

## Brookies Benefit from Continued Success of TROUTFEST

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It is a wonder indeed what a small handful of conservation-minded fishermen can do for the only trout native to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP). Since the founding of the Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited (LRCTU) in 1992, members have been donating their time and energies to assist the Fisheries Department (GSMNP) to restore Southern Appalachian Brook trout (Brookies) to a few of their native streams still capable of sustaining reproducing populations. Their latest efforts, an arts & crafts festival called TROUTFEST, has been particularly successful and rewarding.



The Brookie was originally present in most streams in the GSMNP above 2000 feet elevation. Extensive logging operations in the early 1900s caused contamination of over 160 miles of clear mountain streams eliminating the brook trout from about 50% of its original range. Subsequent introduction of non-native species (Rainbow trout native to the Pacific Northwest and Brown Trout native to Europe) have further reduced the Brook trout populations in lower elevation streams. The Park has no plans to eliminate rainbows and browns, and many streams are managed for self-perpetuating populations of these game fish, however, it is a NPS priority to restore Brookies to higher elevation streams protected by natural barriers.

Since 1992, LRCTU members have waded the streams along side NPS fisheries scientists and performed various tasks from electro-shocking to lugging gear and fish to high mountain streams. They sponsored various fund raising events to supplement Fisheries Department work. The latest fund raising effort has been an arts & crafts festival, TROUTFEST, begun in 2004.



After three financially successful years of TROUTFEST, it is appropriate to look back and see what has resulted from the efforts of members of LRCTU.

The first TroutFest, held in Townsend, TN in early June 2004 resulted in a donation of \$7,621 given to the new park superintendent, Dale Ditmanson and Steve Moore, Supervisory Fishery Biologist, who has been instrumental in Brook trout restoration efforts since 1976. The funds were to be added to the GSMNP Brook trout donation account to leverage additional monies from the Trout & Salmon Foundation, Ford Motor Company, the NC & TN councils of TU, and the Conservation Challenge Initiative. These monies supported Brookie restoration projects in the GSMNP, including:

- Remove hybrid Brook trout from 1.6 miles of Indian Flats Prong, then, approximately 8-10 months later, collect Southern Appalachian Brook

trout from upper Lynn Camp Prong (the most threatened native population in the GSMNP) and transplant them into Indian Flats Prong.

- ❑ Sample (NPS and TU) Sam's Creek and Bear Creek to determine if the Brook trout stocked in those streams survived and spawned successfully.
- ❑ Assess Little Cataloochee Creek to begin the planning process for restoration.

Through their 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Trout Fest in June 2005, LRCTU donated \$12,532 to the fisheries department to support Southern Appalachian Brook trout restoration activities. These funds provided for a seasonal fisheries technician whose duties included:

- ❑ Planning and implementation of brook trout restoration on 2.4 miles of Indian Flats Prong
- ❑ Evaluations of brook trout populations in previously restored Sam's Creek in TN and Bear Creek in NC.

The most recent TROUTFEST, their 3<sup>rd</sup> annual event held in June 2006, enabled LRCTU to donate another \$12,000 to support several Southern Appalachian Brook trout restoration activities. Specifically, these funds support a seasonal fisheries technician to:

- ❑ Assist with the follow-up evaluation of Indian Flats Prong to ensure all

non-native brook trout were removed.

- ❑ Assist with the transplant of 100-200 southern Appalachian brook trout into each of Indian Flats Prong, Bear Creek, and Sams Creek.
- ❑ Support preliminary project setup work for the restoration of 6.5 miles of Lynn Camp Prong.
- ❑ Collect brook trout fin clips from previously restored Leconte Creek for a strain evaluation.



TROUTFEST has produced a great deal of money, more than \$32,000, and these funds have been well leveraged by the Fisheries Department. The diminutive fish means a lot to the fragile ecosystem of the Park, and LRCTU has, since 1992, spearheaded a valiant effort by a small army of citizen scientists – conservationists and fishermen all. The re-opening of the streams in the spring of 2005 was symbolic of the success of the joint efforts of LRCTU and the Fisheries Department to restore the only trout native to the GSMNP, the Southern Appalachian Brook trout.