

Recommended Fish Code & Program Changes

Fish Code Timeline:

Proposed & approved by Fish Committee (8/15/24)

Proposed to F&G Council 10/8/24

Fall of 2024 – draft proposal

Fall of 2025 – Code in place

December 2025 – To publisher for 2026 Digest

✓ will indicate that a change to the Fish Code is needed.



Recommended Fish Code & Program Changes: Trout

Action

✓ Opening Day of Trout Season the 2nd Saturday in April (2026 - 2030)

- Also sets 3-week pre-season closure & in-season closures
- Opening Day turnout is weather dependent
- Easter weekend is avoided (for these 5 years)
- PA Opening Day also switching to 2nd Saturday in April
- 3rd Saturday jeopardizes the end of the 7-week season (temperatures)



Recommended Fish Code & Program Changes: Trout

Action

✓ Remove Pre-Season Closure on all trout stocked lakes & ponds

- Provides 19 days of additional fishing across 87 ponds
- No longer needed to exempt specific waters for early season fisheries (subjective)
- Opening Day tradition preserved on all rivers/streams
- Cormorants don't have a 1-3 week "head start" on the anglers
- Poor Opening Day weather won't dictate early season opportunities
- Law Enforcement not chasing people off ponds during 3 weeks prior to Opening Day
- Harvest will be allowed... C&R during Pandemic had very mixed reviews.
- Creel limit will be changed from 0 to 2 (will address shortly)



TROUT STOCKED PONDS / LAKES

Currently stock 87 ponds / lakes.

Action

✓ Addition of 22 Small Ponds to Trout Stocking Program (n=22)

- Less than 6 acres
- Mostly in populated areas
- Good access, parking, etc.
- Pre-season only (plan will require approximately 5,000)
- Insignificant number of fish, therefore no significant change to current allocations

Why?

- Provide more local opportunities, primarily in overburdened communities.
- Small ponds provide higher rate of return = success
- Have dropped more waters and points over last decade than we have gained... so there are "more" fish allocated per location than in the past.



TROUT STOCKED PONDS / LAKES

Action

- ✓ Add 22 small ponds to spring stocking program.
- 16 should be good to go, pending approval
 - 6 addressing C&R regs

Upper Delaware:

Frelinghuysen Forest Preserve Pond
Lafayette Park Pond

Lower Delaware:

Edgewater Park Pond
Log Basin Pond / Stacy Park Pond
Northern Community Park Pond
Tippin's Pond

Passaic:

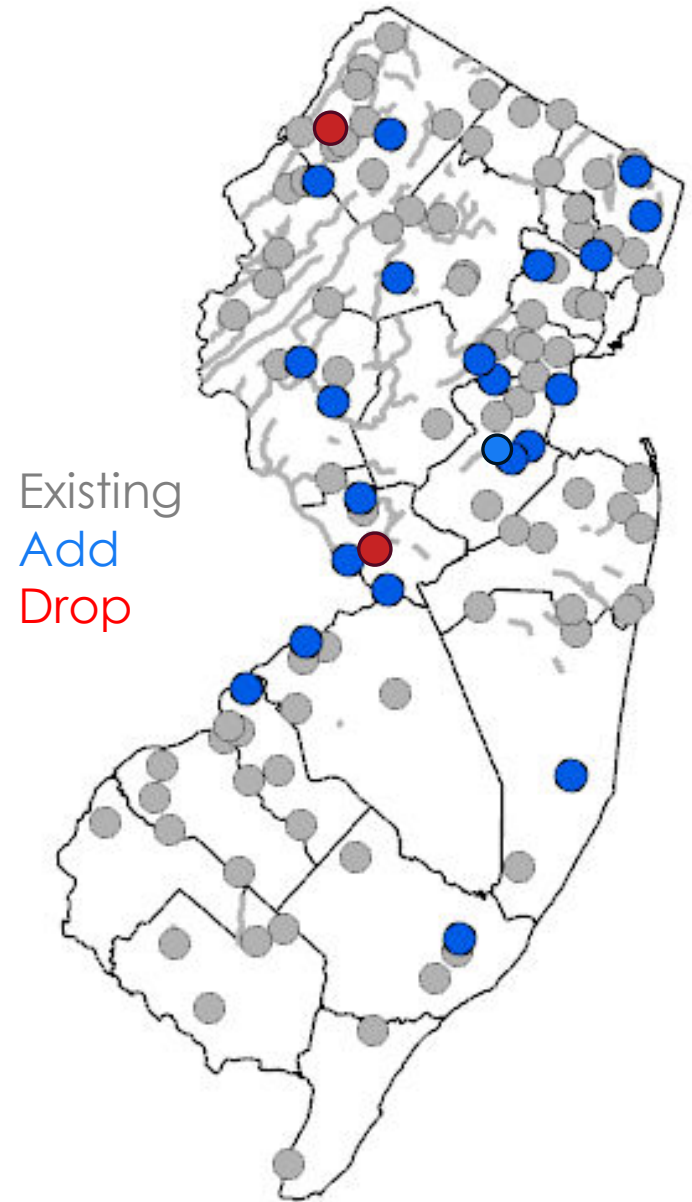
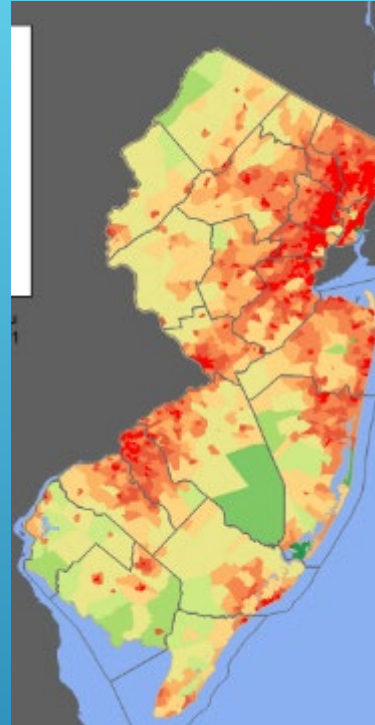
Carteret Park Pond
Cooper Pond
Grover Cleveland Park Pond
Hughes Lake
Wood Dale Co. Park Pond

Atlantic Coastal:

Patriot Lake
Corliss Park Lake

Raritan:

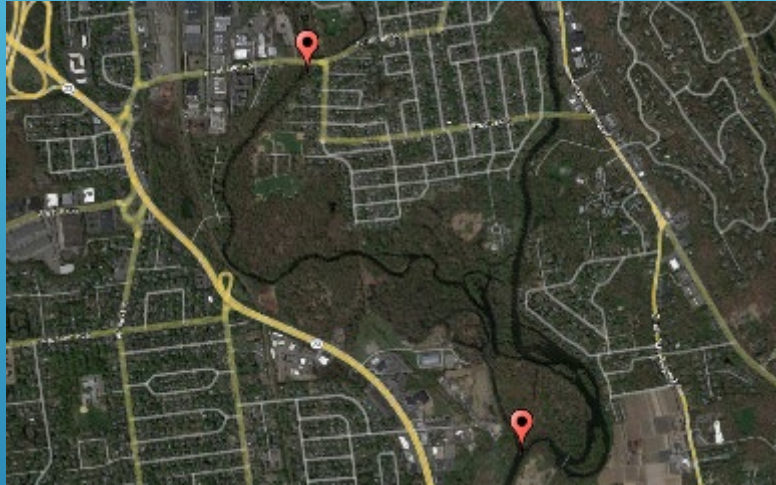
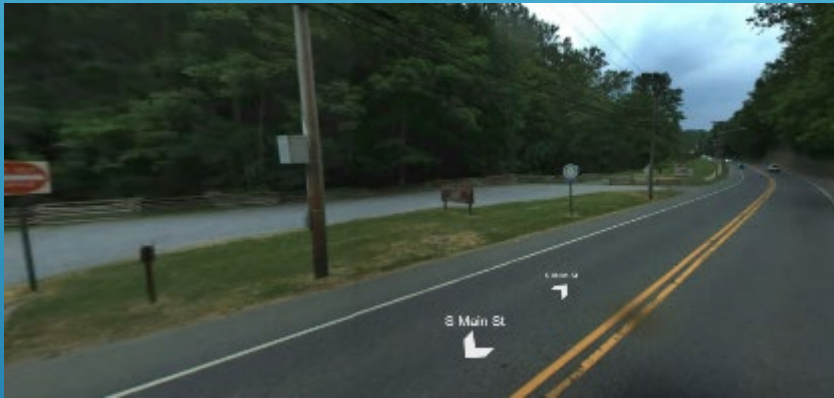
Attwater Pond
Best Lake
Bissette's / Ed A. Grekowski Pond
Cedar Brook Park Pond
Daley's Pond
Deer Path Park Pond*
Demott's Pond
J.F.K. Park Pond (east)
Wargo Pond



TROUT STOCKING BOUNDARY CHANGES

Action

- ✓ Expand stocking boundaries on 3 streams.



- Lopatcong Creek - Rt. 519 Harmony Twp., to S. Main St., Phillipsburg
 - Extend the lower boundary to include a new park

- Pompton River - Confluence with Ramapo River to NY Susquehanna Bridge, Wayne Twp.
 - Extend the upper boundary upstream for stocking of Pompton Aquatic Park complex

- Raritan River N/Br - Peapack Rd. Bridge in Far Hills Borough / Bedminster Twp. to junction with Raritan River S/Br.
 - Extend the upper boundary upstream to base of Ravine Lake Dam (to include NATIRAR park)

TROUT STOCKED WATERBODIES – DROP

A waterbody may be dropped if it is not producing well & has poor angler turnout / success / limited access, etc...

Remove:



Actions

- Colonial Lake (Lawrence Twp., Mercer, 25 acres, 1,390 Trout)

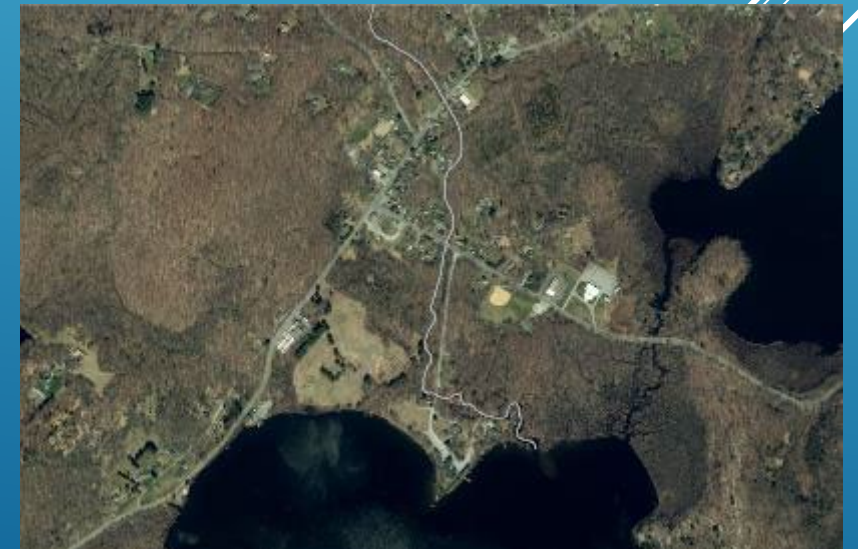
Why?

- Poor catch rates (most years 0 fish in 1st 4 hours)
- Low satisfaction (50% of 22 people who took our survey were either "unsatisfied" or "very unsatisfied").

- Neldon Brook (Stillwater Twp., Sussex, 300 Trout)

Why?

Original stocking points were on private property (opened a B&B)...didn't like trash, ruts, etc. Other public points poorly attended.



PEQUANNOCK RIVER – MORE PROTECTION FOR WILD BROWN TROUT

Existing Regulations

- Pequannock River:
 - ***Route 23, Smith Mills to railroad trestle below Appelt Park: General Trout Fishing Regulations apply***
 - Railroad trestle below Appelt Park downstream to Hamburg Turnpike bridge: Seasonal TCA Regulations apply

Action

✓ Change the 'General Trout Regulations' section to 'Trout-Stocked, Wild Brown Trout Managed'

- Minimum size for Brown Trout increased from 9" to 12". Total creel for all combined trout remains the same, but only 2 trout can be Brown Trout



Recommended Fish Code & Program Changes: Trout

Action

- Combine Winter and Fall season (move winter waters to fall)

Current Fall Program

- 36 Rivers, lakes, & ponds
- 21,000 trout
- 2nd & 3rd weeks in October (6 days)
- Stocked by Land Management staff

Current Winter Program

- 18 lakes & ponds
- 4,000 trout
- Mon & Tues before Thanksgiving
- Stocked by Hatchery staff

Action

- Expand revised Fall Program by an additional 6,000 trout (21K+4K+6K= 31K!)

Action

- ✓ Reduce the Summer/Fall/Winter creel from 4/day to 2/day
 - (2/day through previous preseason closure on all lakes & ponds)



EXISTING GENERAL REGULATIONS

BROOK, BROWN & RAINBOW TROUT (and their hybrids and strains)

***ALL BROOK TROUT CAUGHT WITHIN THE BROOK TROUT CONSERVATION ZONE MUST BE IMMEDIATELY RELEASED UNHARMED.**

The Conservation Zone includes all waters west of I-287 and north of Rt. 202, extending to, but not including the Delaware River.

Season	Minimum Size	Daily Limit	Exceptions
January 1–March 17	9 inches	4*	<div>1. Special regulation areas (Catch and Release Areas, Year-Round and Seasonal Trout Conservation Areas, Trophy and Holdover Trout Lakes and Wild Trout Streams).</div> <div>2. On lakes Hopatcong, Mountain, Prospertown, Shenandoah, Swartswood and the section of Lawrence Brook from Davidson's Mill Road bridge to the Church Lane bridge, fishing is permitted during the period March 18–April 6 at 8 a.m. All trout caught during this period must immediately be released.</div> <div>3. Greenwood Lake and Delaware River—see separate regulations for boundary waters, pages 26-28.</div>
March 18–April 6 at 8 a.m.	Fishing prohibited on trout stocked waters. Catch and release for trout in all other waters.		
April 6 at 8 a.m.–May 31	9 inches	6*	
June 1–Dec. 31	9 inches	4*	

- 3 timeframes
- Nearly 200 waters closed to all fishing for 19 days
- List of exempted lakes
 - What are the criteria? Muskie / Pike fisheries?
 - Good early season Panfish bites?
 - How good of a fishery to warrant exemption?



NEW GENERAL REGULATIONS

Lakes & Ponds Season	Minimum Size	Daily Limit	Exceptions
January 1 – April 11 at 8 a.m.	9 inches	2	1. Trophy and Holdover Trout Lakes 2. Greenwood Lake – see separate regulations for boundary waters, page 28
April 11 at 8 a.m. - May 31		6	
June 1 – December 31		2	

Rivers & Streams Season	Minimum Size	Daily Limit	Exceptions
January 1 – March 22	9 inches	2	1. Catch & Release Areas, Year-Round Trout Conservation Areas, Seasonal Trout Conservation Areas, and Wild Trout Streams. 2. Delaware River - see separate regulations for boundary waters, pages 26 - 27
March 23 - April 11 at 8 a.m.	Fishing prohibited on all trout stocked rivers & streams. Catch and release for trout on all other rivers & streams.		
April 11 at 8 a.m. - May 31	9 inches	6	
June 1 – December 31	9 inches	2	

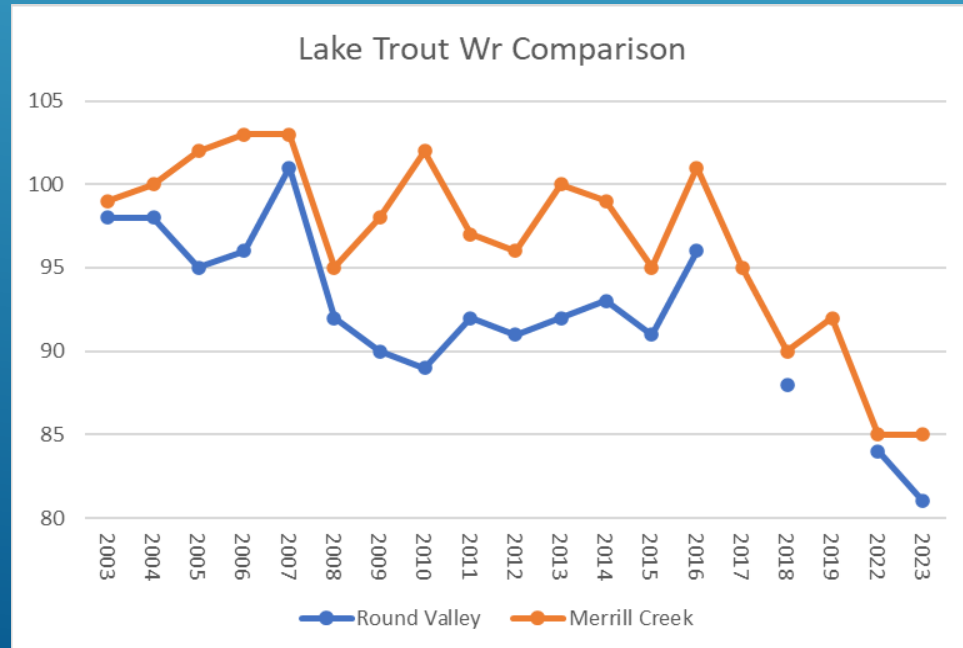
- Ponds/Lakes will be identified in Fish Code and Freshwater Fishing Digest.

LAKE TROUT REGULATIONS

Existing Regulations



2017 thru 2023 – F&W Surveys showed declining relative weights



Trout Lakes

TROPHY TROUT LAKES

Waterbody (County)	Species	Season	Minimum Size	Daily Limit
Merrill Creek Reservoir (Warren)	Brown & Rainbow Trout (and their hybrids) and Landlocked Atlantic Salmon	Open year round	15 inches	2 combined
		Jan. 1–Sept. 15	15 inches	2
	Lake Trout	Sept. 16–Nov. 30	Catch and release only	
		Dec. 1–Dec. 31	15 inches	2
Round Valley Reservoir (Hunterdon)	Brown & Rainbow Trout (and their hybrids)	Open year round	15 inches	2 combined
		Jan. 1–Sept. 15	15 to less than 24 inches AND greater than or equal to 24 inches	6 AND 1
	Lake Trout	Sept. 16–Nov. 30	Catch and release only	
		Dec. 1–Dec. 31	15 to less than 24 inches AND greater than or equal to 24 inches	6 AND 1

✓ Action

- MCR 2 fish (15" to less than 24") & 2 fish (greater than or equal to 24")
- RVR 8 fish (15" to less than 24") & 1 fish (greater than or equal to 24")
- Remove catch & release season at both, open to year-round harvest at both reservoirs

LUNKER BASS REGULATIONS

Existing Regulations

General Bass Regulation at RVR & MCR:

- Minimum Size of 12"
- Daily Limit of 5



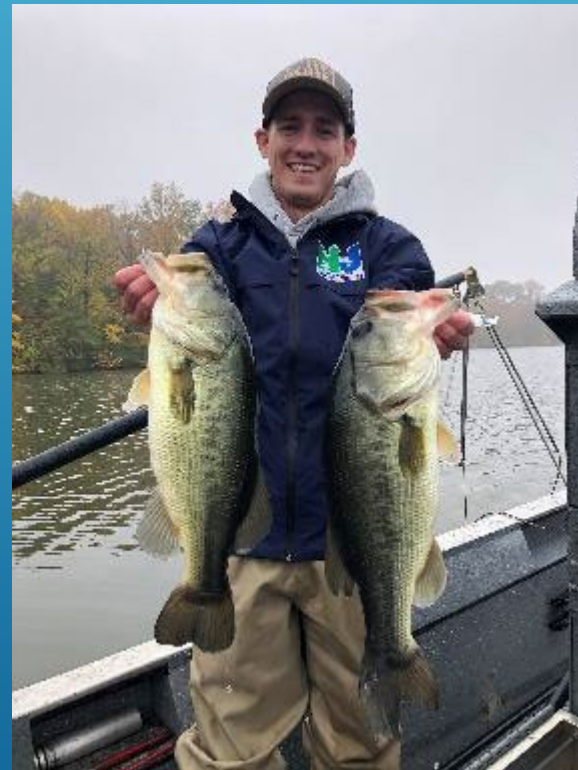
Action

Lunker Bass Regulation:

- Minimum Size 15"
- Daily Limit of 3

Round Valley Reservoir
Merrill Creek Reservoir

Why? To maintain quality fisheries



CONSERVATION REGULATIONS

BASS AND PANFISH

Existing Regulations

Ryker Lake currently has Bass Conservation Regulations

- Minimum Size of 15"
- Daily Limit of 2

Ryker and Rainbow Lake Sunfish Conservation Regulations

- Minimum Size of 7"
- Daily Limit of 10

Ryker Lake Yellow Perch Regulation

- No Minimum Size
- Daily Limit of 10

Why?

- Simplify Regulations!
- Not special enough to warrant



Action

Ryker and Rainbow Lake

- General Bass Regulation: (Min Size of 12" & Daily Limit of 5)
- General Panfish Regulations: (No Min Size & Daily Limit of 25)

INVASIVE SPECIES REGULATIONS

Existing Regulations

Potentially Dangerous Species: 13 Species
New Jersey statutes prohibit the possession or release of live, potentially dangerous animals including fish.

✓ Actions

- Freshwater Drum to Potentially Dangerous Species (found in Delaware River in recent years)
- Add “all catfish species” to the species that are allowed to be taken with a bow. This allows the invasive Blue Catfish to be taken, without concern for accidentally shooting a Channel, White, or Bullhead.



AMERICAN SHAD & STRIPED BASS REGULATIONS

Recent administrative changes

- American Shad daily limit of 2. (Delaware River only)
- Striped Bass minimum size of one @ 28" to a maximum of 31".
- Hybrid Striped Bass minimum size of one @ 28" to a maximum of 31" on the Raritan River downstream of Duke Island Park Dam.



Action

Incorporate Notice of Administrative Changes into Fish Code.



AMERICAN EEL DAILY LIMIT ALIGNMENT

Existing Regulations

7:25-6.13 Warmwater (t): Daily limit 25

7:25-6.10 Baitfish (a): Daily limit 35



Action

Reduce American Eel baitfish daily limit to 25.



Why? To come into compliance with ASMFC and Warmwater regulations.

ENDANGERED & NONGAME LISTING OF SEVERAL FISH SPECIES

Endangered – Bridle & Ironcolor Shiner
Threatened – Slimy Sculpin
Special Concern – A. Brook Lamprey,
Blackbanded and Mud Sunfish,
Comely Shiner, N. Hog Sucker, &
Shield Darter



Actions

Ensure statewide prohibition of take for E/T/SC species (including boundary waters), with demarcation within indigenous species definition.

Existing Regulations

NJAC 7:25-6.13 Warmwater Fish (u) Mud Sunfish, Blackbanded Sunfish, Bluespotted Sunfish, and Banded Sunfish may not be taken or possessed at any time.

NJAC 7:25-6.1(h) Except for Greenwood Lake & Delaware River... "indigenous fish" without specified creel limits may not be taken or possessed as identified in NJAC 7:25-6.2



HARVEST RECOMMENDATION OPTIONS AND ACTIONS

► Clarifications in Public Materials:

- No harvest from land.
- No harvest of eggs from nest.
- No take for personal possession.

► Outreach:

- Initiate survey to better understand recreational harvest.

✓ Changes to Fish Code:

- Limit new commercial entry
- Institute daily and annual harvest limits, by applicant.
- Drop early harvest window of April 1- May 15 and retain July 15 – October 31.
 - Better protection of breeding period and early nesting season.
 - 156 to 108 days
- 13-inch carapace measurement is curved carapace (vs straight-line)
 - Easier to measure in field
- Harvest intended only for personal consumption, not to keep for personal possession, i.e., pet turtle.

