NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF BROOK TROUT

IN MICHIGAN.

Until attention was attracted toward fish culture it was currently reported that Brook Trout were not indigenous to Michigan. Investigation in the early seventies verify the fact that this splendid game fish was a habitat of some streams in Northern and North Central Michigan, the exact locations being somewhat obscure. Later reports bear out the prevalent opinion that ~~he was~~ they were not widely distributed in the streams of the Lower Peninsula, being confined largely to the North Western section of this territory. The first biennial report of the Michigan Fish Commission issued December 1st, 1874 bears witness to these statements, and also calls attention to the the habitat of the Grayling at that time. Streams specifically mentioned are: The AuSable, Muskegon, Hersey, Pine and Boardman. Since it is strongly contended by many friends of the Grayling that the introduction of Brook Trout was at least one of the important factors contributing to its disappearance, it ~~is fair to~~ may be assumed that Brook Trout were not present in these streams or their tributaries at that time. The reports covering ~~the~~ early fish cultural operation all strongly advocate the propagation and distribution of Brook Trout to many streams that are found suitable and the first recorded plantings were made during March and April 1879 into Mechanicsburg and Dowagiac River, Cass County; Blue Creek, Berrien County and Spring Brook, Wait Brook and Four Brooks in Kalamazoo County, 12,000 all told from the State Hatchery near Pokogan at Crystal Springs tributary to Dowagiac Creek. The following year 50,400 fry were planted during February, March and April in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Calhoun, Clare, Kalamazoo, Kent, Mecosta, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, Van Buren, Washtenaw and Wexford Counties, fourteen all told. Thereafter the yearly plantings steadily increased in numbers and in the range over which they were spread, reaching in addition to the above named Ogemaw County in 1881, Lenawee, Livingston, Lapeer, Oakland, St. Joseph, Saginaw, Shiawassee in 1882, Charlevoix (Boyne River), Genesee, Grand Traverse, Isabella, Kalkaska and Muskegon in 1884. As to the results secured as a result of these plantings the report for 1884 ~~says:~~ states:

"The Success that has been attained in the Brook Trout work has been very great and gratifying. There is excellent trout fishing in many counties of the State where trout were never known until planted by the State, and in many streams where Grayling formerly lived but have become extinct. There are many more suitable streams still to be planted. No part of the work of the Commissioners has been attended by as many proofs of entire success, and no work that it can do can give more pleasure to so many people of the State as the propagation and planting of this beautiful fish". A large number of letters from widely separated points in the Southern half of the Lower Peninsula appended to this report attest further to the correctness of the above statements. A page of this report is also devoted to the conditions then prevailing on the AuSable River, from which we copy:

"For two years past the Commissioners have been urged by several gentlemen whose knowledge of that river is full and accurate, to plant the famous grayling river, the AuSable, with brook trout. They tell us the grayling is almost exterminated there, and that the log-running, which has been the most potent factor in his extermination, will prevent his ever being established there again. We have very reluctantly come to the same conclusion. In the summer of 1883 you could float down the Au Sable for fifteen miles below the village of Grayling without seeing or raising a single fish. From that point down there were a few fish, and it is possible that for many years some grayling will live in that lower part of the river where the main stream is deep enough to furnish some protection to the fish and some suitable spawning beds from the ravages of the running logs and the deadly spear. The principal cause of the decline in the number of fish has been the log-running. The grayling is a spring spawner. As a rule the spawning ground is not in very deep water, and while the eggs are in process of hatching, or while the fish are working on the spawning beds, the logs come down, filling the stream from bank to bank, ploughing up the beds, and raking them clean of eggs or driving off the working fish. The grayling is peculiarly obnoxious to this danger, as he spawns almost entirely in the main body of the stream. Trout would not be so liable to be interfered with in this way; as they spawn in October and November. The eggs would be hatched before log-running would begin."

The reports for 1885-86, 1887-88 further attest to the wide success attained in the propagation of Brook Trout and record the first planting in the AuSable, 20,000, by R. S. Babbitt, of Grayling on March 6, 1885, also the first Upper Peninsula plant, 10,000 in Menominee County on April 29th, 1885 by O. D. Marks. The distribution for 1888 reached 46 counties and records plantings in the Jordan, Cedar, Boardman, Boyne Rivers and Carp Lake, among 244 streams planted.

With respect to Brook Trout the report of 1890 says in part: "In this connection, and showing the character of the inland work in stocking the streams with brook trout, it may be stated that prior to the organization of this board, trout were practically unknown in the streams of the lower peninsula below the latitude of the Boardman river. Mr. Bela Hubbard in his valuable and interesting book "Memorials of Half a Century" says, p. 265, "The moment the Straits of Mackinaw are crossed the brook trout is found in abundance in all the rills of the upper peninsula. Some other reason exists for the absence of this fish from the lower streams than the character of their waters, for all these, as well as the interior lakes that exist so numerously in Michigan abound in the same kind of fish as are found in the eastern states." This is an extract from a letter written in 1841, and is authentic as to the condition of things existing at that period.

"It is a matter of common observation that at the present time fine trout fishing is to be had in very many of the counties of the lower peninsula, and these streams never knew the speckled trout until they were artifically introduced. Even in the extreme southern portions of the State, noticeably in the immediate vicinity of Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, the streams now abound in trout, furnishing the finest sport,

and giving a wide-spread reputation to these localities for the size and quality of fish taken there each year.

"Newaygo County has become a famous locality of resort for sportsmen. Its streams now abound with fine brook trout, which were never found there before they were artificially stocked. This is also true of Oceana, Lake, Mecosta, and many other counties of the State. It may be mentioned in passing, as an instance bearing upon the practical feature of the question, that two years ago a fine hotel was erected at Hart in Oceana county for the accommodation of sportsmen who sought the waters of this locality in pursuit of its game fish.

"It may be said that all streams in the lower peninsula lying south of 44°30' (North line of Manistee, Wexford, Missaukee, Roscommon, Ogemaw and Iosco Counties), now having brook trout, are streams to which the trout were not indigenous, and the trout now found in them are the results solely of artificial propagation and stocking."

"There has been a constantly increasing demand for the products of the Paris hatchery since our last report. In some respects our work on brook trout has been phenomenal. When the commission first began their distributions of this fish all the streams in the lower peninsula, with the exception of three or four in the northwestern portion, were entirely destitute of this fish. It was hardly expected therefore, by even the most sanguine of the commissioners, that trout could be grown successfully at any point much south of the D. G. H. & M. Railway. But in a faint-hearted way some experiments were tried in the vicinity of Kalamazoo with the most surprising success, the trout attaining wonderful growth and increasing rapidly in numbers. This led to increased activity by the commission in later years in the direction of stocking the streams and the results of this work have been most satisfactory. As a consequence, nearly the whole State has been considered in the planting of trout and but few failures have been met wherever the requisit care and judgment have been used in making the plants. The economic nature of this fish alone can hardly be estimated. One of the members of the legislature of 1887-88 said; "The cash value of brook trout in my county alone is worth at least $10,000 a year."

During the biennial period 23,000 were planted in the AuSable in 1889 and 18,000 in 1890.

From the 10th report (1890-1892) we find that "Brook trout have now been planted in all the counties of the Lower Peninsula except six, viz: Bay, Benzie, Huron, Missaukee, Sanilac and Wayne" and records planting 40,000 in the AuSable and East Branch in 1891 and 10,000 in 1892 and total plants of 2,252,000 in Lower Michigan and 170,000 in the Upper Peninsula during the season of 1892. Since that time the numbers planted have steadily increased reaching to the remotest section of the State. It may be said without contradiction that all streams of any importance have been planted many times and as a result Brook Trout have found their way to sources of the remotest tributaries. During the decade following 1890 they were without question the most abundant and wide spread of any game fish found within the streams of the State. Conditions affecting the

watershed of many streams have brought about changes that now make some streams entirely unsuited to Brook trout and others partially so. ~~unsuited~~, yet he still holds first rank as the finest and among the gamest of all our fishes.

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