

TALE *of the* TROUT

New partnership aims to study and conserve brook trout populations on the East Coast

Call it squaretail, speckled trout, brookie — the Eastern brook trout is favored by New Hampshire anglers because of its beautiful coloring and delicate flavor, and the challenge it presents to the person holding the fishing rod.

Fisheries managers and conservationists might also compare the brook trout to the proverbial canary in a coal mine: because brook trout are an indicator of high water quality, their presence (or absence) can tell us a lot about the health of our waterbodies, which are so important to our way of life in New Hampshire.

“Because of their need for pristine waters, brook trout populations are declining across their historic eastern range

from Maine to Georgia,” says Steve Perry, fisheries chief for the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. In New Hampshire, notes Perry, the main threats to wild brook trout waters are road sediment, suburban and urban development, acid rain, poorly designed stream crossings and habitat fragmentation from dams.

BRING BACK THE BROOKIES

Because these threats are in many cases regional as well as local, East Coast states have joined forces to create the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, a collaborative approach to conserving wild brook trout populations. The Venture is a

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NEW HAMPSHIRE TROUT SEASONS

Brook Trout, Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout & their Hybrids

- Rivers and Streams: January 1 - October 15
- Wild Trout Streams: January 1 - Labor Day
- Trout Ponds: 4th Saturday in April - October 15
- Wild Trout Ponds: 4th Saturday in April - Labor Day
- Lake Trout and/or Salmon Waters: January 1 - September 30
- All Other Waters: No closed season

Lake Trout

- Trout Ponds: 4th Saturday in April - September 30
- All Other Waters: January 1 - September 30

Landlocked Salmon

- Trout Ponds: 4th Saturday in April - September 30
- All Other Waters: April 1 - September 30

Trout fishing requires a New Hampshire fishing license (children under 16 fish free). For information or to buy a fishing license online, visit www.wildlife.state.nh.us.

geographically focused, locally driven and scientifically based effort to protect, restore and enhance aquatic habitat throughout the range of the Eastern brook trout. It is a unique partnership between state and federal agencies, regional and local governments, businesses, conservation organizations, academia, scientific societies and private citizens.

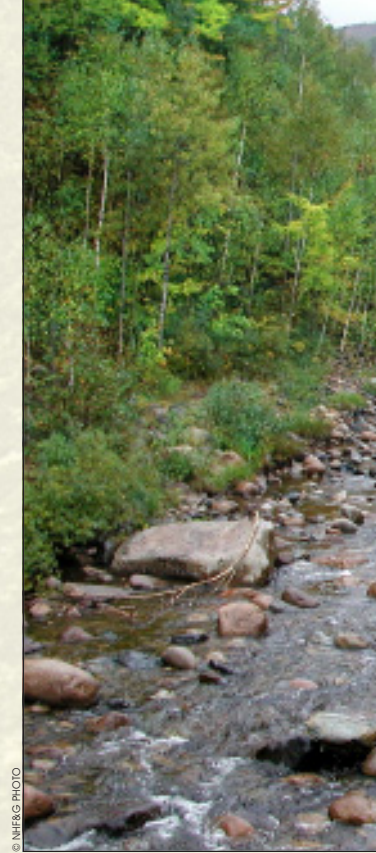
The Venture's partners are involved in scores of activities and projects — from data collection

to habitat restoration — but they all have the same objective, which is to halt the decline of brook trout and restore fishable populations.

As an active partner in the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, New Hampshire Fish and Game is developing strategies for conserving wild brook trout in the state. "On-the-ground implementation of these strategies will help us better protect New Hampshire's brook trout habitat," says Steve Perry. They will also enhance or restore historic brook trout habitat that has been degraded by detrimental land or water use practices.

Dianne Emerson, the coldwater fisheries program coordinator for Fish and Game, says that one of her team's goals under the Venture is to map brook trout population status throughout the state of New Hampshire over the next several years. "Right now we have a lot of areas where brook trout exist, but we don't know to what extent," she said. For one related project, Emerson has been involved with wild brook trout assessment and telemetry work in the Dead Diamond River watershed. "Our work will help us better manage our

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With data gathered using backpack electrofishing equipment, stream survey teams can determine size and viability of trout populations.



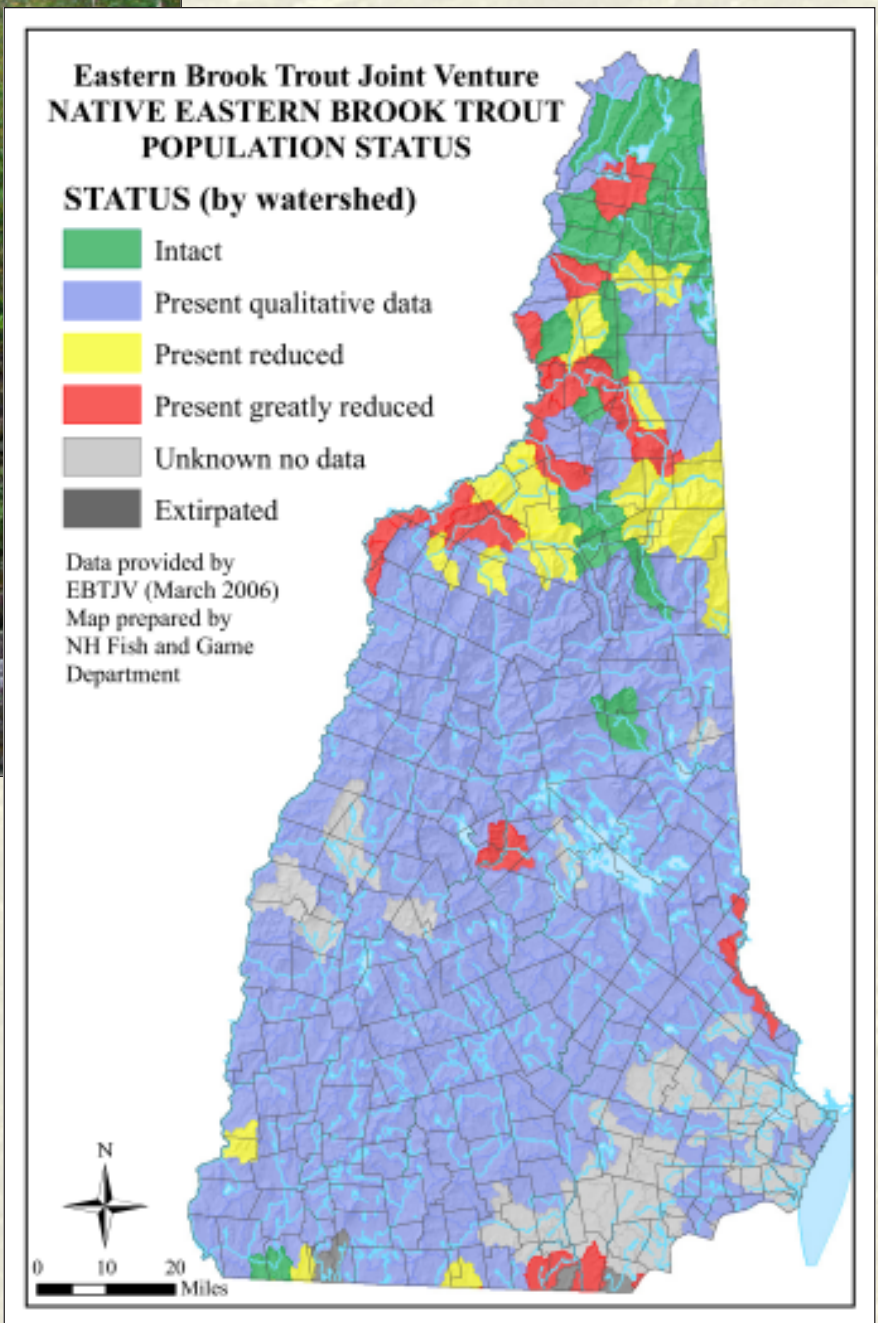
Many partners are working to restore and conserve Nash Stream so that it will once again be prime habitat for native brook trout.

existing populations, as well as show us areas for potential restoration,” Emerson said. Research results will also help identify critical areas to help guide decisions made by local communities.

RESTORING NASH STREAM

One N.H. Fish and Game project that fits into the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture is a multi-phase restoration and conservation project on Nash Stream in Coos County. For decades, Nash Stream was known as a high-quality native brook trout stream that provided exceptional fishing opportunities. Fisheries habitat biologist John Magee describes how, in 1969, the Nash Bog Dam failed, “sending a torrent of water that scoured Nash Stream to bedrock, and leaving huge deposits of sediment in the new floodplain.” In a failed effort to control future flooding, Magee says, bulldozers and other heavy equipment were used to channelize the stream and form large berms along its banks.

Today, 37 years after the dam failure, Magee says some of the floodplains are “virtual deserts” — the near-shore vegetation hasn’t come back, and the stream itself has very little suitable habitat for brook trout. Additionally, some of the culverts under the roads in the Nash Stream State Forest are barriers to fish passage. A project is underway to restore the instream and floodplain habitat of Nash Stream. Magee says, “Some of the effort will include working in the stream, while much of it will be focused on providing conditions in the near-shore and floodplain areas to enable Nash



The green areas of the map show where wild brook trout populations are intact. Scientists believe that wild brook trout exist in the blue areas, but their exact status is unknown. Brook trout populations have declined in the red and yellow watershed areas. Learning more about brook trout populations will help with the development of fisheries conservation plans.

Stream to restore itself over time.” Trout Unlimited, the N.H. Division of Forests and Lands, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners are contributing to the effort with funding, expertise and volunteer time.

The ultimate success of the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture depends on the research and work of these partners and many more. With so many experts working to improve and restore fisheries habitat all along the East Coast, brook trout should be able to swim a little more freely in years to come.

