

Troutfest reels in big dollars for Great Smoky Mountains' streams

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Troutfest 2010 attracted lots of tourists to Townsend and netted tens of thousands of dollars this weekend for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



"We doubled the number of vendors compared to last year's Troutfest," said Byron Begley, chairman of Troutfest 2010. "We don't have all the numbers in right now, but a rough guess is that at Friday's banquet we raised more than \$35,000 and we also sold about \$15,000 worth of tickets to the expo. We increased our expenses this year, too. We'll know by the end of the week, but probably around \$30,000 will go to the park's fisheries department."



The money specifically helps the park restore streams and the native Brook Trout. The Brook Trout is the only species of trout native to East Tennessee. It was decimated by

the logging industry and the introduction of other competing species of trout such as Rainbow and Brown Trout.



"We've got about 40 miles of streams proposed for total restoration," said Steve Moore, fisheries biologist with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. "We have already completed a little over 27 miles of streams. Once we get the rest of it completed, that's really all the restoration we can do."



The Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited created Troutfest seven years ago. Moore said the chapter's members have played an integral part in restoring the Brook Trout beyond the festival.

"These are the folks who have helped clean the stream, take water samples for us, and been donating money long before there was ever a Troutfest." Moore added, "Since the early 1990s, they have made it possible for us to raise more than \$2.5 million for Brook Trout restoration."



Moore said he hopes the streams will be restored and stocked with enough Brook Trout to allow fishing within three to five years. Some world-class anglers who attended Troutfest 2010 said adding healthy Brook Trout streams will bolster what is an already strong trout-fishing area.



"I live in Maryland and asked a fellow asked me where he should go out west to go fly fishing last year," said Lefty Kreh, professional fly fisherman. "I told him not to go out west and said he should go to Tennessee. There's better fly fishing down there for trout than there is out west now."