

## Youth Fishing, Trout, and Clean Water By Watershed Now

Watershed Now and Blue Ridge Trout Unlimited is hosting a youth fishing day on May 18th from 5 pm-8 pm along the E and A Rail Trail near the recreation center. It will include demonstrations, instruction, and education materials. The goal of this event is to bring awareness to the youth about stream ecology and address the future of recreational fishing opportunities in our region.

Fishing has always represented a way for people to connect with nature. Native American fish weirs can still be seen in the Yadkin River when the water is low. This strategic placement of stones allowed them to direct fish to certain spots in the river and provide a valuable food source. Before dams, pollution, and channelization impacted seasonally spawning species, there were shad, herring, alewife and even sturgeon in the Yadkin River. Currently the Yadkin River around Elkin supports smallmouth bass, brook, catfish, and suckers.

Another popular type of fishing in our area is trout fishing. The three types of trout in our regional streams are brown, rainbow, and brook trout. Brown trout have been in North America since the 1800's but are originally from Europe. Rainbow Trout are the native trout of the North American west. Both Brown and Rainbow trout are highly adaptable and now occur in naturalized reproducing populations in cold water all over the world. The native trout to our region are Brook Trout. Although the common name suggests the same genus, they are not. Brook Trout are a totally separate genus and species from Brown and Rainbow and are more closely related to Char. Trout, Salmon, and Char are all part of the Salmon family.

Brook Trout have similar habitat considerations as both Brown and Rainbow Trout which includes cold, clear, oxygenated water. In the Eastern United States, these conditions are naturally found in the mountain regions from the Great Lakes to the Southern Appalachians. In our area Brook Trout were historically found in the higher elevations of Alleghany County and cold Blue Ridge escarpment streams of Surry and Wilkes County. The state designates some streams as Wild Trout streams. There are several wild trout waters at Stone Mountain State Park. Streams designated as "Wild trout" waters have a 4-fish daily limit and are not stocked.

The NC Wildlife Resource commission manages our recreational trout waters. The Big Elkin Creek, as well as, Roaring, Mitchell, and Fisher Rivers are all stocked with rainbow and brown trout by the Wildlife Resource Commission. There are several types of stream regulations to be aware of, including Delayed Harvest and Hatchery. If a waterway is designated as "Delayed Harvest," no trout can be harvested between October 1st-June 2nd. Anglers must throw any live trout back once caught. In Hatchery supported waterways, trout can be kept from April 1st-February 29th. These regulations help support healthy fish populations. Trout fishing brings travelers to our region from nearby urban areas looking for clean water and a fly fishing experience.

Well established trout fishing opportunities have existed in the Mitchell, Fisher, and Roaring Rivers. Currently both recreational and native streams are under threat from changing land use.

Because many of our trout streams run through agriculture lands it is essential that farming practices protect water in order for fish to survive. Without buffer zones, tilled agriculture land deposits sediment into the streams destroying long-term habitat by reducing oxygen. Ramey Creek was a high elevation stream originating in Allegheny flowing into Surry, with Native Brook Trout, and was severely damaged by large land moving machines last year. The Mitchell River, a long-time destination for recreational trout fishing, is now under threat by damage to buffer zones near the creek. Blue Ridge Trout Unlimited is working to make the public aware. Check their website for more details.

The Big Elkin Creek is currently stocked with trout downtown at the shoe factory dam. Anglers can fish along the creek when it is clear, but rainfall events often wash sediment from farm fields into the creek, impacting fish health and fishing. Landowners along these waterways should be aware that natural plant growth along stream areas is ideal for fish. A minimum of 30-50 feet of vegetative growth is needed to help clean water flowing in and keep water temperatures cool. Fish need clean, cool water to reproduce and survive.

In order for our region to support recreational trout fishing opportunities the streams have to stay clean and sediment free for most of the year. The Big Elkin does not currently support reproducing trout, and other fish populations are lower than they could be. However, in the future we can imagine a situation where these waters can run sediment free for more of the year. In support of clean water and recreational fishing opportunities,