



**WV Back The Brookie:**  
**Position on C&R Regulation**

Many anglers and conservationists believe that one of the greatest threats realized to wild trout is additive mortality from angling pressure. Due to the complexity of the population ecology of native brook trout populations this is typically a reaction not based in science. Some research has been performed in support of C&R regulation that utilized improper scientific modeling by not adequately correlating exterior interactions and/or not using adequate data points. Some research has been performed in support of C&R using good modeling, but due to important differences in life history strategy, genetic differences, geological differences in relevant habitat and miscellaneous issues, they cannot normally be extrapolated to watersheds in WV. Likewise, studies in PA<sup>2</sup>, MI<sup>1</sup> and TN have shown that angling restrictions have had varied response, but the overwhelming norm is that these regulations have had negligible effect on overall population numbers and/or size structure of native brook trout. Research supporting this conclusion has been used to lift angling restrictions from designated waters. Previous angling restrictions have been shown to be social in nature and having no valued effect on brook trout populations. In addition, research in Wisconsin showed that C&R regulation implementation had no effect on one stream, a slightly positive effect in one stream and actually served to deteriorate the populations in a third stream<sup>5</sup>. Tennessee government studies showed that natural events such as floods and droughts had a far greater effect on population fluctuations than any other factor (e.g., one stream suffered almost 80% population decline due to flooding)<sup>6</sup>. These studies were performed on specific watersheds and may not be extrapolated to WV watersheds in entirety, but it is clear that traditional beliefs by anglers that fishing pressure causes significant harm to brook trout populations is actually a myth in a great number of cases.

The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture published its “Distribution, Status and Perturbations to Brook trout within the eastern United States” in 2005. This document lists 30 specific threats to eastern Brook trout in three different categories (High level perturbations, medium level and low level). Angling pressure was not listed as a threat in this document or within these specific threats, particularly not for WV<sup>4</sup>. The Status and Threat Assessment for WV was published by the EBTJV and TU in that same year. Angling pressure was not listed as a threat in this document for WV watersheds<sup>7</sup>.

Further, the WV Sportsman's Association actively lobbied against the WV DNR to stop the spread of C&R regulated waters in WV and to actively remove waters designated by C&R restriction. The DNR has indicated a reluctance to pursue these types of regulations without scientific support due to what we believe is the highly controversial nature of this management tool. Which makes the whole idea moot. There are no comprehensive studies for WV brook trout to show value to this type of regulatory management and no known published watershed level studies to support watershed specific regulation. Creel surveys and licensing statistics show a decline in angling participation and a decline in creel takings of wild trout. Also, due to the fact that the majority of WV brook trout streams are located in difficult terrain and isolated headwater tributaries and since these habitats are food limited due to sterile geology causing the size structure to be generally small in largest adult size, fishing pressure has not been identified as a factor affecting WV brook trout streams. The most significant fishing pressure on WV native brook trout water generally comes in those waters where adult trout are stocked. Sufficient studies have been performed to show that adult stocking of trout over a wild population results in significant impact to the wild trout population due to various causes that will not be listed in this document. We maintain that the greatest most immediate affect to these waters is not the taking of brook trout, but the stocking of adult trout.

Due to the lack of well structured data on WV brook trout streams to show any specific watershed currently being impacted by additive mortality related to fishing pressure and the fact that most C&R regulation is social in nature and that angling restrictions may create social divisions that isolate potential habitat allies (i.e., WV Sportsman's Association) and that the WV DNR has not recently determined itself towards pursuing this form of management, at this time WV Back The Brookie is not pursuing and will not pursue support of angling restrictions on WV native brook trout waters.

Recognizing the passion that many anglers have towards C&R regulation, we do not intend this to be an inflammatory position. Rather, we believe that the above position is in TU's best interest regarding the most efficient use of our limited resources. Should any other chapter, committee or other conservation group choose to pursue C&R regulation, they will not receive immediate opposition from BTB. We on the committee will continue to practice C&R of brook trout as a voluntary conviction and promote voluntary C&R socially.

## **Bibliography**

<sup>1</sup><http://www.dnr.state.mi.us/PUBLICATIONS/PDFS/ifr/ifrlibra/Research/abstracts/1987abs.htm>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.fish.state.pa.us/anglerboater/2003/jf03angler/wildtrout.pdf>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/inventory/TroutHooking.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><http://easternbrooktrout.org/docs/BrookTroutJointVenture.pdf>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.wnrmag.com/stories/2007/oct07/fishery.htm>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.state.tn.us/twra/fish/StreamRiver/wildtrout/2001cws.pdf>

<sup>7</sup><http://easternbrooktrout.org/docs/WV.pdf>