Clear Creek, flowing through the Village of Ellington in Chautauqua and Cattaraugus Counties, provides a high-quality fishery for wild brown trout. This stream has continuous public fishing rights easements along nearly its entire 11-mile length. Trout stocking was discontinued after 2005, due to the high density of wild brown trout found in 2000 and 2005 surveys. A limited population of wild rainbow trout was first seen in the creek in 2005 and has not expanded substantially. The stream is open for fishing year-round, with catch and release – artificial lures only from 10/16-3/31. In 2018, as part of region-wide trout population monitoring, Clear Creek was sampled by electrofishing at two sites, Cowen’s Corners Road and near a gravel pit, upstream of Ellington, totaling 800 feet of stream. Both sites had been sampled previously, in 1995, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2016 and 2017, while the site at the gravel pit, additionally, was sampled in 1991. To estimate the trout population abundance, we utilized two electrofishing passes in 2010-2018, prior to this we utilized single pass CROTS methodology.

In 2018, at our two sites, we captured 144 yearling and older (adult) wild brown trout. No wild rainbow trout were captured in 2018 sampling. Adult brown trout ranged in length from 4-16 inches (Figure 1), with an average length of 8.9 inches. At the Cowen’s Corners site, we found a moderate adult wild brown trout abundance of 408 fish/mile (±250) (Figure 2). At our site near the gravel pit, we continued to see a high abundance of adult wild brown trout (1,605 fish/mile (±53)) (Figure 2). Reproduction of brown trout in Clear Creek in 2018 was very poor, with almost no young-of-year being captured at the Cowen’s Corner’s site and a low number captured at our gravel pit site.
Adult wild brown trout abundance at the Cowen’s Corners site in 2017 had increased significantly (P<0.05) over 2010, 2015 and 2016, but declined significantly in 2018 (Figure 2). Due to much above normal flows at the time of sampling, shocking efficiency (and confidence limits) were very poor at this site in 2018. The adult brown trout abundance value at our site near the gravel pit in 2018 was significantly lower than we found in 2015, 2016 and 2017, however, it was significantly higher than was found in 2010 (Figure 2). The habitat at the gravel pit site improved considerably after the 2010 survey, with a new, deep pool holding approximately half the adult fish in the site. This new pool very likely accounted for the doubling of the adult brown trout abundance from 2005-2010 samples and 2015-2017, but does not explain the drop in 2018. From angler catch reports, wild rainbow trout appear to be maintaining a small and variable sized population. In addition to electrofishing, from July 9-August 31 we monitored water temperatures at five locations throughout Clear Creek. Results of temperature monitoring revealed that at four of the five sites (including both our trout sampling sites) temperatures remained very good for wild brown trout growth and survival, never exceeding 70 degrees F. At the fourth site, temps never exceeded 75 degrees F. Based on this year’s monitoring efforts, it appears Clear Creek will continue to provide excellent fishing for anglers wishing to pursue wild brown trout and the occasional wild rainbow trout. Due to the high wild trout abundance found in recent surveys, Clear Creek should continue to be managed as a wild trout fishery, with no changes in fishing regulations.