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FISH

2021

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Is soft plastic so fantastic?

What *are* the special trout regulations?

And how the Delaware is not your grandfather's river

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Mailing Address:
PO Box 150, Narrowsburg, NY 12764
Phone: 845/252-7414 • Fax: 845/252-3298

Publisher: Rev. Laurie Stuart
Section Editor: Veronica Daub
Production Manager: Amanda Reed

Ad Sales Associates:
Eileen Hennessy, ext. 135, eileen@riverreporter.com
Barbara Winfield, ext. 121, barbara@riverreporter.com

Administrative Assistant
Kathlyn Leggio ext. 134: sales@riverreporter.com

If you would like copies for your place of business:
Contact: Roger at 845/252-7414, ext. 130
or events@riverreporter.com
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Have a comment or idea for the magazine?
Contact: Veronica Daub at 845/252-7414, ext. 129
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Is soft plastic so fantastic?

By HUNTER HILL

A popular sector of the fishing lure industry is soft plastic baits. These are lures like frogs, grubs and worms that are normally placed on a rig or even just a hook or jig head. Fishermen who fish bass in particular often utilize these in tournaments and fast-paced fishing meant to control the nuance of the lure. Typically used with a bait caster, these lures are synthetically molded soft plastic that mimics the shape and movement of live bait. They may be weighted in a way that affects their descent as they fall, they may have feet that flap behind them like the kicking legs of a frog, or a spiral tail that churns to imitate the tail of a swimming fish or perhaps a tadpole.

As in all fishing though, lures and other hardware are sometimes lost from battle with a fish, from snagging, bad knots, etc. But what happens to the soft plastic lures that are claimed by the water?

One has only to watch a bass tournament to see the efficacy that these lures have the potential of in terms of catching fish. But as fish consume these lures, perhaps past the fishermen's ability to retrieve if hooked deep in the throat, and still others found by fish perusing the lake-bottom, what happens to the plastic?

Plastic that is consumed by fish often fails to pass from their system. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find one or even several soft plastic lures in the stomach of a fish when processing them. This of course depends on where you fish and the pollution level of that body of water. Various worm lures are the most common, according to studies conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Agency as well as some conservation groups. These lures have a habit of expanding up to six times their original size when submerged for long periods of time.

If you have ever had the opportunity to scour the shallows in low tide or when a lake or pond has been drained to work on a dam, you may have seen this evidenced. Nearly a decade ago, the Duck Harbor pond in Wayne County, PA was lowered nearly 10 feet for just this reason. In the cove



RR photo by Hunter Hill

Soft plastic lures like these make big claims of biodegradability but are often quite the opposite.

at the eastern end, a large stump field presented a plentiful harvest for anyone ambitious enough to brave the mud in order to claim the years of lost lures tangled and hooked to the sunken forest. While stick lures, crankbaits, spinners and the like adorned nearly every exposed stump, soft plastic worms vastly outnumbered any one type of lure amongst them.

The point to be made here is this: Soft plastic lures do not just magically disappear once overexposed to water. Responsibility is the duty of any outdoorsman, fisherman, or hobbyist. Soft plastic lures should not be just thrown out in the water once you've finished using them. Take the time to throw them away properly; you never know if that worm you toss out could be the one that kills your next big bass.

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Cast-net fishing

What you need to know

Throwing a cast net takes lots of practice, but before you approach the water, be sure to know the rules.

By HUNTER HILL

For many in the fishing community, pictures and videos of landing a fish are the bread and butter of modern fish bragging. From shows like “Wicked Tuna” to hundreds of Instagram celebrities sporting their catch, many followers have taken to traveling to destinations highlighted on these platforms and recording their own successes via social media. As a result of this, a wave of fishing techniques and equipment has begun to rise in popularity through the influence of what is seen throughout the old interwebs. One activity that has quickly risen in popularity is cast-net fishing.

Cast netting is the practice of throwing a circular net with weights around its edges into an area of water that is rich with fish. The goal is to throw the net in such a way that it spreads out completely without folding over on itself and drops down around the fish below. There is a series of drawstrings connected through a center ring that extends to the outer rim, which can be pulled once the weights have fallen to the bottom. This closes the net below the area that has been covered, allowing the fisherman to pull up the net as a bundle with the fish trapped inside.

This method of fishing is very fast-paced and can be extremely efficient for those with little time to devote to the sport. However, in our part of the country at least, it comes with some fairly strict rules that the fisherman must be aware of prior to running out and tossing the net anywhere they please.

The interesting thing about where we live on the Delaware River is that there is a reciprocation of license and permits from both sides. This means that if you have a New York license, you can fish on the Pennsylvania side and vice versa. But this is only for the Delaware River and does

As you watch the videos on social media of fishermen casting out these vast nets in a style not unlike a discus thrower, just understand that the ability to practice this style of fishing is not as legally accessible in our area as popular media may suggest.

not apply when you enter the state and fish any other body of water. This is important to know because there are different regulations for cast-net fishing in each state. In Pennsylvania, you must first have a Pennsylvania fishing license before applying for the cast-net permit. You can obtain the permit from www.fishandboat.com and mail it in with the application fee, or you can order it through the www.huntfish.pa.gov website. The cost is about \$11 and there are only certain types of fish that can be targeted using this method.

To reference the disclaimer on the permit application itself, "The use of a cast net or throw net in any other commonwealth waters is a violation of the Fish and Boat Code and is punishable by a fine and may result in the loss of fishing privileges. Cast nets or throw nets shall not exceed 10 feet in radius or 20 feet in diameter and possess a mesh size of at least 3/8 inch. The holder of the cast net or throw net permit may take, catch, kill or possess a daily creel limit of 100 gizzard shad and alewife (combined species). The holder of the permit shall carry the permit on his/her person while using the net or while possessing more than 50 gizzard shad or alewife (combined species)."

Gizzard shad are the primary species for which the permits were initially developed. Alewives, or combined species, include members of the herring family, which are plentiful in a number of lakes in this region. The final stipulations of cast-net fishing in Pennsylvania are the strictest. There are only a few bodies of water that can legally be cast netted and those are described in the chart

Cast-net fishing in PA

County	Water Area
Berks	Blue Marsh Lake
Bucks	Nockamixon Lake
Butler	Lake Arthur
Carbon	Beltsville Lake
Huntingdon	Raystown Lake
Mercer	Shenango River Lake
Wayne/Pike	Lake Wallenpaupack

Courtesy of www.pfbc.pa.gov

on this page.

Lake Wallenpaupack is the only local body of water in our region that can be netted. In addition, any species caught there can only be used as bait for on that lake and cannot be resold or taken to another body of water. You will notice that under the Pennsylvania

guidelines, there is no option to use the cast net on the Delaware River.

In New York, regulations are different. Obviously, since New York has contact with the ocean, there is a saltwater category of fishing regulations, which are separate from freshwater ones. For the purposes of this

article, I'll only be focusing on the freshwater regulations specifically as they pertain to our Upper Delaware River region. The regulations are, again, very strict, as they are in Pennsylvania. For example, there is only one location in New York where freshwater fish can be legally caught using a cast net, and that is anywhere below the Troy Dam on the Hudson River. You can find this information on page 73 and 82 of the New York Freshwater Fishing Guide: www.dec.ny.gov/docs/fish_marine_pdf/fishguide21.pdf

Cast-net fishing is not currently permitted from either state in the Delaware River itself, and the limitations for the size and parameters of the net are the same in both states: no larger than a 10-foot radius or 20-foot diameter of the net, with 3/8-inch holes. Additionally, both states require that it is only used for shad and alewife (herring).

As you watch the videos on social media of fishermen casting out these vast nets in a style not unlike a discus thrower, just understand that the ability to practice this style of fishing is not as legally approachable in our area as popular media may suggest. However, it is not an impossible method of fishing to enjoy. In other parts of both states, it is a common practice. If you still have the desire to try it out for yourself, a common cast net can be purchased from many box stores such as BassPro, Walmart, Field & Stream and, of course, online for a very low, one-time cost. Just remember to double-check before taking it out; it isn't worth losing your fishing license over.

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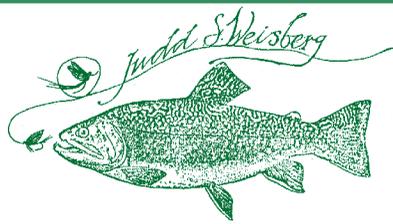
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Special trout fishing regulations

The history and biology

By TONY BONAIVIST

Special trout fishing regulations have been used as a fisheries management tool in New York State and around the U.S. for many years. In many instances, but not always, these regulations are based on self-sustaining trout populations, type of habitat and angling pressure. Fisheries managers have implemented a variety of special regulations to protect and promote those fisheries. Depending on the resource, regulations may specify no-kill, size limits and/or reduced bag limits. Most special regulations mandate the use of single-hook-point artificial lures and flies in order to minimize hooking mortality. In some cases, they require barbless hooks. The philosophy here is to promote and protect trout while providing a quality fishing experience.

I became involved with special trout regulations back in the late 1960s as a fisheries biologist for the New York State Conservation Department, now known as the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). At that time, the fisheries manager in Region 3 assigned me to survey and manage Amawalk Outlet, a small stream that runs between Amawalk Reservoir and Muscoot Reservoir. The stream is 2.5 miles long and is part of the vast NYC Department of Environmental Protection's Croton Watershed complex. Special regulations were first implemented on Amawalk in 1963 after an electro-fishing survey conducted in 1961 found wild brown trout fingerlings. As a result, the fisheries manager decided to protect the fishery with the hope that spawning by brown trout adults would develop a substantial wild fishery, if managed accordingly. A no-kill regulation was implemented at that time. Two years later, the regulations changed after biologists found a fair number of large brown trout had populated the stream. So, in 1965, a one-fish, 14-inch size and bag limit was imposed, with only single-hook pointed artificial lures and flies permitted.

The brown trout population responded dramatically, as documented by electrofishing surveys. In other words, the

void created by years of overfishing rapidly filled with wild trout because of the protection afforded by the regulations. So, for the first time in many years, some fairly large browns were taken by anglers. However, as the years passed, biologists found the trout were not growing as rapidly as before and that fingerlings were not as abundant. It didn't take too long to realize that the population had exceeded the stream's ability to support a large population of big fish. As a result, and after considerable discussion with the local chapter of Trout Unlimited, it was agreed that the size limit be changed from 14 inches to 10 inches, and anglers were also permitted to keep two trout a day. Those regulations were put in place for the 1969 season. As it turned out, changing the regulations on paper was a lot easier than getting local anglers to take a few trout home. Philosophically, most members of Trout Unlimited and other trout preservation organizations are very reluctant to kill fish, even when some harvest would help balance a slow-growing, overpopulated fishery. According to a biologist I spoke with recently, the DEC changed the regulations again, this time to three trout, 12 inches or larger per day, in order to simplify and standardize fishing laws. Frankly, based on my knowledge of Amawalk Outlet, I'm not convinced that many trout will attain that size.

Like the Amawalk, New York's famous Beaverkill River was also subjected to overfishing. So, in 1964, the conservation department conducted a creel census on selected portions of the Beaverkill in order to determine angler success, evaluate fishing pressure and help develop future fisheries management plans for the river. At the end of the 1964 season, electrofishing surveys found that a very small portion of the trout collected was of wild origin; most trout came from seasonal stocking. Upon review of the data collected during the census, along with the results of electrofishing studies, biologists determined that the existing size and bag limits were too generous to support quality trout fishing on a season-long basis. As a result, biologists took the bold steps necessary to implement a no-kill regulation on a two-mile stretch of the river. Although the new regulations were not a big hit with locals, the conservation department learned that trout fishing improved dramatically.

Soon after, similar studies conducted on the Willowemoc Creek found that certain sections of that river also benefitted from no-kill regulations, which were put in place in 1969. Large trout that measured well over 12 inches soon became a normal catch for anglers. It was also not uncommon for fishermen to release several fish in that size range during the peak fishing season. By 1970, and because of the initial success with the catch-and-release regulations on both the Beaverkill and Willowemoc, the conservation department increased the total miles of catch and release to eight. It is important to note that the fisheries in both the Beaverkill and the Willowemoc are dependent on stocking, not natural reproduction by wild brown trout like the Amawalk. However, I have been told that wild rainbow trout from the Delaware River have made their way well into the Beaverkill system.

Now that I've described the wild fishery established for the Amawalk, along with the fisheries established in the Beaverkill/Willowemoc system, it is essential to note that not all rivers are created when it comes to managing their trout populations. The Amawalk is a small cold-water stream with a flow of around 25 cubic feet per second (CFS). It is affected by the discharge from a sewage treatment facility on the main tributary. Overtime, that discharge has negatively impacted the river's trout population. In addition, the Amawalk is considered an unproductive stream in regard to food supply. As a result, its ability to produce a large population of large trout is severely limited. Consequently, the fishery cannot be managed as a no-kill because harvest is necessary in order to prevent a slow-growing, overpopulated fishery.



RR photos by Tony Bonavist

A Beaverkill special fishing area sign.



The Amawalk special fishing area.

On the other hand, the Beaverkill and Willowemoc, at least in their lower reaches, are dependent on annual stocking to maintain fishing. Because of that, and because both rivers have a significant food base with a much greater flow, they can be managed for larger trout by controlling the number of fish stocked annually. Over time, we'll see if the burgeoning wild rainbow trout population will affect the growth rate and size of the Beaverkill's brown trout.

While special regulations have dramatically improved the quality of trout fishing throughout the U.S., there are some negative aspects associated with this type of management. Over time, catch-and-release fishing has risen to cult status to the degree that anglers who wish to keep a few trout are ostracized by fellow fishermen. I had that happen to me after I reeled in two rainbows from the Delaware Rive several years ago. That being said, it is important to keep in mind that trout must be harvested from some rivers like the Amawalk to ensure adequate growth and to maintain population balance. Biologically, not all rivers can support unlimited, healthy trout populations.

Since most special regulations are implemented on large, productive rivers like the Willowemoc and Beaverkill, they attract a great deal of fishing pressure. Consequently, those rivers are frequently overcrowded, particularly during peak times of insect activity. That can compromise the quality of the fishing experience. Nevertheless, special regulations on selected rivers across the nation have dramatically improved trout fishing.



A slow-growing brown trout, like those we found during surveys of the Amawalk.

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What's the reel deal?

By HUNTER HILL

The changes in fishing trends are akin to the changes in fishing patterns themselves. One week, you may be bending rods left and right on one style of lure or bait setup. The next week, it'll be nothing to show. This is similar to the many small fishing accessories that pop onto the market through a flurry of social media promotions, landing in all your buddies' tackle boxes. As we gain new technology, many of these will come and go, but some are here to stay. Much has changed in the market of fishing apparel with the development of new water-wicking materials showcased by companies such as HUK and Pelagic. But even on the general manufacturing scale, there are odd little tools that appear from time to time such as line-cutting tools, knot-tying tools, fish-holding tools and many others for every detail of need that may arise while practicing the sport.

As a way of reviewing just a few of the most recent fishing accessories to hit the market, I've selected a handful to share with you and determine whether or not they are worth your time.

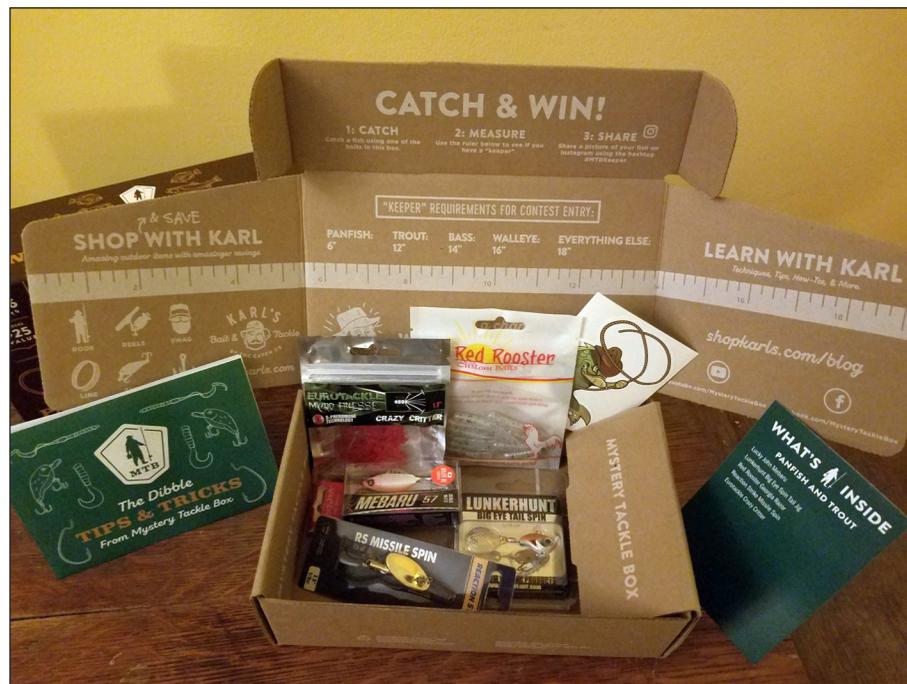
Rod socks



Protecting your fishing rod is essential.

First on deck is the rod sock. What is the purpose of a rod sock, you may ask? Well, have you ever grabbed a couple of fishing rods and hastily thrown them in your vehicle on your way to your favorite fishing spot? When you arrive, all you want to do is grab the rod and get fishing, but before you can, you must untangle the lines of the rods that were thrown together. The rod sock is designed to carefully slip over the length of your fishing pole and prevent tangles if rods are stacked or stored close to each other.

Do rod socks really work? In my opinion, they are one of the best new inventions of the decade. In years past, there have been many renditions of rod cases and fabric sheaths—earlier rod socks—within which you could safely stow your rod. However, cases became cumbersome to the fisherman on the go, and the fabric sheaths were dif-



RR photo by Hunter Hill

You can quickly collect lots of interesting tackle from a subscription box service.

ficult to put on and take off quickly due to their material, which caused snags when any hooks were involved. Today, rod socks are made of an expandable mesh that doesn't snag on hooks as badly as fabric and also slips easily over the eyelets of the rod. Most have a rubberized loop at the bottom that can be hooked on the reel to keep it in place. At a price of three dollars, I highly recommend a few of these to anyone who travels locally with any more than two rods at a time. Even if you don't travel with multiple rods, they look stylish and protect your rod from minor damage, normal wear and tear that might occur from traveling.

Face shield

This next item, in the category of fishing apparel, has drawn huge amounts of popularity: the face shield. Perhaps this is due in part to the current pandemic (the CDC says gaiters used as protection from COVID-19 should be double layered), but the neck-up style face shield is one of the most popular new fishing accessories out there right now. It is essentially a tube of breathable, stretchy polyester and spandex fabric that can be pulled up from the neck and over the bridge of your nose, effectively shielding your face and neck. It was originally designed for those long summer days when the sun beats down on your neck as your attention is fixed downwards at the water. It is additionally helpful to avoid the spray



The face mask that is convenient for fishing or, in pandemic times, for just day-to-day living.



of water as certain boats move from spot to spot, along with the bite of wind while looking for that bite amidst a storm.

This item is so popular that I have witnessed countless individuals wearing it as their regular facemask in public due to its comfort and breathability. It comes in a large variety of designs printed onto the fabric, including the scale pattern of your favorite fish species, the American flag or, in my case, classic camouflage. At an average starting price of \$10, I think the price point is a little high; however, in all practicality, it is a highly functional accessory and, when not in use, can easily be pulled down to rest around your neck.

Bubble box

The bubble box is a product I was unfamiliar with until I began perusing accessories to write about for this article. Being familiar with a lot of the more highly promoted products on the market, this one surprised me for its functionality and lack of market presence. It comes in several sizes, based on your capacity needs, and is quite simply an aeration tool for your baitfish.

The device is battery-operated and can be clipped onto the rim of your bait bucket or tank with a small hose and air stone running into the water to provide fresh air for the bait. I decided to splurge on the \$15 model, which operates for an eight-gallon capacity and will run for approximately 44 hours on a pair of D batteries. What I found interesting was that the device will function if you only have one battery. So, if you are in a crunch and don't have a second battery available, it will still work. There is a waterproofed on/off switch on top of the bubble box and the face opens



If you fish with live bait, the Bubble Box may be an aeration solution for you.

into two hatches that house the motor compartment and the battery compartment; this can double as storage for your air hose and stone until needed. There is a small metal clip on the back of the box that is used for hanging on a five-gallon bucket or another style tank.

As I mentioned, there were a few sizes to choose from, ranging smaller and larger than the model I chose. What I like about it the most stems from personal experience. When I was a kid, my dad always had a fancy bait tank in the boat. It held about 75 gallons or so and had a built-in caged aerator on the lid that was supported by a separate boat battery, which would only be run occasionally to conserve the power if we were out for as long as a day. Assuming this bubble box works as advertised, it would be vastly more efficient in keeping live bait fresh. I've not had a chance to run it for 44 hours as promoted, but the output from the stone is adequate for a dozen or more bait. For the price, I would definitely recommend this to anyone transporting bait even a few times throughout their fishing season.

Subscription boxes

My final product review is merely an example of a booming industry: the subscription box. Subscription boxes themselves are not new, but the standardized marketing of them from multiple outfitters has become a reinvigorated marketing technique for even well-established tackle companies.

Small tackle companies have taken to starting some of their own subscription boxes filled with, of course, tackle from their company, but there are independents who collaborate with the big names to bring a well-balanced collection of items to the fishing enthusiast. One such box company from which I picked up a sample was Mystery Tackle Box. As the name suggests, they create a fun experience in each box by not revealing what is inside. The boxes are categorized by the customer's target area of fishing—for example, bass versus panfish and trout—and don't just simply contain lures and tackle designed for those species. The boxes also include decals from brands, a small informational pamphlet on fishing tips and tricks and an infographic built right into the box that doubles as a ruler for measuring fish.

Given the price of roughly \$20 a box, I was leery of what might be inside, but the surprise and variety definitely held up to the associated hype. In this particular box, I received three lures, valued at roughly \$5 apiece; two bags of soft plastics valued at about the same if not a few dollars cheaper; and a decal and pamphlet. So, the value comes in just over what has been paid for the whole box, and the marketing certainly has me considering an additional purchase. Being as frugal as I am, I wouldn't want to commit to the \$20 every month, but for someone willing to spend money on their hobby regularly or who simply doesn't know where to start to begin collecting tackle for fishing, I would say this is a great option and would make a good gift idea for the fisherman in your life.

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Located in the Beaverkill Valley at the end of dead-end road, this 330-acre retreat is nestled in its own valley for complete privacy. Five-bedroom home with commanding views of two ponds and the valley. Huge fireplace provides heat long after the fire has gone out. Covered porch off the kitchen to relax with your morning coffee. Stream, with a great mix of open and wooded land. Several food plots and tree-stands for the hunter or photographer. In-ground pool with a beautiful bluestone patio. Two garages and a big old barn for all the toys. Need a getaway from the getaway? A great little hunting cabin borders hundreds of acres of state land on the north side of the property. In keeping with the rest of the Valley, there are some modest deed restrictions to keep the property private. Membership to private clubs for fishing the Upper Beaverkill may be available. Property consists of 3 parcels. \$2,500,000



Your own private refuge from the world. At the end of a dead-end road and bordering over 3000 acres of PA state-lands, this 39-acre estate is the ultimate in privacy and comfort. Five bedrooms/3 baths in this classic 2-story home built in 1994 with many recent updates. Kitchen has a gas stove with electric oven as well as a second induction 4 burner cook surface to easily feed the gang. The property has a pond, pool, enclosed garden and a private airstrip. Plenty of room for your cars and collection of outdoor toys with a 4-car attached garage as well as a new 4 -car detached garage. Five minutes to world-class trout fishing. Split unit air conditioning units which function similar to central air conditioning. Pellet and wood stoves provide inexpensive forms of auxiliary heat. \$800,000



Plenty of room to spread out with a living room and den. This 3-bedroom, 3-bath Hancock home has a basement that could be finished for extra living space. Good deer hunting and great fishing. 1700 feet of frontage on the Beaverkill. The frontage is across Old Route 17, a bit of a walk, but the house is high and dry with no flood issues. Gardens, fruit trees and even a shed for all of your toys. \$250,000



Here is your chance to own West Branch Delaware Riverfront Property! Superb trout fishing right out your front door! This 3- bedroom home is located on some of the best trout water in the country. New NYS regulations will now allow trout fishing all year round. There is a bonus parcel of land behind the house-perfect for a garden. This one will not last long. \$120,000

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From the archive...

Not your great-great-grandfather's river

How times have changed

By GREG BELCAMINO

We think of the Delaware and its tributaries as the locale of some of the very best trout fishing in the east, but the area and its angling would be unrecognizable to its earliest anglers. Even though the region remains relatively unpopulated, the river has been transformed by a series of man-made events. And although the angling is now perhaps better than it has been in many years, it is far different from what it had been before settlement by Europeans.

Historically, the only trout in the Delaware and its tributaries were brook trout (which is actually a char, and not a true trout). Brook trout require cold, clean water. The scientific name for the brook trout is *Salvelinus fontinalis*, or “char of the springs,” and they lived in the smaller headwater streams where temperatures were suitable.

Settlement brought with it industry, transforming the landscape and habitat for the native trout. Perhaps the most destructive industry was tanning, which required bark from native hemlocks as a raw material for tanning hides brought mainly from South America. Enormous tracts of large hemlock were killed for their bark, and the

disappearance of these trees led to greater erosion and less shade for the rivers, and consequently higher water temperatures unfavorable for the native brook trout. In addition, waste from the tanneries created pollution that further damaged brook trout habitat, driving them farther into the headwaters.

After the tanning industry went into decline in the second half of the nineteenth century, other assaults on the rivers continued. Precursors to the modern chemical industry, acid factories appeared on the rivers, along with charcoal kilns, both requiring large quantities of wood and producing pollution, so that deforestation continued. (One well-known pool on the Beaverkill is called “Acid Factory.”) By the late nineteenth century, much of the original forest of the Delaware River basin was gone, and its rivers were warmer and their waters less pure. Historical photos show a landscape devoid of trees that would be unrecognizable to either 17th- or 21st-century visitors. (The impacts of industry on the Delaware tributaries are well documented in Ed Van Put’s two books, “Trout Fishing in the Catskills” and “The Beaverkill.”)

However, the area’s fishing had been discovered before industry had seriously



Photo courtesy PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Surrounded by piles of Hemlock tanbark, workers fill a railcar with the valuable commodity, harvested for its tannin, which was used in tanning leather. (Photo taken in Leetonia, Tioga County, PA, circa 1900)

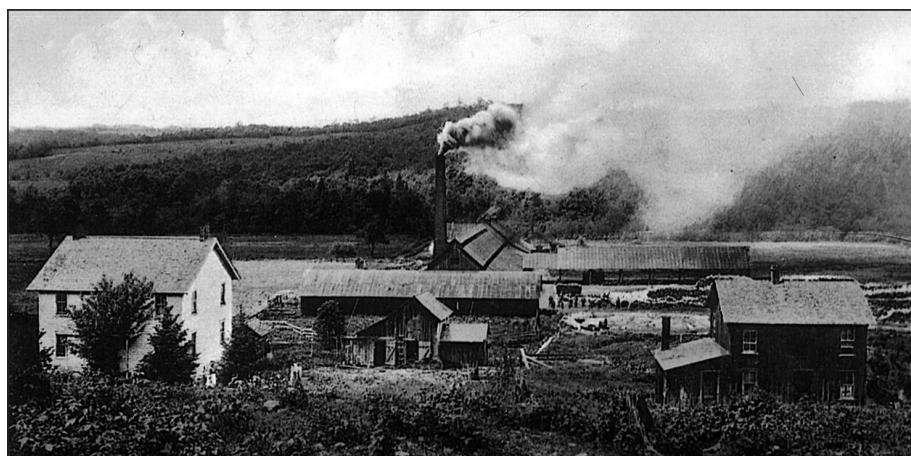


Photo courtesy of Ed Van Put
This acid factory on Willowemoc Creek in Sullivan County, NY once processed hardwoods to produce wood alcohol and other products.



Photo courtesy PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Before heavy machinery, men, horses and mules harvested hemlock and other timber for Pennsylvania’s thriving forestry industry.



Photo courtesy PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

These bark peelers are hard at work supplying hemlock bark for the tanning industry. In 1900 Pennsylvania was the largest leather-producing state in the nation. (Photo taken in the Hammersely region of Clinton County, PA.)

degraded brook trout habitat, and photos show enormous catches of trout. Stories abound about anglers who came from the cities and killed hundreds of trout in a week (or even just a day) of fishing. As fishing declined, as a result of both decreased habitat and over-fishing, many private fishing clubs were formed in an effort to preserve the quality of fishing for those who had the means to join them. Nevertheless, reducing angling pressure could not counteract the losses of brook trout habitat.

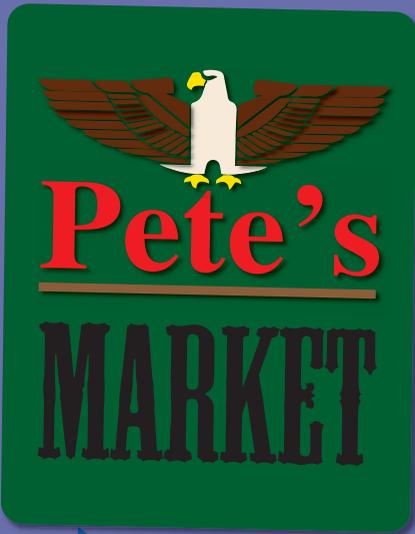
Two other events began the transformation of the area from a pure brook trout fishery to what it is today. These were the advent of trout hatcheries and the introduction of rainbow trout (native to the American West) and brown trout (native to Europe) in the late 19th century. These fish not only out-competed brook trout in the waters that were suitable to both, but prospered in waters that were too warm for brook trout. The brown trout, especially, were also less susceptible to angling pressure, so, despite initial prejudice in favor of the native fish, they kept alive trout fishing in waters that were no longer suitable for brook trout.

Finally, dam building further extended habitat for the introduced rainbow and brown trout. On the New York side of the watershed, New York City constructed reservoirs on the upper East and West Branches of the Delaware and on the Neversink River

in the mid-20th century. Each of the three reservoirs has cold-water bottom releases that extends trout habitat far downstream from the dams. From the angler’s point of view, the reservoirs are a mixed blessing, because while the dams create and extend trout habitat, managing them for the city’s water supply trumps maintaining them for ecological reasons, and many external factors influence the city’s operation of the dams. There are continual negotiations between the city and various organizations over the management of flows from the reservoirs.

The Delaware and its tributaries have been transformed from pristine rivers dominated by native brook trout, where anglers could count on catching hundreds of trout in a week’s fishing, to heavily managed streams providing an opportunity to catch a few large, challenging non-native trout. Depending on whether you’re primarily a preservationist or an angler, that’s either a shame or a blessing, but whatever your view, the fishing is completely different from what it was in early times.

[Greg Belcamino is an avid trout fisherman and is on the board of the Delaware Highlands Conservancy, a land trust working in partnership with landowners and communities to conserve the natural heritage and quality of life in the Upper Delaware River region.]



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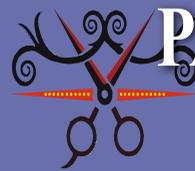
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