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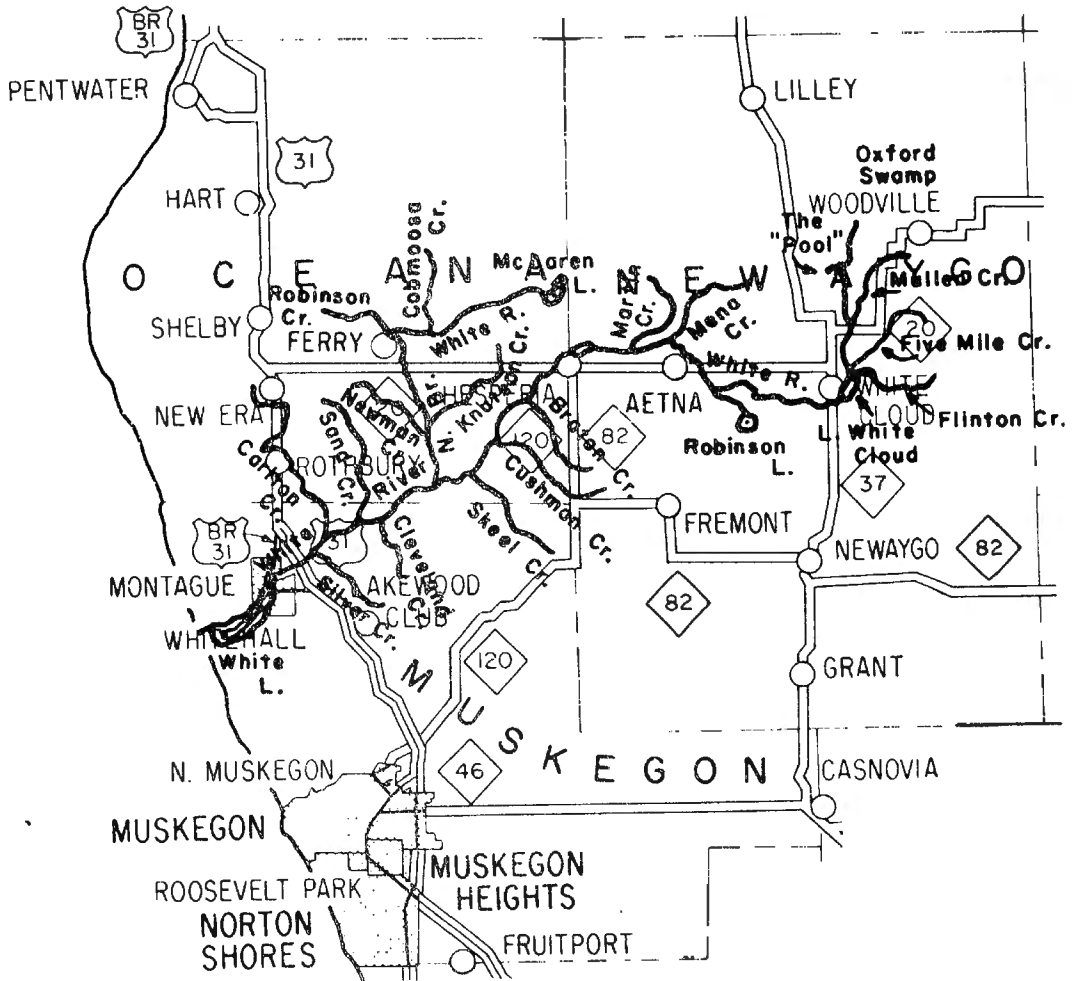
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SERIES: THE TROUT STREAMS OF MICHIGAN

NO. 1 THE WHITE RIVER

David P. Borgeson, Inland Fisheries Section

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The Upper White

The White River rises from the extensive Oxford Swamp in north central Newaygo County, the same swamp that feeds the headwaters of the famous Little South Branch of the Pere Marquette. Whereas the Little South flows north from its source, the White flows south toward the county seat of White Cloud.

Between The Pool and White Cloud the Upper White is bordered with scattered cedars, old fields, pine stump fences, aspen groves and white pine--a beautiful stream that ranges from 20 to 40 feet wide. Excellent stream improvement work was done on this stretch utilizing natural pine stumps and field stone.

This is fine trout water, famous for its brook trout fishing. It is still a good producer of brook trout, particularly in the upper reaches near The Pool, but from The Pool downstream brook trout gradually give way to browns until at White Cloud only the occasional brookie is now taken. The stream gains much groundwater between The Pool and White Cloud from extensive glacial deposits. The river has a good gradient and ample gravel for spawning and is open enough for pleasant fly fishing.

Good tributary streams enter in this stretch--Mullan, Five Mile and Flinton, with Five Mile being the best. It is a fine cold brook-brown stream that flows through a cedar swamp for most of its length. Flinton and Five Mile creeks contribute considerable numbers of trout to the river immediately above the impoundment at White Cloud (White Cloud Lake) where the river becomes sandy and has few spawning areas. White Cloud Lake (about 35 acres) harbors large numbers of suckers and other roughfish that migrate upstream and detract somewhat from the quality of the first two or three miles of river above the impoundment.

For its size, the Upper White produces a surprising number of browns of two pounds or better. Avery Love of White Cloud once took a twelve pounder in this stretch on a fly.

For the fly fishermen there are Beaverkill hatches in May, Drake hatches in early June and "caddis" hatches in late June and early July.

When swollen from heavy runoff, the Upper White does not become "coffee with cream" murky as do many Michigan streams but takes on the transparent darkness of strong tea.

The Middle White

Between White Cloud and Hesperia the White is a sizeable stream that flows first through a broad elm swamp where its bottom is sandy and deep holes are gouged by countless log jams. North of Robinson Lake it begins again to flow through glacial morrains and from there to Hesperia the current quickens and the bottom becomes more gravelly. Around Aetna the rolling country is farmed some and the river contains large boulders as well as an abundance of gravel. Cedars are sprinkled liberally along the watercourse and the river is quite picturesque.

The trout population in this stretch is only fair but the river contains some outsized browns. Thus, the Middle White warrants the attention of the "big fish" fishermen, particularly in view of the fine "caddis" hatches that occur from mid to late June.

In the White Cloud-Robinson Lake area an abundance of chestnut lamprey prey heavily on trout and creek chubs become so evident after the first month of the season that bait fishermen are discouraged from fishing this section of the stream during the day.

The inadequate natural reproduction and abundance of food in the Middle White presents an opportunity for improvement through brown trout plantings. Some attention could also be given the lamprey and roughfish problem. The stream is very well suited for fly fishing, particularly in the area around Aetna.

Several tributaries enter the Middle White, but by far the best is Martin Creek. The Martin is a fine brook-brown stream in its own right and is a favorite among some fly fishermen even though it is quite brushy. It has a good Drake and "caddis" hatch during June. The Martin produces not only good numbers of browns and brooks, but fish of excellent average size also (a 14 pound brown was recently taken from this stream). Mena Creek is the only other tributary that supports significant trout fishing in this stretch. It is a good brook-brown trout stream but is smaller and not of the quality of the Martin. They both join the White between Aetna and Hesperia.

The Lower White

The Lower White is a good sized river, most famous now for its fine fall and spring steelhead fishing. However, until about 1950 the river near Whitehall was known more for its fine spring fishing for white bass which ran the river in droves at spawning time. These were sizeable fish, too; often running 2-3 pounds and up to 17-18 inches long. Some smallmouth bass and northern pike are also taken.

For about 15 miles below Hesperia the White flows rapidly over good gravel bottom. The stream here contains a few lunker brown trout and could produce some good trout fishing if stocked as it should be--temperatures in the summer get into the low seventies often and natural reproduction in this area is scant in spite of the good gravel conditions and rapid flow.

The first tributary of note to enter below Hesperia is Braton Creek, a fair brook trout stream of small size that usually has a slightly milky discoloration. Further down the sizeable (though short) Cushman Creek enters. The Cushman contains a good trout population consisting of brooks, browns and rainbows (from steelhead natural reproduction which is significant in this stream). Sizeable brook trout (to 17 inches) and brown trout (to 5-8 pounds) are present in this stream.

Skeels Creek is another fair brook trout stream similar to Braton.

The North Branch of the White is significant enough to warrant a separate description of its own. The North Branch rises at McClaren Lake a few miles north of Hesperia, flows west to Ferry, and then south to its juncture with the main White. Due to the influence of its headwater lakes (warming temperatures and warm-water fish) the North Branch is not good trout water for its first four or five miles. Just north of Hightower Lake enough groundwater enters to cool the stream to trouts liking. Browns and a few brooks are found in this area. From this point until it joins the Lower White the North Branch is a good brown trout stream that also produces a fair number of brooks. Sizeable browns (16-22 inches) are not uncommon. The river tends to be sandy but it has a fair amount of gravel scattered throughout its length. It flows through a heavily wooded valley (though some meadows and farms are found between Ferry and Hightower Lake). It is a popular steelhead stream spring and fall in the area below Arthur Road. It also offers good fly fishing during the June Drake hatches.

Several small but excellent cold tributaries enter the North Branch--Robinson Creek, Cobmosa Creek, Newman Creek and Knudsen Creek--all of which contain brooks and browns of respectable size.

Downstream from the mouth of the North Branch the tributaries of the White are notable in that they are sizeable streams that contain almost 100 percent brook trout. These are Carlton, Sand, Silver and Cleveland creeks. Carlton is the largest and best with Silver and Sand ranking above Cleveland. These are hard fished by local anglers from Muskegon and Whitehall and they are excellent producers of brookies. Small impoundments on Sand, Silver and Cleveland inundate some good water, but produce good trout fishing themselves when roughfish are kept in check.

Except for the area around Hesperia, the Lower White is a wild; scenic, remote stream crossed by few bridges. This is rare fortune for the populous Muskegon-Grand Rapids area and fish managers should remember this in their planning.