

Coldwater Fisheries Management Plan



**New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Division of Fish and Wildlife
Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries**

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Introduction

New Jersey's coldwater streams and lakes come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and offer an array of habitats for animal, plant, and microbial life. Fish species such as trout, that inhabit and prefer waters with relatively cold temperatures, 4 –15°C (40-60°F), are often referred to as coldwater fishes. The emphasis in this plan is placed on managing New Jersey's salmonid (trout) fisheries because they are widely recognized as indicators of high water quality, and are important recreational game fish. Efforts to conserve, protect, and manage trout and their habitats are beneficial not only to other aquatic organisms that co-exist with trout, but to downstream biotic communities as well.

The Department of Environmental Protection's Division of Fish and Wildlife is the primary agency entrusted with protecting and managing the state's fish and wildlife. Trout management in New Jersey dates back to the late 1800's when the New Jersey Fish Commission planned to re-stock natural trout streams believed to have been decimated by a severe drought. The state's first fish hatchery was constructed in 1912 to produce trout in response to a growing demand. Since that humble beginning, trout management within the state has evolved into efforts to protect water quality and in-stream habitat and enhance seasonal and year round trout fishing opportunities for anglers through two modern fish culture facilities. Anglers help support agency research and management activities through the purchase of fishing licenses and trout stamps. While many of the Division's fish management efforts benefit the angler, the state's eight million residents also reap the benefits of resource protection and preservation efforts. In addition, the pursuit of freshwater fishing in New Jersey generates over 138 million dollars annually into the state's economy.

Despite the long history and evolution of trout management within the state there has never been a long term, strategic plan formulated to address the myriad of issues surrounding the state's fragile coldwater resources. The lack of long range goals and objectives leads to a "reactionary" approach to fisheries management. New Jersey is the fourth smallest state in the union, the most densely populated, and is currently undergoing rapid changes in land uses. The development of this plan is crucial to providing for the long term protection of coldwater resources and providing for its most optimal use. The plan also coincides with the Department's on-going initiative in protecting the state's waterways. This initiative most recently resulted in substantially increasing buffers on trout production streams through changes in stormwater management rules. These comprehensive rules play an integral role in the protection of the water quality and critical habitat of important indicator species such as trout.

For the first time an information base specific to New Jersey's trout resources has been compiled into a single reference document. The information contained in the Coldwater Fisheries Management Plan (CWFMP) has been organized into sections that can be readily referenced and used by a broad audience that includes resource managers and regulators, anglers, conservation organizations, consultants, and landowners. This Plan documents the evolution of trout management practices in NJ over the last century and identifies coldwater issues, goals and strategies in the areas of fish culture, habitat

protection, fish health, regulations and stocking practices. Most importantly, it provides a mechanism for implementing these strategies by establishing an operational plan for the next five years.

Since social as well as biological factors play an important role in the management of the State's aquatic resources a draft version of the plan was released for public comment in February 2004. A public meeting was held on April 3, 2004. Due to the magnitude of the document, several extensions were granted for the comment period. Public comments have been incorporated in this final document.

The CWFMP is not static and should be considered a work in progress, subject to change as warranted by changes in environmental or social pressures on New Jersey's coldwater resources, or advances in fisheries management techniques. Updates to the CWFMP will be noted in this document at the end of each appropriate section. In addition, these updates, as well as summaries of activities and actions related to coldwater fisheries management, will appear in the Addendum to the plan.