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SERIES: THE TROUT STREAMS OF MICHIGAN

NO. 29 MOSQUITO RIVER

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The Mosquito River is a small trout stream tributary to Lake Superior in central Alger County. It lies largely within the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and drains about 12 square miles. The Mosquito arises from a small semi-open marsh and flows generally northward--emptying into Lake Superior about four miles east of Munising. In its course of travel, it flows through beautiful rolling hills covered with a mixture of white birch, maple and hemlock and then down the Lake Superior escarpment.

The river, which lies at the bottom of a steep gully, has very limited road access but provides about 7.5 miles of out-of-the-way brook and rainbow trout fishing. Two roads cross the stream: County Road C.O. 639, north of Melstrand, off the Adams Truck Trail; and a poor dirt road running south from C.O. 639, at the site of the old Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company Camp 15. All other access is either from foot trails or unmapped dirt roads. Although the Mosquito lies within the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, about forty percent of the adjacent land is under private ownership.

The upper Mosquito, from its headwaters down to Mosquito Falls, varies from four to 15 feet wide and from three to 12 inches deep. The water is dark brown in color and only moderately clear. The bottom consists mostly of black organic material. Beyond the confluence of the Noble Lake outlet, the water is clearer and the bottom changes to gravel and rock with just a trace of sand.

This section is characterized by a series of riffles and slicks, with large rocks, pools, a few logs and undercut banks for fish cover. The stream here is fishable but success is usually considered poor above Noble Lake outlet. Fishing pressure is light. The principal game species above the falls is brook trout, however, legal sized fish are not too abundant. Mosquito Falls, with its six to seven feet vertical drop, is a barrier to both rainbow trout (steelhead) and sea lamprey. Natural foods in this area include: caddis flies, mayflies, stoneflies, mottled sculpin (C. bairdii) and dace.

There are several small tributaries in this segment of stream and all are similar physically to the mainstream. None of them provide a fishery, however, some spawning and nursery habitat is available.

The mainstream from Mosquito Falls to the mouth provides the best fishery. This portion of the river ranges from 16 to 30 feet wide, 3 to 26 inches deep, and has moderate to rapid velocity. The bottom varies from mixed gravel and rock to a solid sandstone and hardpan.

The water is clear, light brown and cold. Although anglers will find this area easy to fish, wading may be difficult in some places because of the rapid stream flow and rocky bottom. There are a series of rapids and slicks, but there is ample cover--mostly logs, boulders, undercut banks, pools and hardpan shelves.

The principal game fish here are lake run rainbow (steelhead) and brook trout. Forage species include the mottled sculpin (C. bairdii) and longnose and blacknose dace. Other species include sea lamprey and the non-parasitic American brook lamprey. Primary food organisms are mayflies, caddis flies and stoneflies. Fishing success is usually good for rainbow and brook trout and fishing pressure is moderately heavy early in the season.

The West Branch Mosquito River (also called the Little Mosquito River) is the only tributary below the falls. It is a small, clear, shallow-water stream which flows over a rocky bottom through a sharp, sandstone cut. Some areas of the cut have near vertical banks from 25 to 40 feet high. The West Branch originates from several springs which have been dammed by beavers and is characterized by a series of riffles and rapids. Cover is poor and consists mostly of large rocks and an occasional log. Like the mainstream, it also has a formidable waterfall near the mouth and receives fair numbers of spring run rainbows.