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MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Fisheries Division

Technical Report: No. 76-7

October, 1976

SERIES: THE TROUT STREAMS OF MICHIGAN

NO. 20 ROXBURY CREEK

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Roxbury Creek is a small, spring fed stream in Chippewa County tributary to the Tahquamenon Bay of Lake Superior. It has a drainage area of about 9 square miles. The watershed lies in a series of undulating hills, with soil types of sand, clay and gravel and with a vegetative cover of northern hardwood, hemlock and spruce in the highland and spruce, balsam and tag alder in the lowland. The land southwest of the East-West Road is hilly but flattens out considerably into low dunes north of it.

Access to this stream is good. Various wooded roads lead to its headwaters; the East-West Road (gravel) crosses about a mile above the mouth; and a new hard surface road (USFS #3150) crosses near the mouth. Most of the stream north of the East-West Road is in Federal ownership.

This creek maintains a good flow and temperatures (rarely exceeding 70°F) tolerable to all salmonids throughout the year. Water is clear and colorless. Due to the steep terrain in the headwaters and the short water course, this stream has a tendency to rise and fall rapidly in flood stage. Because of the presence of clay soils along its course, it becomes quite roilly during these times.

Numerous small beaver meadows and remains of old beaver dams are found in the valley above the confluence of the north and south branches. The creek is bordered by tag alder and spruce, especially above the East-West Road. Vegetation north of this road consists of lowland hardwoods and conifers, until the stream reaches the proximity of the dunes. Here an estuarine environment occurs and the banks are again alder fringed. The stream cuts through a high sand bank at the beach.

The North Branch averages five feet in width, six inches in depth, and has an average flow of 1.5 to 2.5 cfs in mid-May. The bottom is mostly sand and silty sand with 5-10% gravel and rubble. Cover is good and consists mostly of logs, undercut banks and brush. Caddis larvae are the most abundant food item, but other insects and snails are also present. Small brook trout are the principal species of fish.

The South Branch averages four feet wide, and has a maximum depth of 20 inches. It has a rapid velocity and flow averages about 2 cfs in mid-May. The bottom consists mostly of silty sand, sand and about 5% rubble. Fallen trees produce abundant cover; a few weeds are present, and caddis flies are the main food item. Both small brook and rainbow trout are present.

The average width below the confluent of the two branches is about 9 feet, with a maximum depth of 18 inches. The water volume averages about 4 cfs in mid-May and velocity is rapid over a silty sand bottom with some large rubble. A cover of fallen trees and debris is fair. Caddis and mayflies are the principal food items. Sculpins are the principal fish species present.

A quarter mile upstream from the East-West Road the average width is 14 feet with a maximum depth of 6 feet. A volume of 7.5 cfs flows rapidly over 80% silty sand and 20% gravel. Small rainbow and sculpins are principal species found. A few insects make up fish diet.

About 50 feet above the East-West Road the volume picks up to 11 cfs in mid-May and depths range from 1-6 feet. The flow is rapid over a bottom composed of about 50% silty sand, 40% boulders and gravel, 5% rubble and 5% clay. Food items are more abundant here and are in the form of caddis flies and amphipods. There are clay "sink holes" in this portion of the stream. Rainbow, slimy muddlers and the non-parasitic American brook lamprey are the most abundant fish species present.

A quarter mile below the East-West Road the average width is 15 feet and maximum depth is 3 feet. Water volume averages 8-10 cfs in mid-October and the current is rapid over a bottom of hard sand interspersed with gravel runs and pockets of clay. There is no instream vegetation and only some overhanging brush. May, stone, caddis flies and chironomids are the principal fish food items. Adult coho are common in the fall, but both steelhead and brook trout are reported to be present also. Long nose dace are also common.

This stream has a history of fair to good brook trout fishing in head-water beaver ponds; a very good run of steelhead, suckers and smelt in the spring; and runs of salmon in the fall. However, the principal fishery is for the spring-run rainbows from Lake Superior. Though stocked at one time with brook and rainbow trout, it was determined that natural reproduction is adequate to sustain the small fishery this stream affords. Rainbow do not grow to legal size within the stream itself.

Two borrow pit type ponds near the mouth of the Roxbury (just south of the new Lakeshore Drive) are managed for brook trout and are stocked annually with sub-legals. These ponds are already getting a good play though fish were just introduced in 1974.