

# 2019 Opening Day Trout Angler Survey Report

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**2019 New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife  
Opening Day Angler Survey Report  
by Ross Shramko, Senior Fisheries Biologist**

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### What are Angler Surveys?

Angler (or sometimes referred to as “creel”) surveys are one device utilized by Fisheries Managers to help protect and enhance freshwater fishing opportunities.

An angler survey is a widely applied and broad term that simply refers to methods of sampling used to collect recreational fishing information.

Many anglers who fish on Opening Day of trout season may already be familiar with the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries use of angler surveys given that this tool has been utilized since 2004 on about 120 trout stocked locations throughout the Garden State. So, if you fish on Opening Day, you may have a good chance of having your voice heard and taking part in the management of New Jersey’s freshwater fisheries.



Manny’s Pond Hunterdon County, 4/6/2019

Photo credit: Shawn Crouse

The Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries (BFF) relies on anglers to gather information about angler success, fishing preferences, interests, and attitudes, not only about trout stocking, but also about the Division’s Freshwater Fisheries program. The type of angler survey that is used on Opening Day is referred to as an “On-Site Creel Survey” because surveys or interviews are conducted at the time the angler is fishing. The intent of this type of data is to provide the Division with information to better understand anglers, provide better service, and ultimately improve fishing throughout New Jersey.

The Opening Day Angler Survey has two main objectives: (1) to record angler presence or turnout on specific waterbodies and (2) to determine angler success. This data is gleaned from casual interviews with anglers. Data about specific species catch, waterbody conditions, cormorant activity, and other pertinent information is also collected to enable the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries to better manage the waterbodies that are being stocked with trout. The emphasis of the opening day survey is usually on lakes and ponds because of the difficulty in obtaining and assessing accurate angler turnout and success on streams.

### How are the opening day surveys conducted?

Wildlife Conservation Corps (WCC) volunteers assist Fish and Wildlife staff in conducting surveys on various waterbodies on Opening Day of trout season. Each volunteer, or angler survey clerk, is assigned a waterbody and given written instructions to be reviewed before Opening Day so questions or concerns about the survey can be addressed.

All individuals fishing are counted by survey clerks to help determine angler turnout. Counts are conducted hourly from 8 a.m. until noon. From the five counts made, the highest number of anglers is used as the indicator of angler turnout. One limitation in hourly counts is that turnover is not taken into account. For example, if 10 anglers leave the waterbody, and 10 new anglers arrive, the count would still be 10. This is done because the survey clerks would have a difficult time keeping track of all anglers coming and going, especially on large waterbodies, as they drove between different locations interacting with anglers.



Stony Lake, 4/6/2019

Photo credit: Dean Blumetti, WCC

In-between hourly counts, survey clerks record angler catches, what successful anglers are using to catch trout, observations about the fishing action in general, and any other pertinent information supplied by the anglers or observed by the survey clerk.

Data is recorded on supplemental data forms and submitted to Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries staff to be compiled and analyzed. Lakes and streams are analyzed separately because of the difficulty in counting total anglers fishing on a given stream stretch at one particular point in time.

### **Results of the 2019 Opening Day Angler Survey**

The Opening Day of the 2019 trout season was Saturday, April 6<sup>th</sup>. The weather was warm with overcast skies in the morning eventually giving way to sunny skies. Weather-wise, this was one of the nicer / warmer opening days in the last several years, with high temperatures in the upper 50's to mid-60's for much of the state. Even with the warm air temperatures, anglers still faced somewhat difficult fishing conditions as higher flows and off colored water on the streams and rivers curtesy of the rain from the day before, along with the usual colder early spring water temperatures making fish lethargic. Of the 35 surveys conducted, 32 were on lakes and ponds. 1,188 anglers were observed fishing (an average of ~37 anglers per waterbody) on the lakes and ponds. This number is up from last year's opening day when 762 anglers were observed on 32 lakes and ponds surveyed (an average of ~24 anglers per waterbody). The increase in fishing pressure is probably attributed to the warmer temperatures this opening day. It also didn't hurt that the week prior to opening day was also a little on the warmer side. Even with the slightly off colored water and cool springtime water temperatures,

anglers did very well for themselves. In fact, 2019 had the best fish per angler ratio ever recorded by the Division (12 years of data). A catch rate of 0.80 fish per angler in 2019 bested the 2018 catch rate of 0.78 fish per angler. Each of the last two years anglers have had the greatest level of success since the opening day angler survey began recording angler catch rate.

### Trout-stocked Lakes and Ponds Results

In some locations trout fishing was fantastic. Several anglers expressed what a wonderful day of fishing they had and thanked the Division of Fish & Wildlife for their efforts in making the 2019 opening day a huge success. Stony Lake (Sussex), Topenemus Lake (Monmouth), Westville Pond (Gloucester) and Whites Pond (Bergen), to name a few, were the places to be on opening day as anglers had the highest catch rates per angler at 2.88 fish per angler, 1.93, 1.64 and 1.53 fish per angler respectively. Sylvan Lake (Burlington) and Nomahegan Park Pond (Union) had exceptional angler turnout with 115 anglers at each waterbody and over 100 trout caught at each waterbody in the first 4 hours of the season.

Unfortunately, trout were not as cooperative in all the lakes and ponds across the state. Many clerks reported the number of anglers at a waterbody was highest at 8 a.m. or sometimes 9 a.m. but dropped heavily by 10 a.m. and throughout the rest of the day.

7 different lakes and ponds produced less than 5 total fish during the 4-hour survey time period. Of those 7 waterbodies, 6 of them had more than 10 anglers fishing while 1 was less popular and had less than 10 anglers fishing. We would have liked to see higher turnouts and possibly with the higher angler turnouts, higher success rates on these waterbodies.



Angler and his family having a great day at Mt. Hope Pond.  
Photo Credit: Hung Le, 04/06/2019

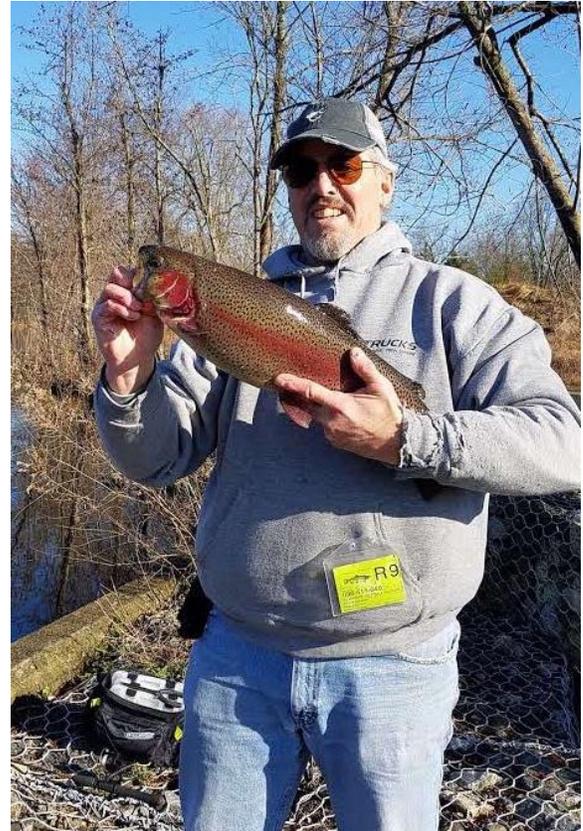
Angler success rate data has been collected and calculated per waterbody starting in 2008. Since then, the division has had the ability to compare one year's opening day's success to another year's opening day success. 2019 results showed the best ever anglers success rate compared with previous opening days. 2019 had a success rate per angler of 0.80 fish per angler or a little less than 1 fish for every angler. This fantastic success rate comes just one year after experiencing the best opening day success rate ever recorded in 2018. See table 1 for more detail.

Table 1: Yearly comparison of angler success rate

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	AVERAGE
<b>Total</b>	<b>Anglers</b>	1095	1462	1675	1918	1830	2100	664	1812	762	1188	<b>1373</b>
	<b># Trout</b>	551	669	1107	1354	996	960	380	411	595	956	<b>757</b>
	<b>Trout/Angler</b>	0.50	0.46	0.66	0.71	0.54	0.46	0.57	0.22	0.78	0.80	<b>0.55</b>

Some waterbodies have been producing consistently bad opening day success rates. The following waterbodies in Table 2 will continue to be monitored, but if their success doesn't change, they could in the future be dropped from the trout stocking program.

A complete list of the 2019 Opening Day angler success on the lakes and ponds can be found in the appendix of this report along with information on angler success.



Broodstock Rainbow Trout caught at Whites Pond Bergen Co. on opening day.  
Photo Credit: Stephanie Rogacki, 4/06/2019

Table 2: Waterbodies with consistent poor angler success.

County	Waterbody	Acres		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	AVERAGE
Mercer	Colonial Lake	10	<b>Anglers</b>			50	22	28	50	26	13	41	<b>33</b>
			<b># Trout</b>			8	0	2	0	0	0	13	<b>3</b>
			<b>Trout/Angler</b>			0.16	0	0.07	0	0	0	0.32	<b>0.06</b>
Atlantic	Heritage Park Pond	6	<b>Anglers</b>				14	25	7	21	11	16	<b>16</b>
			<b># Trout</b>				1	3	0	2	3	0	<b>2</b>
			<b>Trout/Angler</b>				0.07	0.12	0	0.1	0.27	0	<b>0.10</b>

## Trout-stocked Streams and Rivers

Typically, The Opening Day Trout Angler Survey may only have a few streams or rivers as part of the survey because angler counts and success on streams and rivers is difficult to assess. The distance that must be covered and the movement in and out of fishing spots by anglers makes it difficult to get accurate quantitative data from the survey.

Angler surveys and counts were conducted on 4 streams or small sections of streams in 2019. A total of 40 anglers were surveyed. The rivers had slightly higher flows and the water was a little off colored making it somewhat difficult for anglers to target and catch trout. Despite the difficult conditions, a few anglers found some success on the Musconetcong below the Trout Conservation Area with a catch rate of 2.00 fish per angler.

A complete list of Opening Day angler counts on streams and rivers can be found in appendix of this report along with information on angler success.



A father and his sons showing off their successful day at Sylvan Lake on opening day of the 2019 trout season.  
Photo Credit: Tom Pagliaroli, 04/06/2019

## In Summary

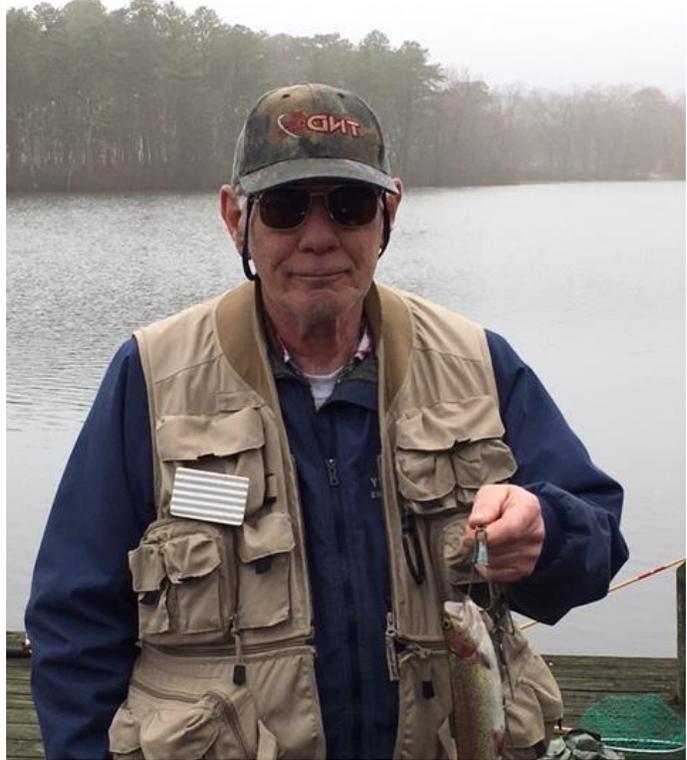
Opening Day success in 2019 was varied. On the positive side, anglers who were interviewed for this survey have never been more successful in the 12 years we have been monitoring trout caught per angler. The 0.80 trout caught per angler beat the previous record set one year earlier in 2018 of 0.78 trout per angler. On the other hand, the cold water and air temperatures in areas definitely had a negative effect on the number of anglers and the success rate at many waterbodies.

The overall number of opening day anglers counted in this year's survey was 1,228 anglers (counting both lakes & rivers). This number is below the average number of anglers since 2008 of 1373 anglers.

Sylvan Lake & Nomehegan Park Pond had the largest showing of anglers with 115 individuals fishing at each location. But the place to be in terms of overall trout caught per angler was the Stony Lake in Sussex County as 69 trout were caught by only 24 anglers (2.88 fish per angler).

Despite the typical ups and downs experienced on opening day, spring trout fishing will only get better as the season progresses. Warmer waters, lower flows and milder days will be here before you know it. Those fish stocked pre-season will begin to bite along with the trout stocked over the next 7 weeks of stocking making for another exciting and fun filled NJ spring trout season.

Reports and detailed results noted by volunteer survey clerks for each waterbody surveyed can be found in the appendix of this report.



Angler at Lake Shenendoah proudly holds his first trout of the season.

Photo Credit: Frank Delgais, 04/06/2019

## Acknowledgements

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife's Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries staff would like to thank the following Volunteers and DEP staff who make this project possible every year. Together with NJDFW staff angler counts were conducted on 35 waterbodies across the state. A special note of thanks is also extended to Fisheries Technician Chuck Sedor for coordinating the volunteer efforts.

<b>Survey Clerks</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Ray Adam	WCC	Hung Le	WCC
Mitch Smith	WCC	Tony Rego	WCC
Stephanie Rogacki	WCC	Fred DelGais	WCC
Lou Malino	WCC	Carol Flynn	WCC
Jim Winters	WCC	Jimmy Paolozzi	WCC
Tito Ramirez	WCC	Dean Blumetti	WCC
Jerry Benfer	WCC	Gene Herre	WCC
Ryan Mager	WCC	Michael Haliscak	WCC
Fried Klein	WCC	Dan Calligaro	WCC
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