

The North Branch Potomac River Zero Creel Limit Trout Fishing Area 2019 Trout Population Survey Summary

The entire twenty mile management area was sampled from Westernport to Pinto during 2019. The Peterson Mark/Recapture method was used to estimate the adult trout density in the Westernport to Black Oak section of the management area, as well as obtain relative abundance using the number of trout collected and observed. Due to frequent rapids, a sixteen foot cataraft inflatable boat equipped for electrofishing was used to collect fish. The cataraft was operated using four personnel: an individual at the oars, a worker operating the anode pedal, and two persons with dip nets collecting fish.



Fishing and Boating Services fisheries biologists obtaining trout data in the North Branch Potomac River Zero Creel Limit Trout Fishing Area in 2019. Photo by John Mullican.

Rainbow trout were the most abundant salmonid species followed by brown trout. Brook trout were present but scarce. The rainbow trout population was characterized by having multiple year classes from four inches to 20.5 inches, and exhibited overall optimal body condition. Stock (9 inches), preferred (12 inches), quality (15 inches) and trophy size (18 inches) trout were well represented in the population, and exhibited optimal body condition in all size ranges. About 33 percent of all rainbow trout collected in the survey were greater than twelve inches. The brown

trout population was characterized by having multiple year classes from 7.3 inches to 20.5 inches, and exhibited overall optimal body condition. Stock, preferred, quality and trophy size fish were well represented in the population, and also exhibited optimal body condition in all size ranges. About 53 percent of all brown trout captured in the survey were greater than twelve inches.



Rainbow trout (top) and brown trout (bottom) collected during the 2019 North Branch Potomac River trout population survey. Photos by John Mullican.

The area of the river from Westernport to McCoole contained the highest trout abundance for both rainbow trout and brown trout. These abundance indices were similar to that observed during the 2009 through 2016 surveys (Figure 1). The estimated density based on the mark-recapture effort ranged from 115 to 622 adult trout per mile within this section of the management area. We believe this to be a very low estimate to the actual population based on reported angler catch rates and recent fingerling trout stocking numbers. Anglers report catching 30 to 60 trout per trip in this section of the river, which is more comparative to rivers supporting more than 1,000 trout/mile.

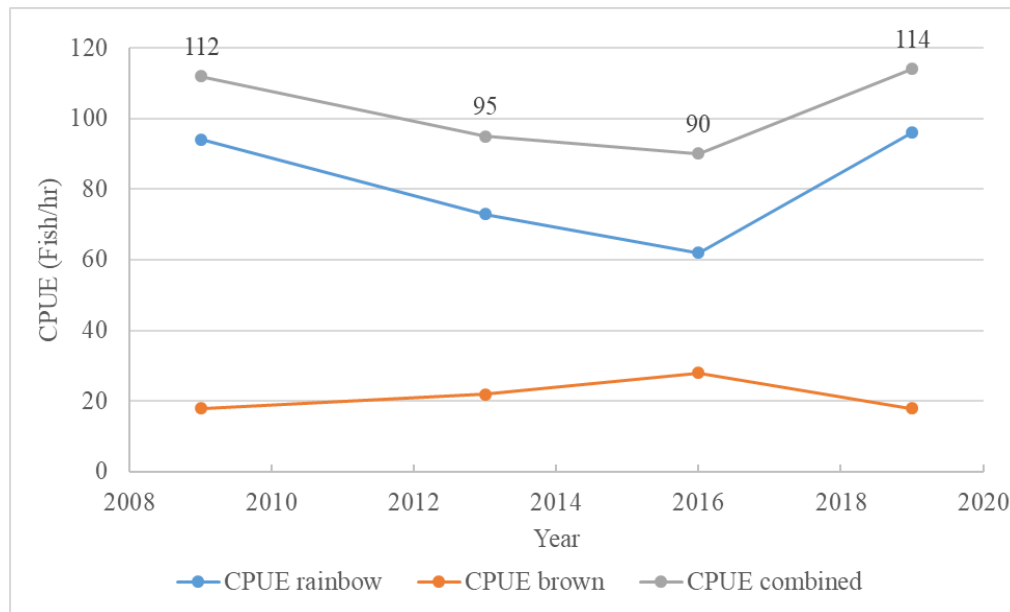


Figure 1. Electrofishing catch per unit effort of trout species within the Westernport to McCoole reach, North Branch Potomac River 2009 – 2019.



Stocked fingerling rainbow trout exhibit excellent growth and condition in the North Branch Potomac River Zero

Fingerling brown trout and rainbow trout are stocked annually in the Zero Creel Limit Trout Fishing Area to support the put and grow fishery. A total of 66,615 fingerling rainbow trout and 20,000 fingerling brown trout were stocked in this management area between July 1, 2019 and July 1, 2020. The lower Catch and Return Trout Fishing Area

downstream of Barnum was floated stocked with 18,000 cutthroat trout fingerlings in order to provide anglers a diverse trout fishing experience found nowhere else in Maryland.