

Trout Stocking Information:

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's Division of Fish & Wildlife is committed to conserving and responsibly managing Rhode Island's freshwater and wildlife resources to ensure equitable and sustainable use for current and future generations. As part of this mission, RIDFW works to provide meaningful opportunities for residents and visitors to connect with and enjoy the state's natural resources.

It is our belief that trout stocking and wild trout conservation are not mutually exclusive; rather they are complementary components of science-based fisheries management. RIDFW fisheries biologists carefully evaluate where and how stocking occurs and they apply established est practices to balance recreational angling opportunities with long-term protection and stewardship of wild trout populations.

Stocking programs play an important role beyond fishing by generating license revenue that funds our conservation initiatives, contributes to local economies, and help keep fishing opportunities accessible to the public. At the same time, RIDFW remains firmly committed to protecting and restoring wild trout through targeted habitat restoration, water quality improvements, and projects that strengthen ecosystem resilience.

An example is the Divisions' "Trees for Trout" program, in partnership with the RI Chapter of Trout Unlimited, that uses donated Christmas trees to restore in-stream habitat for wild brook trout and other native species. Additional projects involve dam removals or alterations, and road stream crossings upgrades (culverts) that reconnect cold water streams and improve water quality.

Less than 8% of Rhode Island's freshwater systems are stocked with trout. Most waters remain unstocked, and some include additional protections such as catch-and-release regulations. The Beaver River, located in the upper reaches of the Wood River system, is one example: historically stocked, it's now managed as a catch-and-release fishery and is no longer stocked. Trout stocking in RI is primarily put and take fishery, very few survive an entire year.

This regulation was requested by Trout Unlimited in the 1980's and is still in practice today. *"That portion of the Falls River, Exeter, from the Bridge at Austin Arm Rd., downstream approximately 2 miles to the bridge at Brook trail as designated a "no-kill" or "catch and release" area. Fishing is permitted only with artificial lures equipped with a single barbless hook or a single barbed hook which has been crimped. All fish caught must be returned to the water immediately. The possession of any trout while fishing in this section of the river shall be prima facie evidence that the said trout salmon or charr were taken in violation of these rules and regulations."*

The state stocks trout 3 times in the spring beginning with Opening Day, Fall stocking around Columbus Day, and winter stocking, primarily for ice fishing. The state stocks brook, brown,

rainbow, golden rainbow and occasionally tiger trout as well as land-locked Sebago Atlantic salmon.

We stock over 100 locations for Opening Day. Annually, the state stocks about 80,000 trout. We also stock children's fishing derbies for clubs and municipalities and for our own Aquatic Resource Education Program for adults and children.

Other important points:

- Hatchery fish do not reproduce in the wild; in fact, all stocked rainbow trout are female, tiger trout are sterile. We have not found hatchery trout reproducing in any self-sustaining numbers, ever. Most stocked trout are harvested by anglers within weeks, meaning they rarely establish long-term populations. Many stocked waters, such as reservoirs, ponds, and urban rivers, are not suitable for natural trout reproduction. In these locations, stocking provides fishing opportunities that would not otherwise exist. Hatchery trout are sought after by the angling public for sport and food and thereby take the pressure from wild trout.
- The state began stocking trout in 1871 with brook trout imported from other states. Largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill sunfish and carp were also brought into the state to be stocked. This was done because recreational angling was becoming more popular, subsistence fishing was the norm especially for poor families and immigrants from Europe, and there were not enough wild species of fish available to sustain the need.
- Wild brook trout are small, colorful, and adapt well to drought conditions whereby hatchery trout would not survive. They live for an average of 3 years. They seek out seeps and springs to sustain them in low water situations. The state never stocks first order streams where many take refuge. Annually Fish & Wildlife biologists survey wild trout populations and use temperature loggers to assess stream temperature habitat suitability.
- Wild brook trout are found statewide, and their numbers are not in jeopardy due to stocking, but rather due to siltation, development, water withdrawals, and connectivity issues of dams and non-passable culverts. Populations so isolated do not have the ability to mix with other wild trout populations, which would benefit them by enabling them to be genetically stronger. The state is committed to working toward the alleviation of these impediments.
- We don't know if they were here originally or if their origin is from the original trout stocked over 150 years ago. But a DNA study that the division conducted a few years ago determined that there was no intermingling of genetic markers from hatchery to wild trout.
- Irrespective of studies in other states, Rhode Island scientific data compiled, analyzed, and continued through many years has determined that the population of wild brook trout in our state is successful in self-sustaining populations and not at risk by hatchery stocking.
- Recreational freshwater and marine angling are important in Rhode Island, supported by over 175,000 anglers who spend money locally on tackle, bait, licenses, travel, and dining. Freshwater licenses and trout stamps generate 130 million annually.
- It ensures accessible public angling opportunities, fosters community well-being, supports educational programs, and in the case of trout, diverts fishing pressure away from vulnerable, wild, trout populations.

- The program largely pays for itself through Federal US Fish & Wildlife Service, Sport Fish Restoration funds, and state fishing licenses (\$24 for RI residents), and trout conservation stamps (\$6.00).
- To fish for freshwater species, anglers 15 and older need a valid RI Freshwater Fishing License, along with a Trout Conservation Stamp if they plan to keep or possess trout. Permits, licenses, and official stocking schedules can be easily accessed via the RI DEM Fishing Information portal.
- Again, it is important to note that fish hatchery husbandry programs support fishing license sales and equipment taxes that contribute significant funding for conservation projects under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act. These funds support stream restoration, research, habitat protection, and anadromous fish passage improvements of fish ladders and natural rock ramps.