

The Branch (North Hudson) Biological Survey (Survey # 521058)
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The Branch (H-391-47) is a tributary to the Schroon River in the Essex County town of North Hudson. It is in the Upper Hudson watershed and starts as the outlet of Elk Lake, flowing south and then east over its 13-mile course. This survey was an assessment of salmonids and focused on the upper reach north of the Blue Ridge Road. The land immediately north of the Blue Ridge Road was recently added to the Vanderwhacker Mountain Wild Forest and is open to the public; the area near Elk Lake remains private and off limits. The Branch is currently stocked with Atlantic salmon fry as part of the overall Schroon River stocking plan.

Three sites were sampled using a backpack electrofishing unit in August and September 2021. A total of nine fish species were collected across the three sites (Table 1). Instream habitat was generally good in this section of river with a mixture of boulders, cobble, gravel, and sand. Widths varied from 20 to 40 feet and the banks were typically forested with mature trees and alders. The middle site featured a few large gravel bars and was more open with less shading than the other sites.

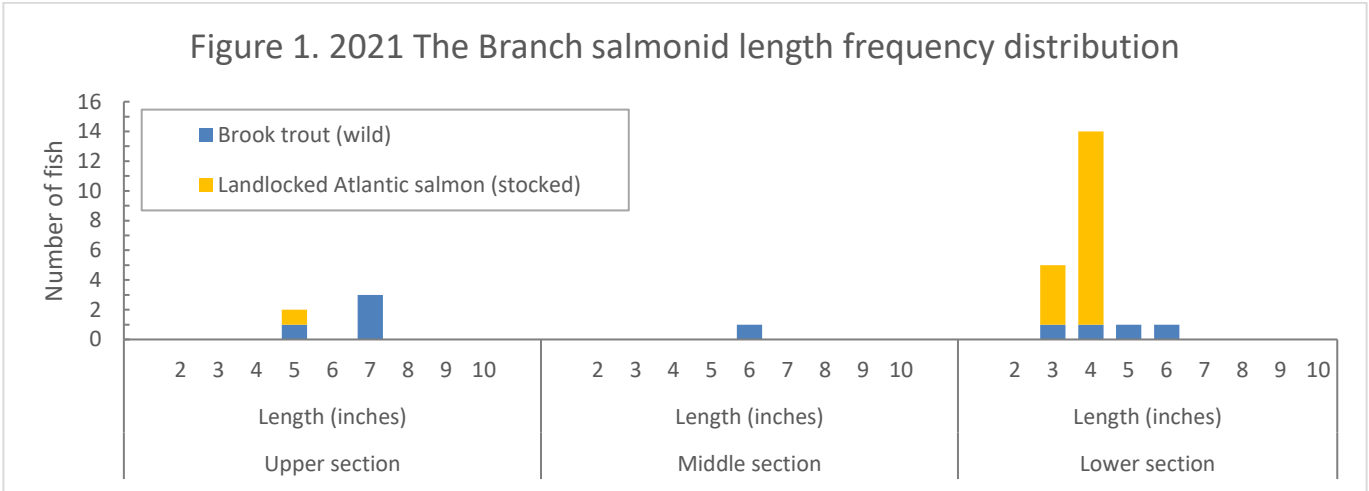
Table 1. Numbers caught and size ranges of fish from The Branch in 2021.

Section	Species	Number caught	Length range (inches)
Upper site	Brook trout	4	5.0 - 7.5
	Atlantic salmon	1	5.2
	Eastern blacknose dace	1	2.2
	Longnose Dace	15	2.6 - 3.9
	Pumpkinseed	2	2.6 - 3.1
Middle site	Brook trout	1	5.8
	Cutlips minnow	4	3.8 - 5.2
	Eastern blacknose dace	18	1.5 - 2.5
	Longnose Dace	6	1.7 - 4.5
Lower site	Brook trout	4	3.0 - 5.8
	Atlantic salmon	18	3.0 - 8.0
	Cutlips minnow		
	Common shiner		
	Eastern blacknose dace		
	Longnose Dace		
	Creek Chub		
White sucker			
	Pumpkinseed		

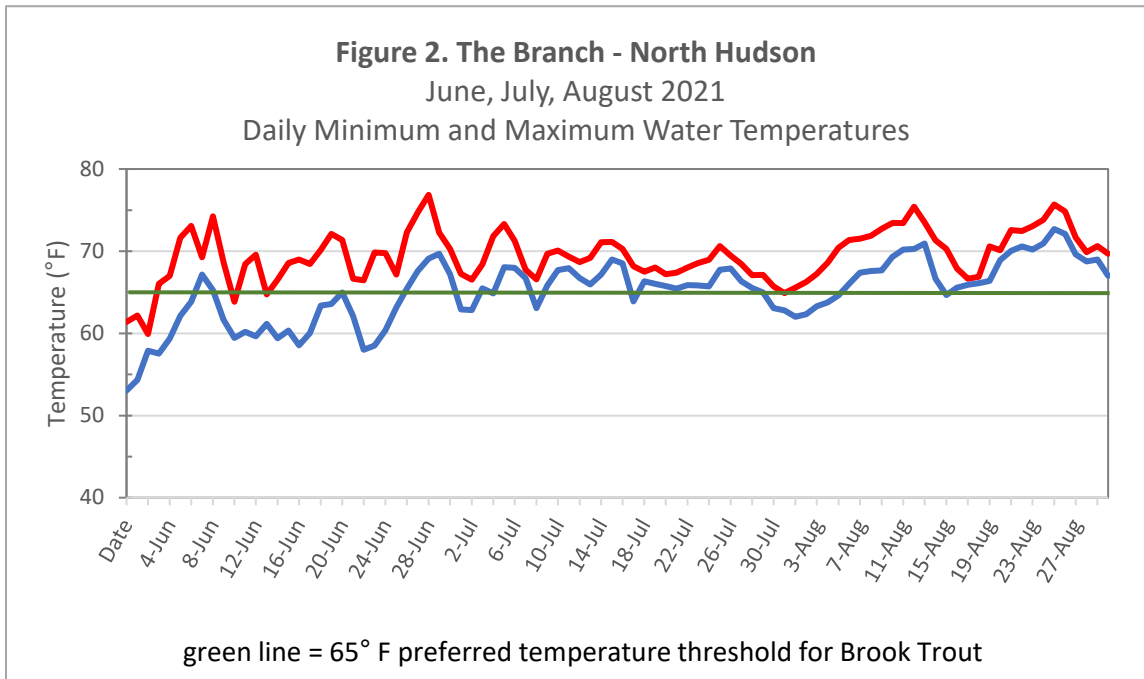
Brook trout numbers were not high, but all fish were wild and present at every site (Figure 1). Atlantic salmon were found at two sites and included two-year classes. The rest of the species composition was fairly typical for a medium sized Adirondack river.



Figure 1. 2021 The Branch salmonid length frequency distribution



A water temperature recorder was placed in the vicinity of the middle site for the summer of 2021. The following chart, (Figure 2) reveals a hotter temperature profile, with temperatures reaching the mid-70's (°F) on a few occasions, than typically found on a small brook trout stream. But this is not surprising since The Branch begins as the overflow from Elk Lake. Though Elk Lake is at nearly 2,000 feet in elevation, the best temperature profiles are seen where the stream does not drain a surface water.



Management recommendation is to build on this effort and collect additional fish and temperature data on the State-owned portion of The Branch. The current temperature data and presence of pumpkinseed, a warmwater species, are not ideal, but wild brook trout continue to survive. Additional data will help to determine an appropriate stocking rate for brook trout, should that option be pursued.