

West Branch Ausable River Survey (Survey # 517073)
 Tom Shanahan, Region 5 Fisheries

8/15/2018

One of the region’s marquee trout waters, The West Branch of the Ausable River originates on the shoulder of Mount Marcy in the Adirondack’s High Peaks region and flows nearly 40 miles through Essex County before joining the main stem of the Ausable River. The river is part of the Champlain watershed and is mostly known for its tumultuous pocket water and brown trout fishery. The current survey focused on two sites along the upper reaches and essentially replicates a 1994 sampling effort. The West Branch features abundant public fishing [rights](#) along with state land (Saranac Lakes Wild Forest and High Peaks Wilderness), so there is good angler access to much of the river.

The first sampling site was at the upstream end of the brown trout stocking segment, just as the river transitions to more of a brook trout fishery. The river at this site is relatively wide (50 - 55’) and open and the substrate is mostly gravel and cobble. The second site, further upstream and within a brook trout stocking segment, is similar, but includes several massive boulders. Both sites are relatively infertile with low conductivity values. The two sites were sampled using backpack electrofishing units in August 2017. Along with 9 brook trout, the following species were caught: eastern blacknose dace, longnose dace, creek chub, longnose sucker and slimy sculpin. The site 2 results are comparable between the two years (Table 1) with low numbers of trout, but this is not unexpected for a low-productivity mountain stream. The site is roadside with easy access, so we will continue the yearling brook trout policy to provide a fishery.

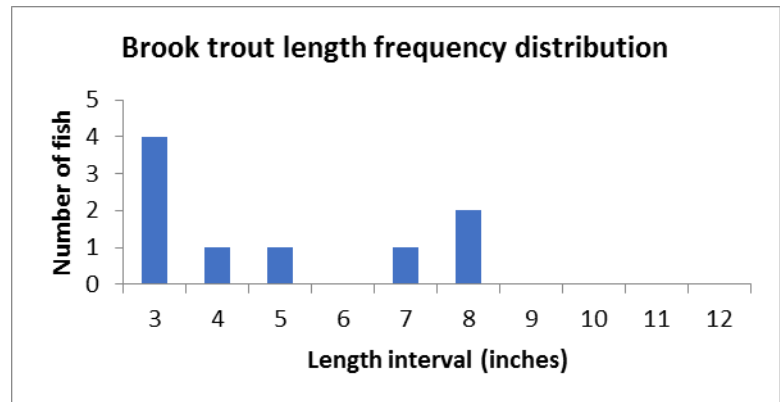


Table 1. Comparison of numbers caught and size ranges of salmonids from West Branch Ausable River over two separate time periods.

Year	Site 1 - stocked w/ brown trout			Site 2 - stocked w/ brook trout			Site 2 - stocked w/ brook trout		
	# caught	# wild	Length range (in.)	# caught	# wild	Length range (in)	# caught	# wild	Length range (in)
2017	0	-	-	3	3	3 - 6	6	2	3 - 8.5
1994	7	1	6 - 9.5	13	10	2 - 8.5	8	4	2 - 8



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Salmonid results from site 1 for 2017 are poor compared to the earlier survey (Table 1), and there was a reduction in the number of minnow species as well. Sampling conditions were quite good, as were water temperatures for the season (see accompanying chart), so these are perplexing results. A large bridge replacement project that summer on State Highway 73 just downstream of the sampling site may have been a contributing factor. We will maintain the current stocking policy and resurvey this section in a couple of years to see if 2017 was an aberration.

