

Spring Mills Creek Fish Passage Enhancement Survey

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On June 29, 2023, Spring Mills Creek was electrofished at two sites by NYSDEC Region 9 Fisheries and USFWS staff for the purpose of evaluating a fish passage project completed in 2020. The purpose of this survey was to look for fish that had been tagged by USFWS in 2022 below the lower improved culvert. This stream is a high-quality tributary of Cryder Creek, located near Whitesville in Allegany County. Spring Mills Creek is entirely on private land and anglers may need to obtain owner permission to fish the stream.

In the fall of 2020, two impassable culverts on Town and County roads were improved by installing engineered rock riffles downstream to back water up into the culverts (Figure 1). Sampling in 2022 by USFWS staff had not been able to determine if wild brook trout were moving upstream through the improved culverts. At the upper improved culvert on Pleasant Valley Road, 200 feet of sampling below the culvert produced four adult wild brook trout, ranging from 4-9 inches (Figure 2). An additional 100-foot done immediately above the culvert captured no trout. Several non-trout fish species were captured both below and above the culvert. The area sampled above the culvert was heavily impacted by beaver and very thick with willows, making sampling efficiency low.

An additional site was sampled just upstream of the improved culvert on County Route 19A. In this 125-foot site, we captured two adult wild brook trout. This site was located in a recently drained beaver pond, with heavy sediment deposits and little adult trout habitat. Several additional active beaver ponds were located upstream of this site. None of the adult brook trout captured in this survey had been tagged in 2022, thus we could not confirm that fish are moving upstream through either of the improved culverts. Abundant beaver populations in the watershed upstream of the County Route 19A culvert may be depressing the wild brook trout population in the headwaters of the stream and potentially inhibiting fish movement. A site sampled in 2020, approximately 1/2 mile downstream, near Cobb Hill Road, showed an abundant wild brook trout population (see survey 920004).



Figure 1. Engineered rock riffle below Pleasant Valley Rd on Spring Mills Creek, June 29, 2023.



Figure 2. Nine-inch wild brook trout from Spring Mills Creek, June 29, 2023.

