For More Information:

Region 5 Fisheries:
Raybrook: (518) 897-1200
Warrensburg: (518) 623-1200
fwfish5@dec.ny.gov

Region 6 Fisheries:
(315) 785-2263
fwfish6@dec.ny.gov

Additional References:

I FISH NY Guide to Freshwater Fishing
Request a copy at:
www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/fishing.html

Stocking information:
www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7739.html

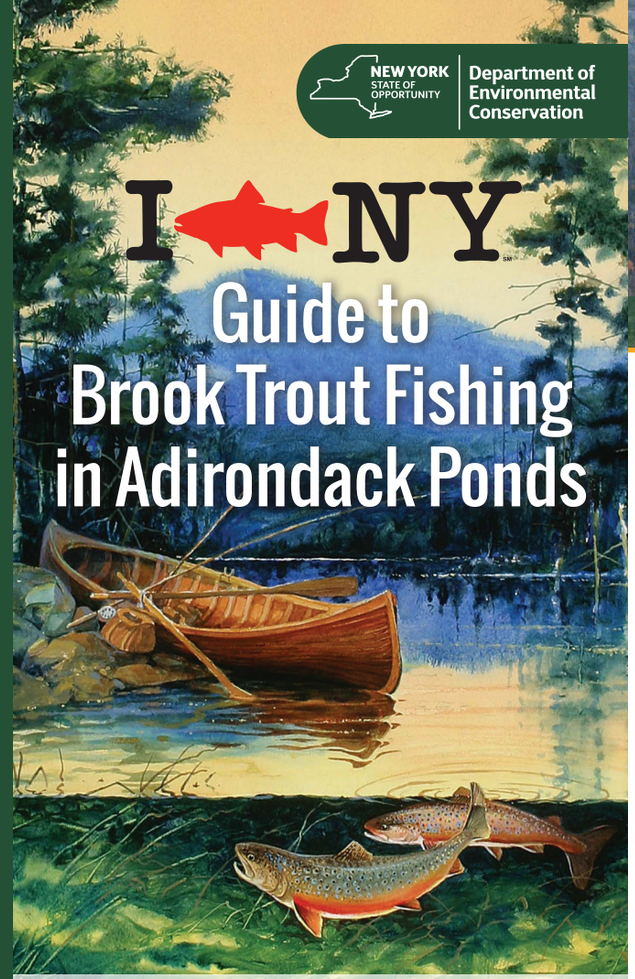
Reclaimed Trout Ponds:
www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/64503.html

Recommended Adirondack Fishing Waters:
www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28244.html

Maps of Fishing Waters:
www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/42978.html

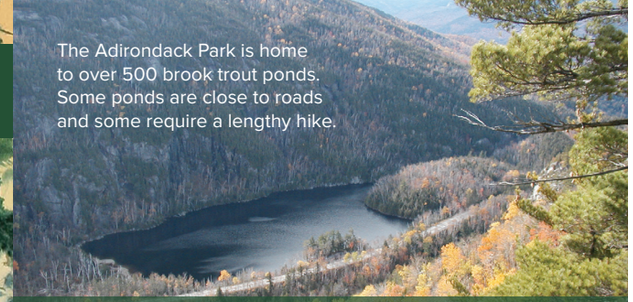
NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Department of Environmental Conservation

I ♥ NY Guide to Brook Trout Fishing in Adirondack Ponds



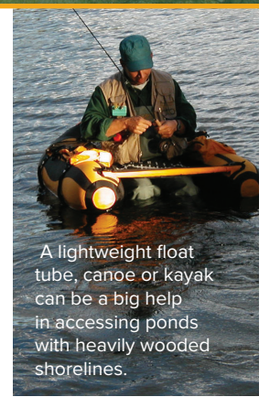
New York's State Fish

Designated New York's state fish, Brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) were once widely distributed in New York State but are now most numerous in small streams and the headwaters of larger streams in mountainous areas. Fish in these waters are normally small but still have a dedicated following among those looking for a tasty meal. In these situations, a small worm drifted in the current can't be beat. Brook trout can grow much larger in ponds, the majority of which are found in wilderness areas within the Adirondack Park. Fish in these waters can reach 3 pounds or more.



The Adirondack Park is home to over 500 brook trout ponds. Some ponds are close to roads and some require a lengthy hike.

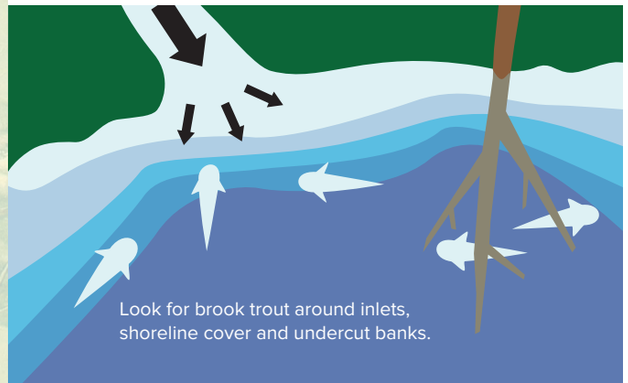
Selecting a Pond



A lightweight float tube, canoe or kayak can be a big help in accessing ponds with heavily wooded shorelines.

The first step in your Adirondack brook trout fishing adventure is selecting a pond to fish. Some ponds require a long hike to access; others can be found along roads. Some good starting points include the St. Regis Canoe Area, Pharaoh Lake Wilderness, West Canada Lake Wilderness and Lake George Wild Forest areas. These lands all contain numerous ponds and lakes and miles of marked hiking trails. A lightweight canoe, kayak or float tube can be a big help, as the shorelines can be difficult to access.

To help you find a brook trout pond, DEC's website provides a list of waters managed for brook trout. The website also lists waters where brook trout are stocked and waters that DEC has reclaimed by eliminating competitive fish species prior to stocking brook trout.
(See "Additional References.")



Look for brook trout around inlets, shoreline cover and undercut banks.

Where to Fish

The physical features of a pond including the amount of available cover, shape of the lake basin, and inlets and outlets are important in fishing for brook trout. Brook trout will closely associate themselves with cover in some lakes for at least part of the time. They tuck under the edges of bogs or underneath logs where they are protected from predators yet still able to feed if the opportunity arises. At other times, they can be found cruising throughout the pond, far from cover.

Brook trout also use underwater features like drop-offs, particularly where there is an associated inlet. Inlets enable trout to remain fairly stationary as food is transported downstream to them. Inlets that add cold water to a lake can concentrate brook trout during warmer months. In some ponds, surface waters may be too warm, and bottom waters may lack oxygen during summer months. In these situations, look for brook trout in the cool water between these zones. The position of brook trout in a given pond may also be determined by the type of prey available. Such is the case during insect hatches, when trout can be found just under the water's surface feeding on emerging insects.

When to Fish

Water temperature and light level are two important considerations when fishing for brook trout in ponds and lakes. In many ponds, particularly those with a limited amount of cover, brook trout are much more easily caught when light levels are low, such as early or late in the day and during cloudy periods. Unsettled, even unpleasant, weather can produce excellent brook trout angling. The cool, sometimes cold, weather of spring and fall very often produces the best angling of the year, when active, hungry trout are found near the water's surface. As the season progresses and surface waters warm, brook trout seek deeper water to find acceptable temperature and oxygen levels.

Fishing Tackle and Techniques

Fishing for brook trout in lakes and ponds can take many forms, and anglers use a wide variety of tackle and techniques to pursue them.

The Lake Clear Wabbler™ is a popular and effective brook trout fishing rig.

Spinning and Spin Casting

Trolling a spoon and a baited hook is one of the most effective and popular brook trout fishing techniques. The Lake Clear Wabbler™ was developed in the Adirondacks and has taken innumerable brook trout, including some large specimens. A fairly light fishing rod is used in this method, either with a spinning or spin-cast reel. To assemble this type of rig, connect the spoon to the end of the line, and add 12 to 18 inches of 4 - 6 lb. test leader, with a hook (commonly size #6) at the very end of the rig. Attach a worm to the hook, and troll the rig slowly so the spoon wobbles back and forth but doesn't spin. Split-shot can be added to the line, to increase the weight and sink the rig deeper in the pond. This method works well when fishing deeper in the water column, which is quite useful as summer progresses and surface waters warm. Many anglers also cast jigs or spinners for brook trout.

Mickey Finn

Wooly Bugger

Beadhead

Gray Ghost

Hornberg

Muddler Minnow

Flyfishing

Fly fisherman also catch many brook trout from lakes and ponds. These anglers use varied tactics and fly patterns. A standard fly fishing outfit for brook trout in ponds is an eight- or nine-foot rod designed to cast a five- or six-weight floating, sinking tip or sinking fly-line and a 4X tippet.

Although a variety of fly patterns can catch brook trout, there are a few standard patterns that most anglers commonly carry. Black or olive wooly buggers, either unweighted or tied with a weighted bead on the head of the fly (they fish a little deeper) are responsible for the capture of untold numbers of brook trout. Other classic brook trout flies include: blacknose dace, mickey finn, hornberg, muddler minnow, baby brook trout, black ghost, and the grey ghost (mostly in sizes 6-12). Casting these streamer flies along the edges of cover can produce many trout, as can trolling. While streamers are often the most popular flies, both weighted and unweighted nymphs can also be effective on brook trout.

One of the most exciting ways to fish is to chase rising brook trout when an insect hatch is on. An early spring midge hatch on a good brook trout water is a sight to behold. Few angling experiences can rival catching a large rising brook trout with a well-placed cast from your favorite fly rod.

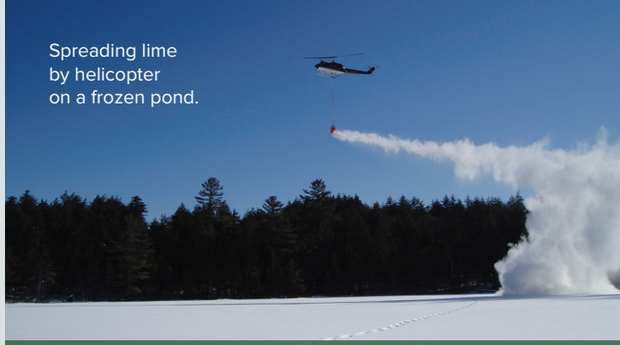
The Plight of the Brook Trout

Brook trout are members of the *Char* genus and are more closely related to lake trout than they are to brown and rainbow trout. Brook trout primarily eat insects and other invertebrates, not fish. They evolved in isolated ponds with few other competitive fish species and continue to flourish in these types of waters. Unfortunately, over the years, non-native fish species such as yellow perch, bass, golden shiner and various other baitfish have been introduced into many of these waters. When this occurs, brook trout populations almost always decline.

Brook trout also require excellent water quality and are particularly sensitive to increases in pond acidity caused by acid precipitation. Acid precipitation occurs when moisture in the air mixes with emissions from coal-burning power plants and falls as rain or snow. While more fertile areas can usually buffer the impacts of acid precipitation, the Adirondack region is naturally low in limestone and cannot offset its effects.

In the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest region of the Adirondack Park, only 3% of the waters that once held brook trout still do, due to both acid precipitation and illegal fish introduction.

Collecting heritage strain brook trout eggs.



Spreading lime by helicopter on a frozen pond.

What DEC is Doing

A Horn Lake strain brook trout - one of three heritage strains raised in DEC fish hatcheries.

New York State has established the toughest acid rain control requirements in the nation and continues to lead the fight for increased reductions in power plant emissions outside the state. Although progress is being made to combat acid precipitation, the introduction of competitive fish species remains a major problem. This can occur through the careless use of baitfish, or by anglers who incorrectly believe they are doing a good thing by adding small fish for the brook trout to feed on. To combat this, DEC prohibits the use of baitfish in most brook trout ponds. The introduction of any fish into waters they did not come from without a DEC stocking permit is also prohibited.

DEC is also working to restore brook trout to waters that they once inhabited in the Adirondack Park. Ponds are selectively limed each winter to reduce acidity levels, and non-native fish populations that compete with brook trout are eliminated. Once acidity levels are suitable for fish survival and competing fish species have been eradicated, ponds are restocked with brook trout. Many waters are stocked with native "heritage strain" brook trout. Other waters are stocked with hybrid brook trout that are more tolerant of acidic conditions.