper stream and enhanced flow. Crews have installed about 40 luncker structures and 75 boulders, constructed 10 wing deflectors, and used Christmas tree bundles along 1,000 feet of stream bank. Numbers of trout in the new habitat area are expected to increase to similar levels to that found in the TU habitat area below Nelsonville: 800 brown trout per mile and about 120 brook trout per mile. All of the trout streams in Portage County appear to have trout population numbers that have held the same or increased with the stable rainfall received in the last two summers. Other popular trout streams including the Lower Tomorrow River below Amherst, the Portage

County Ditches, Flume Creek, Emmons Creek and the Little Plover River have all seen stable or increased trout abundance. Trout fishing in 2012 should be exceptional. - *Tom Meronek, senior fisheries biologist, Wausau*

### **Pepin County**

Trout fishing opportunities in Pepin County are mostly limited to a few small streams, however Bear Creek is an exception. DNR surveys in summer and fall 2008-2011 revealed some exceptional results for brook and brown trout. While overall trout densities are moderate to low (300-1,500 per mile), quality (8- to 12-inch) sized and trophy brook trout greater than 14 inches were relatively common and offer some of the best brook trout water for larger fish in west central Wisconsin. Also, recent stocking of Timber Coulee strain small fingerling brown trout has been highly successful, resulting in a major expansion in the brown trout population. The number of quality (12- to 16-inch) brown trout looks pretty darn good right now.

During 2007, a major effort began to improve trout habitat, trout densities and overall fishing in Bear Creek. DNR staff along with the Durand Sportsmen's Club, Trout Unlimited, local landowners, Pepin Land and Water Conservation Department and the Natural Resource Conservation Service formed a support group to begin habitat and watershed restoration. The first habitat restoration project was completed this fall. In order to jump start the project, DNR modified stocking efforts to encourage restoration of natural reproducing trout populations. Today, Bear Creek receives 6,500 Timber Coulee wild strain small fingerling brown trout and an additional 1,000 legal size brook trout. The best water can be found from Dorwin Mill Road upstream to the Buffalo county line. Give Bear Creek a try this spring. - *Marty Engel, senior fisheries biologist, Baldwin*

### **Pierce County**

Despite heavy flood damage during August 2010, the 2011 season proved another great one for trout fishing. Long-term trend surveys on our most popular trout waters in Pierce County reveal strong natural reproduction and adult densities. Some of the brown trout streams continue to show an increase in larger brown trout exceeding 12 inches.

*Headwater Secrets* – Those up to a significant rocky challenge may want to try fishing Cave Creek upstream of State Highway 72. This is a small, limestone-based stream with a series of pools and riffles. According to our most recent surveys, this stream holds a pleasant mix of quality size brook and brown trout. You will be surprised by the size of fish you'll find here. While Cady Creek is well known as one of the best native brook trout streams in the state, few anglers fish the headwater regions near St. Croix County. Give 850th Avenue area a try. This is a very small stream and you will need to seek out the pools in a stalking fashion. Brook trout are extremely abundant here. And lastly, fish the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River for native brook trout. Fish up or downstream from the DNR parking lot on State Highway 29. Fishing is best in the spring before the prairie grass and water cress beds develop.

*Bush Wackers Delight* – The Big River is a small, brushy creek with a lot of brown trout potential. Past surveys show this Class I brown trout stream has trout in every hole and on occasion, one over 20 inches too. Rumor also has it that the headwaters of the Trimbelle River (upstream of State Highway 65 and County Highway W) hold a few nice brown trout. Recent DNR surveys confirm there is a low density but high quality population of brown trout in this part of the stream. The difficult part of course is finding the fishable water on these streams. Don't forget to fish the beaver ponds. - *Marty Engel, senior fisheries biologist, Baldwin*

### **Southern Wisconsin**

#### **Columbia County**

Rowan Creek, which runs through the Village of Poynette, has an abundant population of brown trout and some catchable sized stocked rainbows as well. A recent DNR trout habitat project on the state fishery area on the east side of the village means open space and a great place to introduce a beginner to trout fishing. As well as a lot of trout! – *David Rowe, fisheries supervisor, Poynette*

#### **Dane County**

Trout fishing is making a resurgence as recent habitat work along the Little Sugar River (New Glarus branch) produce quality fish. Story creek west of Brooklyn harbors beautiful fish for those willing to walk and wade. - *Kurt Welke, fisheries biologist, Fitchburg*

#### **Grant County**

Located within 10 minutes driving of Lancaster, Borah Creek, Rogers Creek, Little Grant River and the Grant River all harbor good brown trout fisheries with near 300 adult trout per acre. Combined, there are 7 miles of

public bank fishing easements available to anglers. Adult brown trout range in length from 7 to 21 inches. For those of us accustomed to the “good ole days” of many large trout within these systems, we will have to change the way we view these trout fisheries. Gone are the days of stocking numerous large holdover trout and broodfish measuring 12 to 24 inches. The mainstay of these fisheries is the stocking of small fingerling feral brown trout. These fish have been shown to survive well in these systems while establishing natural reproduction. It is advantageous for trout living in these systems to have a smaller body size so many anglers will not see the 21- to 26-inch brown and rainbow trout of the past. Trophy fish in these systems will now be in the 16- to 18-inch range. There are still a few fish over 20 inches, but anglers looking for these larger fish will have to look farther downstream on the Grant River. - *Bradd Sims, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville*

### **Iowa County**

With just over 4 miles of public fishing easement, Gordon Creek supports one of the better brown trout fisheries south of Highway 18. With an estimated 330 brown trout per acre and fish over 20 inches present, Gordon Creek offers anglers the opportunity to catch trophy-size brown trout. With the support of the Southern Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited, nearly one mile of additional habitat work has been completed. Fly and spin fisherman will find pastured vegetation to their liking in parts of the public fishing area. Gordon Creek is located on the eastern edge of Iowa County. - *Bradd Sims, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville*

### **Richland County**

Stream-base flows in southwestern Wisconsin continue to be above normal, with major positive impacts on our trout fisheries. Our better and larger streams not only have optimum water conditions for trout throughout their historic trout areas but the year round living zone for trout has been extended on downstream considerable distances. Larger waters that historically were marginal have improved to very good. Many of the smaller streams that had size, habitat or temperature limitations have significantly improved. The trout populations have all time highs under these new optimum water conditions. In addition, the increased water levels and improved water quality and habitat resulted in more large and heavier trout than we've ever noted. The trout populations are in the best shape by far for overall numbers, average size and distribution that I've seen in my 40-plus years of managing them in this area. Additionally, brook trout reproduction and distribution appears to be at an all time high. These improvements should continue as long as the base water levels remain elevated. The entire coulee region should provide absolutely outstanding trout fishing for the foreseeable future. - *Gene Van Dyck, fisheries biologist, Dodgeville*

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Jamison Wendel, Fisheries Biologist, Washburn County

## **Southeastern Wisconsin**

### **Fond du Lac County**

Trout anglers in Fond du Lac County looking for brook trout have a unique opportunity close to home. Flowing through 60 acres of county park land just 3 miles south of the city of Fond du Lac is Parsons Creek. A naturally reproducing population of brook trout resides in Hobbs Woods County Park, a scenic wooded area devoted to hiking and nature study. Stream surveys from 2011 showed impressive catch rates and a few fish greater than 9 inches. Hobbs Woods County Park is located on Hickory Road just south of County Road B in Fond du Lac County. - *Travis Motl, fisheries biologist, Plymouth*

### **Sheboygan County**

If you are looking to get your boots wet in Sheboygan County the Nichols Creek Wildlife Area offers 612 acres of rolling uplands with restored prairies, cool-season grasses, and northern hardwood stands to explore. Nichols Creek itself is a Class I Trout Stream where anglers can expect to find naturally reproducing brook and brown trout. Stream surveys from 2011 showed outstanding catch rates and a few fish above the 9-inch mark. A parking area is located on County Hwy N and additional stream access can be found on Cedar Lane, on the eastern edge of the property. – *Travis Motl, fisheries biologist, Plymouth*

### **Waukesha County**

Naturally reproducing brown trout populations on Genesee Creek are doing very well as revealed by a 2011 stream survey. Twenty-six percent of the brown trout captured were over 9 inches and electrofishing survey catch rates were among the highest recorded in recent history. Paradise Springs, Funk Creek, McKewn Springs and Lower Genesee Lake will be stocked this spring with legal sized yearling brook trout. Lower Genesee, Fowler, Lower Nashotah and Ottawa Lakes will once again provide traditional rainbow trout angling opportunities. - *Benjamin Heussner, fisheries biologist, Waukesha*