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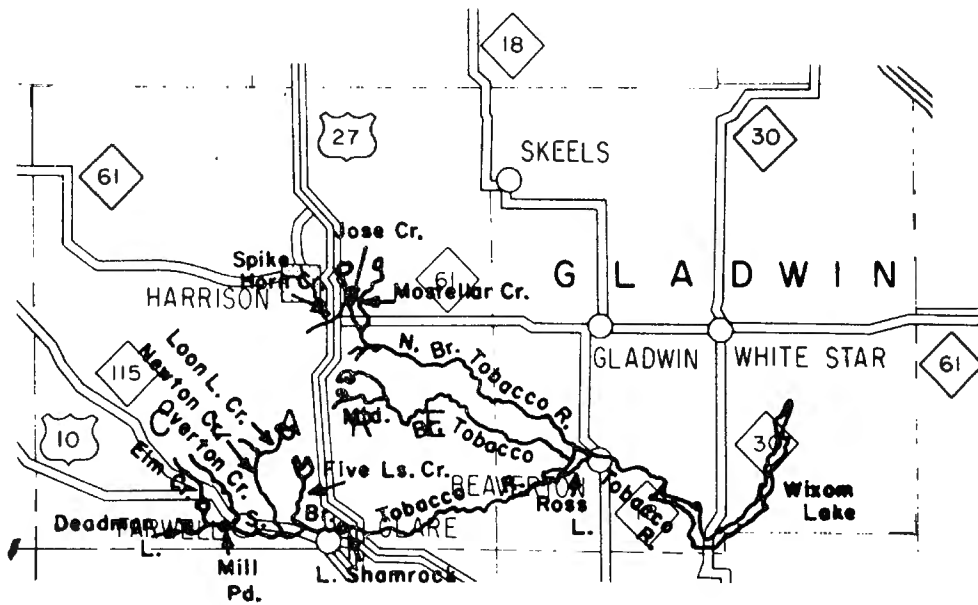
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SERIES: THE TROUT STREAMS OF MICHIGAN

NO. 7 THE TOBACCO RIVER

Donald R. Peterson, Fisheries Biologist

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The Tobacco River System

The Tobacco River system is located in the central part of the Lower Peninsula, mainly in Clare and Gladwin Counties. Two major highways-- U.S. 10 and U.S. 27--intersect and traverse the watershed east-west and north-south, respectively. Because this stream is located within easy driving distance of the heavily populated areas to the south and east, it represents a valuable resource to the weekend trout fisherman.

Originating in southeastern Clare County, the system drains a surface area of about 176,000 acres and includes approximately 207 linear miles of stream. There are also four impoundments and 19 connecting lakes on the system before it eventually drains into the Tittabawassee River flowing to Saginaw Bay on Lake Huron. The stream system is isolated, however, from the Tittabawassee by a dam at Ross Lake near Beaverton. This dam acts as a barrier to the upstream passage of fish. Because of this barrier, the stream can be considered as three separate streams, the North, South and Middle Branches which all merge at Ross Lake.

The South Branch of the Tobacco River

The South Branch of the Tobacco arises out of a swampy area surrounding Deadmans Lake near Farwell and flows easterly through farm woodlots and elm flats broken by occasional meadows. The stream is small and brushy above Farwell Mill Pond, but here it picks up water from Elm and Overton creeks and becomes sizeable enough (15' to 20' wide) to be fished with flies in some areas. Below the mouth of Newton Creek, the South Branch becomes large enough to be fished with flies or spinning tackle for the rest of its length.

There is a fair population of brook trout in the upper reaches of the South Branch above Farwell Pond. Elm and Overton creeks, both small and brushy, contain good populations of brook trout. Between Farwell Pond and the mouth of Newton Creek, the South Branch is marginal and contains few trout.

Between Newton Creek and Shamrock Lake resides a fair population of large brown trout, but temperatures are such that the stream will not support a large population of trout.

Newton Creek, which is almost as large as the South Branch where they join, contains a fair population of brown trout from Surrey Road to the mouth. Above Surrey Road to the junction of Loon Lake Creek, it has a healthy population of brown trout with some brook trout in its upper reaches and in Loon Lake Creek.

Below Lake Shamrock, the South Branch carries a heavy silt load from farmland and is marginal for trout. High turbidity caused by run-off from clay soils makes this area unattractive to trout fishermen. There are reports of a few brown trout being taken from the stream immediately below Shamrock Lake.

Five Lakes Creek is the last trout tributary before the stream reaches Ross Lake. This creek enters the South Branch about midway between the mouth of Newton Creek and Clare. It is a small, brushy stream which contains a fair population of brook trout.

The North Branch of the Tobacco River

This branch of the Tobacco, formed by Beaver, Jose, Spikehorn, and Mostellar creeks, is a fine trout stream. Its four headwater creeks arise in swamps and are small and brushy, but they all contain healthy populations of brook and brown trout.

The North Branch of the Tobacco attains fair size by the time it reaches Cornwell Avenue, and there it begins to flow through farmlands and woodlots. Streambank cover consists of tag alder, conifers, and some aspen and elm. The stream can be fly fished from here to Ross Lake. It contains a good population of brown trout above the Clare-Gladwin county line and a fair population below the county line.

In 1970, to eradicate the whirling disease infecting the trout, the North Branch including Jose Creek was treated with chlorine and all its trout killed down to the Gladwin county line.

The Middle Branch of the Tobacco River

The Middle Branch of the Tobacco, the smallest of the three branches, heads in East Trout Lake, midway between Harrison and Clare. Clear Creek, which drains Beebe Lake, is its only tributary containing trout. Above Rogers Avenue, the Middle Branch flows through rolling country but is bordered by a considerable amount of swamp. This stretch is good brook trout water. Below Rogers Avenue, the stream emerges into farm country and there is some tag alder along the stream as well as elm flats in woodlot areas.

In the vicinity of Rogers Avenue, brook trout are joined by brown trout; and the stream becomes open and large enough to permit fly fishing. The lower reach of the stream is brown trout water.

The Middle Branch is a medium size stream, excellent for the wading trout fisherman.