Written by Bill Ziegler Tuesday, April 23, 2013 1:31 PM -



A 17-inch Assinica brook trout was caught and released at Timber Lake, a managed trophy trout (Type D) lake in Iron County, during a past season. (Ziegler photo) IRON COUNTY—Cold spring weather can inhibit trout fishing success on typical inland trout streams.

Trout are less active in streams with cold water temperatures as the ice breaks up. As those streams warm, trout fishing should improve. ___PUBLIC__Often anglers go out on the streams with great anticipation at the opening of trout season only to get discouraged by high water and trout inactivity due to low temperatures. They may give up fishing prior to the time when the stream trout fisheries become productive. Brook trout prefer water temperatures in the 50 degree range.

Trout anglers can improve their prospects by targeting trout waters that warm faster or lakes where the temperature has less impact in the early trout season activity. Past creel results have often improved by fishing the more marginal trout streams. A good choice is a trout stream that comes out of a lake that provides slightly warmer water early in the season. Some better early season marginal trout streams include the Brule River, North Branch of the Paint River or Tamarack River in Iron County and the Sturgeon or Ford Rivers in Dickinson County.

The advantage to marginal trout streams is that trout grow faster in these waters due to higher water temperatures and higher minnow forage populations. These streams often produce bigger trout for anglers, although trout populations are lower than in better quality trout streams. Anglers need to fish these streams in the first part of the trout season before their waters warm above levels trout can tolerate. These marginal trout streams cannot support trout throughout the summer due to high water temperatures that are intolerable to trout. Trout in marginal streams have to move to areas with springs or cold tributaries that provide cold water refuge as the stream channel temperatures increase. Unfortunately, those streams are not as resilient to harsh droughts like we have been experiencing here in the last several years.

Another way to improve early season success is to fish the small managed trout lakes in the area. Unfortunately with the late winter break up this year, most trout lakes will likely be ice covered. Trout are active in these conditions but extreme caution needs to be used to go out on the ice as rain and melting conditions has deteriorated the ice. Legal terminal tackle options are also limited when fishing through the ice on Trout Type A and D Lakes as minnows are not permitted on either trout lake designation. Remember trophy brook trout lakes (Type D) like Timber Lake only artificial lures are permitted.

Soon the ice should break up on the area trout lakes. When that occurs, these small trout lakes will be an excellent option to consider on a late breaking spring. DNR fisheries managers have maintained a number of small lakes by planting brook and rainbow trout. These lakes are managed in different ways. Some lakes are managed entirely for trout and have easy access and less restrictive fishing regulations. A few lakes are managed to produce larger trout, but have more restrictive fishing regulations and walk-in access. Some lakes are managed as "two story" trout lakes with warmer water fish in shallower waters and trout inhabiting colder deeper

Cold waters are concern for trout opener

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waters in the summer.

Some drive up access lakes are managed for rainbow trout. The minimum size limit on these lakes is 12 inches which is a Type A regulation lake in the Michigan Fishing Guide. Fortune Pond (west of Crystal Falls) and Hannah Webb Lake (North Iron county) are rainbow trout lakes. Drive up access brook trout lakes include Deadman's Lake (southeast Iron County) and Killdeer Lake in (northwest Iron County).

Several lakes in west Iron County are managed in part by more limited access. These lakes require walking in from one quarter to three quarters of a mile in one case. Madelyn, Spree and Skyline Lakes in northwest Iron County require a short walk of about one fourth mile. The brook trout (Type A) minimum size limit is 10 inches and the only bait restrictions are a ban on minnows.

Two lakes, Forest and Timber, in west Iron County are managed as trophy brook trout lakes. Forest Lake has a walk in access of about one half mile and Timber Lake access trail is three quarters of a mile. Fishing regulations at both lakes (Type D) attempt to maintain larger fish through a one fish bag limit with a 15 inch minimum size limit, and a tackle requirement of artificial lures only. This set of regulations has resulted in a sustained quality fishery with a number of larger trout caught. Most anglers use light carry in inflatable "belly boats" or small light canoes/kayaks.

Another trout lake option is to go to one of the multi-species trout lakes (Type B). This group includes Golden, Ottawa and Caspian Pond (west Iron County); Chicaugon, Long, and Ellen Lakes in east Iron county. The Witch Lake area of southwest Marquette County has Squaw and Twin Lakes. Bass Lake, Dickinson County's only trout lake, is a type B regulation and is located west of Iron Mountain. Type B regulation lakes are the only trout lakes where minnows can be used as legal bait.

The hybrid splake are currently being planted in Lake Ellen and Golden Lakes in Iron County. Bass Lake in Dickinson County also supports a splake fishery. Golden, Long and Squaw Lakes are currently being planted with rainbow trout and support modest fisheries for that species. Chicaugon and Ottawa lakes were historically native lake trout lakes. These lakes are currently and occasionally receiving plants of larger size surplus brood stock lake trout. Significant natural reproduction by lake trout is not currently occurring, so the recent plants produce a fishery for a period and then drop off as planted trout numbers decline.

Fish planting by the DNR can be easily accessed on the DNR web site www.michigan.gov/dnr on the fishing home page.

Chicaugon and Ottawa Lakes do have self sustaining populations of lake whitefish and Cisco/lake herring that are closely related to trout. There is an increasing hook and line fishery for whitefish in these lakes during both summer and ice fishing season.

Trout anglers can improve their odds throughout the season by remaining flexible and angling several different types of trout waters. By fishing the more marginal trout streams and lakes, early season trout anglers can give themselves a chance to catch larger trout with potentially fewer anglers around them.

As trout action slows in those waters switching to the better year-around waters can keep good trout action going. Anglers fishing new waters should consult with the Michigan Fishing Guide before going out. If you have questions you can call the local Michigan DNR at (906) 875-6622 in Crystal Falls.