The Ram, a major tributary of Elm Creek is only 1.5 miles long, but receives abundant spring water and supports a high abundance of wild brown trout. The stream flows through western Cattaraugus County in the village of East Randolph. Prior to 1998, water quality for trout was compromised by a shallow, 30± acre impoundment, which raised water temperatures substantially. Public fishing access to this stream is limited to non-posted, private lands. In 2018, as part of region-wide trout population monitoring, the stream was sampled by electrofishing at one 460-foot site upstream of Mill Street. This site had been sampled previously in 1992, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2008, 2013, 2016 and 2017. In 2013-2018 surveys, trout population abundance was estimated from two electrofishing passes; while in previous years we used one-pass CROTS methodology.

In 2018, we captured 88 yearling and older (adult) wild brown trout, ranging in length from 4.8-19.8 inches and averaging 8.7 inches (Figure 1). The abundance of adult wild brown trout in 2018 was as 1,000 fish/mile (±11) (Figure 2). The number of young-of-year (YOO) brown trout captured in the first electrofishing pass was 364/mile. Adult trout habitat was of good quality consisting of log jam pools, and overhanging shrubs.

The abundance of adult wild brown trout in 2018 at our sampling site was significantly lower (P<0.05) than we observed in 2016 and 2017, but much higher than 1992-2013 (Figure 2). Trout abundance in The Ram increased substantially following the sudden draining of the shallow
headwater pond in 1998. Water temperatures were reduced substantially and once heavy sediment deposits flushed through the stream, trout reproduction and abundance (Figure 2) increased substantially beginning in 2003. A similar improvement was noted downstream in Elm Creek as well. Some of the observed decline in adult brown trout abundance in 2018 may have been due to poor reproduction in 2017 (a weather-related phenomenon observed throughout Region Nine). One interesting finding in this year’s sampling was capturing the same large (19.8 inches) brown trout – from the same pool – for the third year in a row (based on unique spotting). This was likely a very old fish and it had grown very little in three years (18.3 and 19.3 inches in 2016 and 2017, respectively). Based on this year’s sampling, The Ram should continue to provide quality angling for those wishing to pursue wild brown trout in a small stream setting. No changes in regulations are recommended for The Ram and it should continue to be managed as a wild trout fishery.