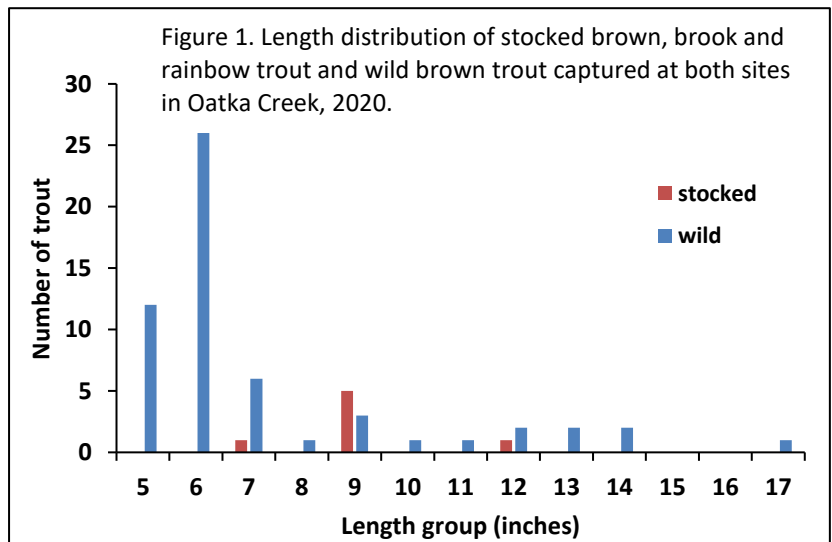


Oatka Creek Trout Population Estimate  
 Scott Cornett, Region Nine Fisheries

9/10/2020

Oatka Creek, south of the Village of Warsaw in Wyoming County, provides a fishery for wild brown trout. It is also stocked each spring with hatchery trout. In most years, it receives hatchery yearling brook and brown trout, however in 2020, yearling rainbow trout were substituted for brown trout. There are currently no public fishing rights easements on Oatka Creek and access is only on privately owned, non-posted lands. Oatka Creek is managed as a year-round trout fishery, with the period from October 16-March 31 restricted to catch and release, with artificial lures only allowed. In 2020, as part of region-wide trout population monitoring, Oatka Creek was sampled by electrofishing at two sites. They were located at Munger’s Mills Road and at the NYS Route 19 bridge below the falls in Rock Glen and totaled 680 feet of stream. Both sites were previously sampled seven times between 1991 and 2019. To estimate the adult trout population abundance, we utilized two electrofishing passes in 2013-2020. Prior to this we utilized single pass methodology.

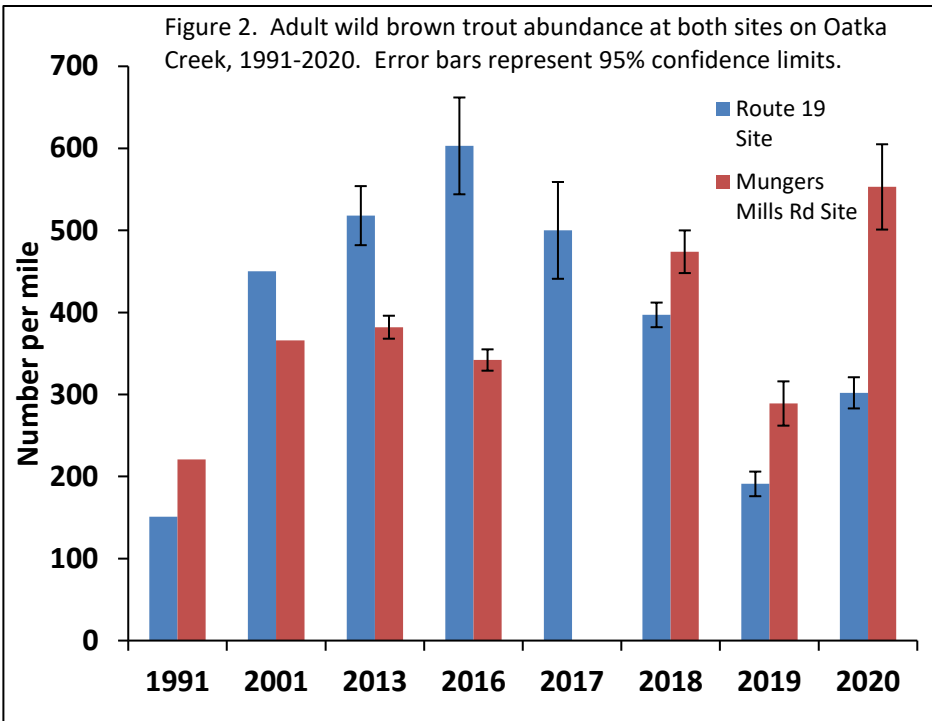
In 2020, we captured 57 yearling and older (adult) wild brown trout along with three stocked yearling rainbow trout and two stocked yearling brook trout. In addition, two hatchery brown trout from 2018 or 2019 stockings were captured. Adult wild brown trout ranged in length from 4.9 to 17.1 inches, with an average length of 7.6 inches (Figure 1). All species of stocked trout ranged from 7.1 to 12.4 inches (Figure 1). At the Route 19 site, we found an adult wild brown trout abundance of 302 fish/mile ( $\pm 19$ ) (Figure 2). At our site at Munger’s Mill Road in 2020, we found a higher abundance of adult wild brown trout (553 fish/mile ( $\pm 52$ )) (Figure 2). The average abundance for wild brown trout at the two sites in 2020 was 450 fish/mile and the average biomass was 48 lbs/acre. As with past surveys, few young-of-year trout were captured at either site and it is believed that most reproduction occurs in the areas above Rock Glen and in upstream tributaries.



Wild brown trout abundance at the Route 19 site in 2020 was lower than we found in 2001-2018 surveys, but higher than we found in 2019 (Figure 2). Only one stocked trout was captured at this site. The abundance for wild brown trout at our Munger’s Mills Road site in 2020 was the highest we have measured in any survey and nearly double what we found in 2019 (Figure 2). Stocked trout were substantially less abundant (79 fish/mile) at Munger’s Mills Road than in most other survey years. You will note, trout population estimates could not be obtained at Munger’s



Figure 2. Adult wild brown trout abundance at both sites on Oatka Creek, 1991-2020. Error bars represent 95% confidence limits.



Mills Road in 2017 due to poor electrofishing efficiency. No long-term trends were apparent for wild brown trout at either site, however there has been a significant short-term decline observed at the Route 19 site from 2016 to 2020 (Figure 2). The reason for this short-term decline is not likely recruitment related and available adult trout habitat at the Route 19 site has not changed substantially since at least the 2013 survey. Hatchery rainbow trout were stocked in Oatka Creek in May, while the stream

received brook trout in the early-April stocking. Although abundance is generally low in Oatka Creek by early summer, stocked trout were substantially less abundant in 2020 than in most other survey years. It appears that most stocked trout do not survive long into the summer in this stream, being lost to angler harvest, natural mortality and/or migration out of the stocked section. This finding for poor stocked trout survival or retention is consistent with 2011-2013 statewide surveys of stocked trout streams. Based on this year's sampling, it appears Oatka Creek will continue to provide satisfactory fishing for anglers wishing to pursue wild brown trout year-round and stocked rainbow trout and brook trout early in the season. There will be no changes to regulations for Oatka Creek in 2021, based on the 2020 state-wide Inland Trout Stream Management Plan. However, the stocked section of the stream will be shortened on the upper end, due to the high abundance of wild brown trout. Stocking will now take place from the mouth of Stony Creek to Keeney Road.