

Waters for Wild Trout

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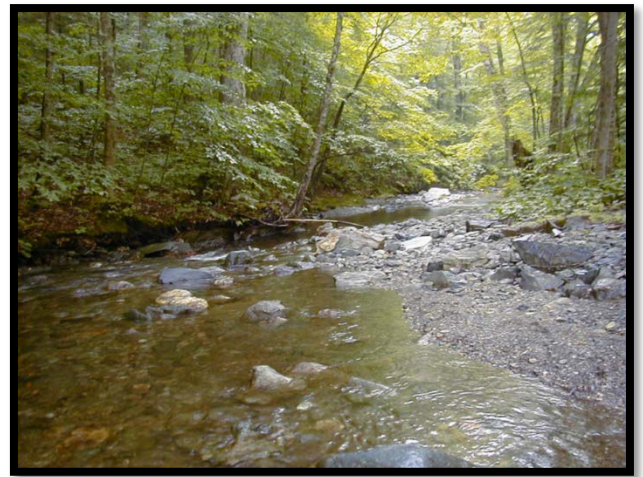
Vermont is fortunate to have a wealth of wild trout populations, a symbol of clean water and high-quality habitat. But their welcome presence in our waters is no accident. Centuries of environmental stressors such as river channelization, deforestation, development, and introduction of harmful species have taken their toll on a fish that requires cold, clean water and connected, diverse habitats. To ensure thriving populations of wild brook, brown, rainbow and lake trout across Vermont, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department has taken a comprehensive and cooperative approach to wild trout management that promotes protection and enhancement of water quality and aquatic habitat.

Pillars of the program

Securing healthy waters and excellent habitat for wild trout requires a diverse set of tools and a talented and robust staff. From regulation of natural resources along both public and private land to execution of outreach programs for varied audiences, wild trout management goals are ensuring a bright future for this revered species of our lakes and rivers.

[Environmental review](#) is one of the cornerstones of the program. In 2014 and 2015 alone, fisheries personnel spent more than 1,200 staff days reviewing development projects and working with other departments and agencies to ensure that aquatic habitat and wild trout populations were protected.

[Aquatic organism passage](#), or the ability for fish and other aquatic species to travel up or down streams, takes front and center in many restoration projects. Fisheries staff work in concert with watershed and angler organizations, municipalities, and other state, federal and private natural resource agencies to identify, design, fund and implement critical projects that support wild trout movement through culverts and other manmade structures. This movement is often based on reproductive needs, feeding or resting habits, changes in the seasons or environmental conditions, or life stage developments. In recent years, cooperative dam removal projects have also become an important part of the department's wild trout passage initiatives.



Wild trout habitat requires an intact forested riparian area that provides a canopy for shading to keep temperatures cool, root systems that ensure streambank stability, downed trees and boulders that form diverse and complex habitats for fish, and clean gravel for spawning.



A culvert replacement project on Bradley Brook in Warren was the product of a partnership between the Friends of the Mad River, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Winooski Natural Resource Conservation District, Town of Warren and Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. Fish & Wildlife participates in many similar projects throughout the state, providing technical assistance and funding for wild trout passage projects.

Biological evaluations are conducted to determine current wild trout status and trends. In some cases these evaluations have indicated that physical habitat conditions may be limiting wild trout populations. Ongoing cooperative projects on the Batten Kill and in the Nulhegan River watershed improve complex habitats through the strategic addition of fish-holding cover like trees, root wads and boulders. Staff and partners also plant trees along waterways to create shade and establish vegetated riparian zones that provide a wide variety of important aquatic habitat functions (see companion article on riparian areas).



This riparian planting project along the banks of the Batten Kill in Sunderland was conducted in partnership with the US Forest Service, Batten Kill Watershed Alliance, Bennington County Conservation District, Trout Unlimited and the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife

Education and outreach efforts enable fisheries staff to connect with the public around water quality, habitat and wild trout support issues. Examples of such efforts include presentations and workshops for teachers, anglers, students, natural resource organizations, regulators and the general public. Outreach initiatives also include strategic partnerships, such as the department's work with the Vermont DEC and the Agency of Transportation on the Rivers & Roads training program for state and municipal transportation staff. Add a new alliance with Lake Champlain International on its "Bring Back the Brookies" campaign aimed at educating and engaging the angling public to ensure that habitat and restoration programs are funded and regulations protecting Vermont's water resources are enforced.

Other key management activities include ongoing population monitoring, the implementation of trout harvest and fishing regulations, and the administration of grant programs designed to support watershed protection and restoration efforts, as well as aquatic organism passage projects.

Ultimately, the department's management program is well-positioned to ensure healthy habitat for wild trout thanks to knowledgeable and dedicated staff, a broad, proactive approach, and strong partnerships with key stakeholders.