

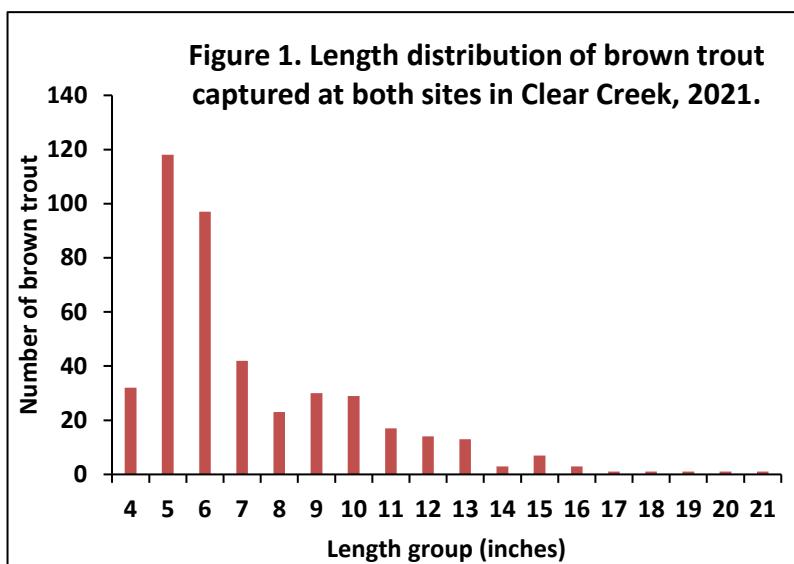
Clear Creek (Ellington) Trout Population Estimate

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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 sampled in the creek in 2005 and has not expanded substantially. The stream from its mouth to the Cockaigne Ski Area is managed with a “Wild-Premier” designation, having a year-round open season, including catch and release – artificial lures only from October 16 through March 31. From April 1 through October 15, one fish of any size may be harvested. In 2021, as part of New York State’s trout stream management plan, Clear Creek was sampled by electrofishing at five sites. The five sites totaled 1,990 feet of stream. The sites were previously sampled from four to ten times between 1990 to 2020 (Table 1). To estimate the adult trout population abundance, we utilized two electrofishing passes in 2010-2020 surveys, prior to this we utilized single pass methodology.

In 2021, we captured 459 yearling and older (adult) wild brown trout and 12 adult wild rainbow trout. Adult brown trout ranged in length from 4 to 21 inches (Figure 1), with an average length of 7.7 inches. For all five sites combined, the average adult brown trout abundance was 1,218 fish/mile (± 122) and rainbow trout abundance was 32 fish/mile (± 5). The average adult trout biomass in 2021 was 109 lbs/acre. In 2021, the number of young-of-year brown trout captured on both sampling runs averaged 854 fish/mile in 2021 (range 329-1,368 fish/mile), which indicates reproduction was strong this year.



Overall, in Clear Creek we have documented a large increase in the adult wild brown trout population from the early-mid 1990s through the 2005 when it was being stocked with hatchery trout, with some noticeable decrease in abundance at some sites after 2010 (Table 1). Three of the sites sampled in 2021 showed no significant population abundance trend from the early 1990s-2021, while two sites appeared to have long-term increases over that time period (Table 1). Based on angler catch reports and our sampling in 2021, wild rainbow trout appear to be maintaining a small, localized population, since they were first discovered in 2005. 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.



Table 1. Adult wild brown trout abundance estimates (number/mile) at all five sampling sites on Clear Creek – Ellington in 2021.

Year	Cowen's Corners	County Line	Wade Hill Rd	Gravel Pit	Middle FPA
1990	---	229	---	---	---
1991	---	---	---	263	237
1995	168	495	276	621	414
2005	1,042	1,059	351	1,324	279
2010	792	559	316	1,236	506
2015	500	507	789	2,303	2,687*
2016	750	---	---	2,224	---
2017	947	---	---	2,566	---
2018	408	---	---	1,605	---
2019	447	---	---	1,789	---
2020	526	---	---	1,461	---
2021	1,053	737	1,494	1,408	1,391

*Denotes an unreliable population estimate at this site.