

Oatka Creek Trout Survey (Survey #: 822025)
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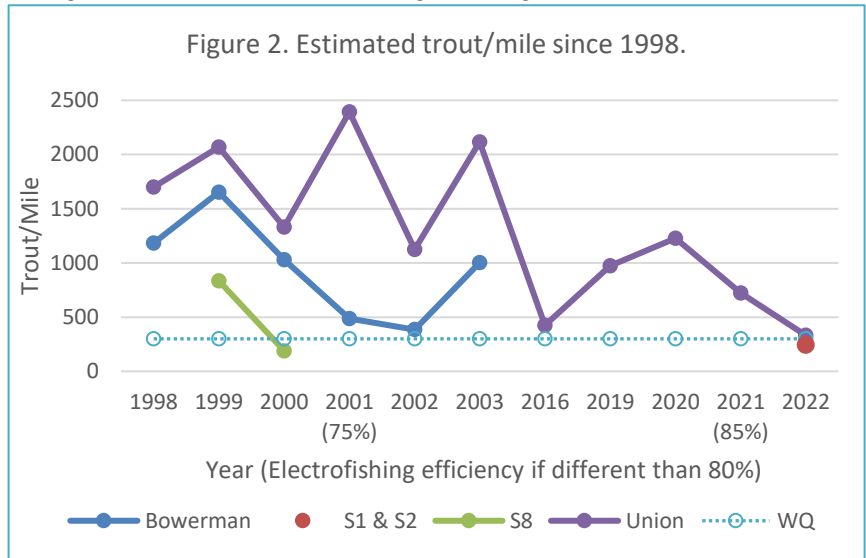
Oatka Creek is a 60-mile-long tributary to the Genesee River which flows through Wyoming County in NYSDEC Region 9 and Genesee and Monroe Counties in Region 8. Public access within the Monroe County section is mostly found within Oatka Creek County Park and a DEC parking area in Scottsville. However, between these access points, and between Bowerman Rd and Union Street lies a 1.5-mile stretch of private water with the north side owned entirely by the Phillip Garbutt Rod and Gun Club (Club). The Club has also leased additional waterfront property from many of the landowners along the south side of the creek to give members additional access to fish. In 2020, the New York State Trout Stream Management Plan was implemented (NYSDEC 2020), and it was determined Oatka Creek would be managed as 'Wild Quality' (WQ) from Bowerman Road upstream to the confluence with Spring Creek. This designation included the private waters owned and leased by the Club. In 2022, the Club contacted the NYSDEC asking to have the management designation of Oatka Creek from Bowerman Road to Union Street changed to 'Wild' (W). The Club felt wild trout abundance would not meet the WQ criteria of 40 lbs/acre of wild trout biomass or 300 yearling and older wild trout/mile, and the W designation would be a more appropriate management category. This designation change would allow for private stocking in this section of the stream. The Club felt stocking is appropriate here due to the effects of intense common merganser predation that occurred during the unusually cold winters of 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. Subsequently, the Club had stocked Oatka Creek prior to the adoption of the new Trout Stream Management Plan, with brook trout in 2016 and brown trout from 2017 through 2019 and 2021 under NYSDEC permit.



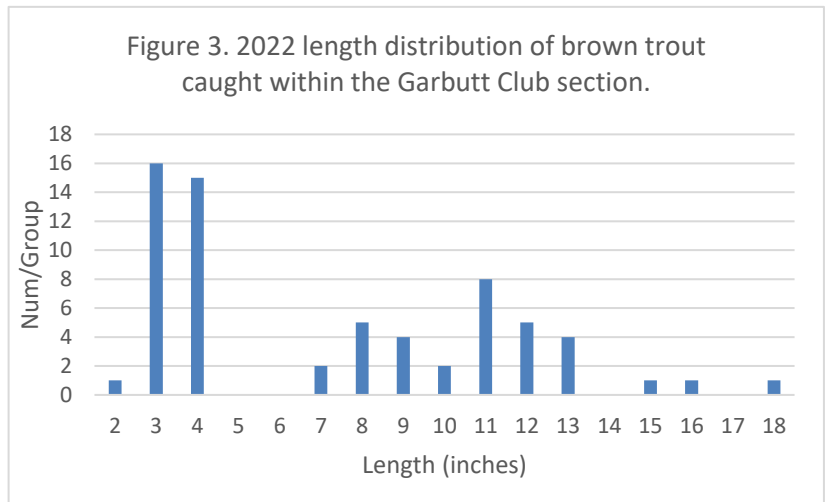
Previous surveys to determine trout abundance were conducted within Club waters during 1999 and 2000 at S8 (previous sampling site during those surveys, Figure 1). Additionally, Oatka Creek has a relatively long history of surveys at both Union Street and Bowerman Road which both abut Club property on the upstream and downstream ends. All surveys conducted prior to 2022 were single pass surveys and trout abundance was estimated using an 80% efficiency rate except as noted in Figure 2. The 2022 survey was conducted on 10/11/22 to estimate trout abundance within this private section of Oatka Creek. Two sites, 396 feet and 374 feet long, were sampled with two passes made at each site. All trout collected were measured to the nearest millimeter. No blocking seines were used during this survey, and all trout were held in containment after the first pass to avoid recapture during the subsequent pass.



A total of 65 wild brown trout were caught during this survey with 32 determined to be young of year. No stocked fish were caught or observed. Yearling and older brown trout lengths ranged from seven to 18 inches while young of year lengths ranged from two to four inches (Figure 3). The combined estimate for both sites for yearling and older wild trout per mile (trout/mile) was 244 and the lbs/acre was 24.7. Previous sampling (site S8 from previous studies) within the Club section of Oatka Creek ranged from 835 trout/mile in 1999 to 190 trout/mile in 2000 (Figure 2). Biomass was also highly variable with 55.1 lbs/acre in 1999 and 8 lbs/acre in 2000. During 2022, trout/mile and biomass was estimated at 332 and 14.7, respectively at the Union Street site. This site, which is 500 feet upstream from Club property, has been sampled extensively, and 2022 was the lowest observed trout/mile since 1998. However, the average trout/mile and biomass since 1998 was 1310 and 47.8, respectively. Trout abundance was also sampled at Bowerman Road, which abuts Club property on the downstream end, from 1998 through 2003. Trout/mile ranged from 385 in 2002 to 1653 in 1999 and biomass ranged from 27.9 to 83.3 lbs/acre during those same years. The 1998 to 2003 average estimate of trout/mile and biomass was 957 and 51.8, respectively at Bowerman Road.



Guidance within the Trout Stream Management Plan relating to stocking by private entities (page 21 of the Trout Stream Management Plan) states that stocking will be permitted if “The reach characteristics make it unlikely to support an abundance of wild trout that meets the standard for Wild Quality management...” Although the 2022 population estimates within the Club section of Oatka Creek are below the 300 trout/mile and 40 lbs/acre for the WQ category threshold, it’s recommended another year of sampling take place since 2022 was an abnormally dry year which may have negatively influenced trout abundance. Additionally, the historical trout abundance estimates from Bowerman Road and Union Street further show that wild trout abundance could meet the WQ threshold under normal conditions. It’s recommended that this sampling be repeated during 2023, and the historic sampling location at S8 (Figure 1) be included to better document trout abundance within the Club section of Oatka Creek. Therefore, no change in management is recommended at this time.



Literature Cited:

NYSDEC. 2020. New York State Trout Stream Management Plan. Albany: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.