

Freshwater Fisheries Monthly Report – December 2016

Stock Assessment

North Branch Potomac River - Provided a presentation to the members of the North Branch Potomac River Advisory Committee regarding the status of the trout fishery and black bass fishery in the river. Trout populations in the Zero Creel Limit Trout Fishing Area have shown increased abundance since 2013, with many trophy-sized fish in the population. The smallmouth bass population continues to exhibit a diverse size distribution, with the proportional and relative stock densities within the expected ranges for a balanced population.



The North Branch Potomac River – a great place for trout and bass fishing!

Habitat and Water Quality

Environmental Review - Provided comments to the Environmental Review Unit (ERU) or other agencies regarding:

- A time of year waiver request from Potomac State Forest staff regarding a culvert replacement for access to a timber harvest. The spring seep is currently flowing down an old road causing sediment issues before flowing subterranean. Replacing the blocked culvert will reduce sediment run-off from the site, and the waiver was approved.

Lands Stewardship Committee (LSC)

- Provided comments on a 40 acre parcel within the Bear Pen Run sub-basin of the Savage River watershed; a 50.75 acre parcel in the Crabtree Creek sub-basin of the Savage River watershed; and a 48.69 acre parcel in the Laurel Run watershed adjacent to the Potomac State Forest. Freshwater Fisheries Program supports these acquisitions. The purchase of these properties is consistent with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources 2006 Brook Trout Fisheries Management Plan's strategies designed to conserve and protect critical brook trout habitat in Maryland.
- An 80.5 acre property in the Middle Fork sub-basin of the Savage River Watershed was purchased and is now part of the Savage River State Forest. This acquisition will provide long-term water quality and habitat protection for brook trout in this watershed.

- A 53 acre parcel was purchased in the North Branch Potomac Watershed on the east side of Dan's Mountain, and is now part of the Dan's Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

Smoots Bay Reef Balls – Staff and volunteers placed 82 cement reef balls (roughly 250 lbs each) into the northern section of Smoots Bay, an embayment just below the Woodrow Wilson Bridge near National Harbor, MD. A home-made trolley and winch system was built and installed in an 18 ft. jon boat in order to smoothly lower the reef balls into place. Additional fish structures made of woody debris will be anchored amongst the reef balls in spring 2017. Procedures are being developed to evaluate the performance of these devices.



Smoots Bay reef ball placement and water depths

Outreach

- Responded to angler inquiry regarding fishing for cutthroat trout in the North Branch Potomac River.
- Met with the Chairman of the Deep Creek Lake Foundation and toured the Deep Creek Lake Hydro-station and the Youghiogheny River Catch and Return Trout Fishing Area. We discussed projects of mutual interest in the Deep Creek Lake and Youghiogheny River watersheds.

Stocking and Population Management

Rainbow Trout - A total of 4,000 Kamloops strain rainbow trout fingerlings (51/lb – source Mettiki Hatchery) were stocked in the Youghiogheny River Catch-and-Return Area.

In early December, 50,000 fingerling rainbow trout were stocked into Antietam Creek. Fish were stocked at multiple points from the Pennsylvania border downstream to Sharpsburg. Given the productive habitat conditions in Antietam Creek, these fish should grow to a catchable size over the next 2-3 years. Maryland received these trout from Paint Bank hatchery in Virginia as surplus fish.



Stocking fingerling rainbow trout into Antietam Creek in Washington County

Brook Trout Program

As part of the Bay Brook Trout Action Team, staff assisted the Bay Habitat Goal Implementation Team with reviewing the impact scoring guidelines for the work being done by Tetra Tech to develop methods to quantify Best Management Practices (BMP) from a brook trout conservation viewpoint. The scoring process is considered critical for prioritizing practices and activities that will yield the best benefits, and this exercise was needed to refine and finalize the process.

Completed the update of the brook trout distribution layer for use in GIS with data collected in 2016. This layer represents the most current distribution of brook trout in

Maryland based on historical data and more current sampling efforts. The utility for the layer is extensive and includes, but is not limited to, environmental review, project planning, habitat and restoration guidance, grant application scoring, etc.

Began the construction of an ESRI Online project in an attempt to streamline the dissemination of spatial brook trout data to regional staff.

Participated in a planning meeting for continuing the brook trout radio telemetry research effort in the Upper Gunpowder River system.

Other

Eastern Region has a new biologist, Rebecca Bobola. A native of Delaware, Rebecca received a B.S. from Delaware State in fish and wildlife management in 2012. While in college, Rebecca worked at Delaware State's Aquatic Research Facility, and spent her summers working at the USFWS facility at Lamar, PA helping with fish culture and various research projects.

Three Freshwater Fisheries staff relocated their offices in December. Letha Grimes and John Mullican are now located at Albert Powell Trout Hatchery. Susan Rivers is now located at Lewistown Work Center.

Cathy Beachley, Administrative Officer for the Freshwater Fisheries Program, retired from state service before Christmas.