

Surry NH's Brook Trout

NH wildlife aficionados, particularly those who fish, are passionate about native brook trout. In the Monadnock region these fish can be found thriving in pristine, shaded, cold-water streams that meander through NH woodlands. Native brook trout in Surry, NH are going to have access to more of this high-quality stream habitat starting in 2019 as a result of a restoration project on Thompson Brook.

This is good news for a species that has been in decline in much of their native range in the United States. In NH, brook trout are a species of special conservation concern. They are impacted by habitat loss and degradation due to roads crossing streams with undersized and/or perched culverts. These road crossings can fragment stream habitats and create barriers for fish passage, which can negatively impact the species diversity and abundance upstream of these impassable crossings. This restoration project seeks to eliminate a severe barrier for fish passage at a stream crossing on Route 12A in the Thompson Brook watershed in Surry, NH.

The stream restoration will occur through a backwatering technique that will raise the water level just enough to allow fish passage to the brook's tributaries on the other side of Route 12A. NH Fish and Game has completed fish surveys and identified Eastern Brook Trout on site, but the culvert prevents them from accessing two and a half miles of critical upstream habitat. Restoration activities are slated for summer 2019.

In 2011, the Ashuelot River Stream Crossing Improvement Project prioritized stream restoration locations in the Ashuelot River Watershed of southwestern NH. The overarching goal is to reconnect 15 miles of upstream habitat and spawning grounds for brook trout and other aquatic organisms. Ultimately, the Thompson Brook watershed was identified as the third highest priority in the Ashuelot River Watershed due to the amount of high-quality, cold-water habitat throughout this stream network. The majority of Thompson Brook consists of excellent brook trout spawning habitat and summer refuge during the hottest and most stressful time of year for these fish.

Thanks to the support of the Surry Conservation Commission and Ashuelot River Local Advisory Council, project partners have been awarded an Aquatic Resources Mitigation (ARM) Fund grant from the NH Department of Environmental Services to restore access to this priority habitat in Thompson Brook, taking one step closer to reaching the watershed goals. Project partners include the Cheshire County Conservation District, Harris Center for Conservation Education, NH Fish and Game Department, Trout Unlimited, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. This same team of partners successfully removed the second priority barrier in Falls Brook in Swanzey, NH in 2016.

Amanda Littleton manages the Cheshire County Conservation District, an organization that supports the conservation and responsible use of natural and agricultural resources. She is a member of the Monadnock Sustainability Network, a 501c3 whose mission is to encourage sustainable living practices and resource conservation in the Monadnock region.