VIRGINIA STOCKED TROUT MANAGEMENT PLAN (2026-2031)

DEPARTMENT OF
WILDLIFE RESOURCES
CONSERVE. CONNECT. PROTECT.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trout fishing provides significant opportunities for outdoor recreation in Virginia. A 2022-2023 Virginia Angler Survey indicated that 32% of all anglers surveyed fished for Stocked Trout in Virginia. Due to Virginia's warm climate, trout thrive year around only in higher-elevation mountain streams and in cold river tailwaters below a few large dams, such as the Jackson River below Lake Moomaw and the Smith River below Philpott Lake. Consequently, 80% of trout fishing in Virginia depends upon the more than 800,000 catchable-size trout (generally greater than seven inches, but frequently 10-12 inches) stocked annually by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR). Approximately 100,000 anglers fish for these stocked trout in Virginia each year in more than 175 lakes and streams stocked by VDWR.

Due to the importance of trout fishing in Virginia, and the significant investment required to operate and maintain hatcheries to produce catchable-sized trout, VDWR developed the Virginia Stocked Trout Management Plan (hereafter referred to as the "2016 Plan") in 2016. This plan guided VDWR staff to effectively and efficiently manage trout fisheries for a diverse range of stocked trout anglers the past 10 years. To continue managing Virginia's stocked trout fisheries at optimal levels, VDWR revised the Plan in 2026 by adjusting to updated angler preferences, ecosystem concerns and the economic challenges of producing catchable size trout.

The revision process maintained the focus of balancing stakeholder values and incorporating sound biological information. This Plan includes revised values, goals and strategies identified by VDWR staff and stakeholders during the development of the 2016 Plan. In addition, there are some new goals and strategies based on a recent Stocked Trout Angler Survey (2025) and rising concerns regarding funding. A technical committee that included VDWR fisheries biologists, hatchery personnel and conservation police officers provided the technical aspects during revision of the Plan. There was a public comment period, and multiple stakeholders were contacted directly to comment on the revision of the plan.

This Plan contains two major sections: the technical section and the goals, objectives and strategies section for management of stocked trout. The technical section describes the history of trout management in Virginia, how VDWR approaches management of stocked trout, including production, facilities, species produced, and challenges in raising trout. The second section of the Plan lists the values and goals for management of stocked trout within five major issue areas. There are multiple objectives and strategies in this section that will allow VDWR to achieve goals and optimal management of the Stocked Trout in Virginia. Originally, the Plan revisions were constructed to guide Trout management in Virginia for the next 10 years. However, given the volatile funding atmosphere VDWR staff has a responsibility to revisit the Stocked Trout Management Plan in five years with the goal of developing a 10-year plan. This Plan is designed to provide a direction for the next five years of stocked trout management rather than specific details of day-to-day operations.

The issue areas and associated goal statements are as follows:

- Funding and administration. Goal: Maintain a productive and adequately funded stocked trout program, including investigation of alternative funding and resource mechanisms to meet current and anticipated future demands. Maintain an open and transparent decision-making process regarding stocked trout management.

- Announcement of stockings. Goal: Announce stockings using available strategies (including prior announcement, post-stocking announcement, Heritage Day, etc.) to provide fair access to the resource and to address the diverse preferences of trout anglers. In addition to existing Heritage Day events, some stockings will be announced in advance to allow anglers to plan fishing trips to coincide with known stockings. All stockings will be announced at the end of the day when stocking occurs.

- Angler recruitment and retention. Goal: Inform and educate existing and potential future anglers, recruit younger and more diverse anglers, and retain those already engaged through new promotional efforts and improvement in the stocked trout program.

- Ecosystem effects. Goal: Manage trout stocking to optimize recreational opportunities while minimizing adverse impacts on aquatic and surrounding habitats, native trout and other aquatic species. Manage habitat in stocked trout waters and preserve the aesthetics of the angling experience.

- Recreational opportunities. Goal: Provide a diversity of stocked trout fishing experiences designed to meet diverse angler preferences and increase participation. Improve access to stocked trout waters for all anglers.

VDWR shared the Plan with the public by posting it on the VDWR web page and requesting comments through outreach from July 7th to August 5th. The VDWR Technical Committee reviewed all public comments and revised the plan accordingly. A summary of the comments are included in Appendix B at the end of the Plan.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY II
LIST OF FIGURES VI
LIST OF TABLES VI
INTRODUCTION 1
WHAT IS THE VIRGINIA STOCKED TROUT MANAGEMENT PLAN? 1
HOW WAS THE PLAN INITIALLY DEVELOPED IN 2016? 2
HOW THE PLAN IS BEING REVISED 3
PLAN FORMAT 3
INTERIM CHANGES TO THE PLAN 3
GLOSSARY 4
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION 5
MANAGEMENT 5
HISTORY OF TROUT STOCKING IN VIRGINIA 5
TROUT FISHING SEASON 6
REGULATIONS 7
LAW ENFORCEMENT 7
TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION 7
FUNDING 8
CATCHABLE TROUT (DESIGNATED STOCKED TROUT WATERS) 8
GENERAL PUT-AND-TAKE WATERS 9
DELAYED HARVEST WATERS 9
URBAN WATERS 9
YOUTH WATERS 10
FEE-FISHING AREAS 11
TROUT HERITAGE DAY 12
FINGERLING STOCKING 12
KIDS FISHING EVENTS 13
HOW IS THE AMOUNT OF TROUT STOCKED DETERMINED? 13
HOW IS THE FREQUENCY OF STOCKING DETERMINED? 15
HOW IS THE SPECIES OF TROUT STOCKED DETERMINED? 16
STERILE TROUT 16
HOW ARE TROUT STOCKINGS ADVERTISED TO THE PUBLIC? 17

WHAT WATERS ARE STOCKED, AND WHERE ARE THEY LOCATED? 17
ADDING NEW WATERS TO THE CATCHABLE TROUT PROGRAM 18
ANGLER SURVEY: 2025 19
ANGLER CHARACTERISTICS 19
TYPES OF ANGLERS 20
YEAR-ROUND SEASON 20
STOCKING ANNOUNCEMENTS 21
SATISFACTION WITH FISHING 23
HARVEST ORIENTATION 24
TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION 25
HATCHERY PRODUCTION 25
GROWTH TO STOCKING SIZE 27
BIOSECURITY 27
RAINBOW TROUT (*ONCORHYNCHUS MYKISS*) 29
BROWN TROUT (*SALMO TRUTTA*) 30
BROOK TROUT (*SALVELINUS FONTINALIS*) 30
TIGER TROUT (*SALVELINUS FONTINALIS X SALMO TRUTTA*) 31
TRIPLOID TROUT 32
VALUES, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POTENTIAL STRATEGIES 33
FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION 33
STOCKING ANNOUNCEMENTS 36
ANGLER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION 38
ECOSYSTEM EFFECTS 41
RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES 42
APPENDIX A. TROUT TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS. 45
APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS 46

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Location of waters listed in the 2026 Catchable Trout Stocking Plan. 9
Figure 2. Location of Delayed Harvest, Fee Fishing, Urban, Trout Heritage, and Fingerling Stocked waters. 13
Figure 3. Support for year-round trout season from 2015 mail survey. 21
Figure 4. Support for having an opening day and spring trout season from 2015 creel survey. . 21
Figure 5. Preferences for how trout stockings are announced in 2025. 22
Figure 6. Support for stocking more but smaller trout or fewer but larger trout in 2025.. 23
Figure 7. Angler satisfaction with stocked trout fishing during 2024-2025. 24
Figure 8. Relative frequency of how often anglers harvest stocked trout in 2025. 24
Figure 9. Trout production facility locations and stocking areas..... 27

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Angler Preference of VDWR Designated Stocked Trout Waters..... 20
Table 2. Hatchery comparison table: Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources has five coldwater Fish Culture Stations (FCS's) that vary in species reared, construction era, and production technology. 26

INTRODUCTION

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (VDWR) stocks more than 800,000 catchable-size trout annually to support trout fisheries in more than 175 streams and lakes. Approximately 100,000 anglers fish for these stocked trout in Virginia each year. Trout anglers have a wide variety of motives for fishing, and their divergent values and opinions about how stocked trout fisheries should be managed create complex challenges for VDWR. The Virginia Stocked Trout Management Plan is designed to inform interested individuals about the Stocked Trout Program, including the resources and infrastructure needed to attain the goals, objectives, and strategies for managing stocked trout fisheries described in the Plan.

Trout have always been a favorite of Virginia anglers. In 2011, approximately 14% of all freshwater fishing effort in Virginia targeted trout (USFWS 2011). According to the agency's most recent statewide angler survey (2023) 32% of Virginia's anglers fish for stocked trout. Stocked trout provide recreational fishing opportunities in many areas of Virginia where natural recreational fisheries are limited, and these fisheries make important economic contributions to localities where they are created.

VDWR, under the direction of a Governor-appointed Board of Directors, is charged specifically by the General Assembly with management of the state's freshwater fisheries resources. The Code of Virginia expresses many legal mandates for the Board and VDWR, including management of wildlife species (§29.1-103), public education (§29.1-109), law enforcement (§29.1-109), and regulations (§29.1-501). To help clarify and interpret the role of VDWR in managing wildlife in Virginia, the Board of Directors has adopted the following Agency mission statement:

The Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources' mission is to:

- *Conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitat for the benefit of present and future generations.*
- *Connect people to Virginia's outdoors through boating, education, fishing, hunting, trapping, wildlife viewing, and other wildlife-related activities.*
- *Protect people and property by promoting safe outdoor experiences and managing human-wildlife conflicts.*

What is the Virginia Stocked Trout Management Plan?

The Virginia Stocked Trout Management Plan is a comprehensive plan developed for stocked trout in Virginia. It summarizes the history of trout stocking and fishing in Virginia and provides a blueprint for future management directions. The revised plan establishes a framework of what needs to be done for stocked trout management, how it should be done, and when it should be done through 2031. By clarifying management goals and objectives of VDWR relating to stocked trout, the Plan will help Board members, VDWR administrators, VDWR staff, and the public to effectively address stocked trout management issues. As the basis for guiding stocked trout management activities, decisions, and projects, the Plan will also serve to

inform the General Assembly and the public of what VDWR hopes to accomplish. The Plan is a strategic plan that is intended to provide overall directions, goals, and objectives for the stocked trout program (e.g., reduce cost of program, increase participation). As such, it is not an operational plan where specific details of potential strategies to carryout objectives are exactly described (e.g., detailed descriptions of programs designed to increase youth participation).

Virginia is blessed with significant wild trout resources. There are over 2,300 miles of coldwater streams harboring wild trout populations in the Commonwealth. The Virginia Stocked Trout Management Plan specifically addresses the management of only hatchery-reared trout; there are separate issues unique to wild trout management that do not pertain to stocking hatchery-reared trout. VDWR is committed to the protection and enhancement of wild trout populations and plans to revise the Wild Trout Management Plan in 2028. The current Wild Trout Management Plan is located at https://dwr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/Virginia-Wild-Trout-Management-Plan-2019-2028.pdf.

How was the Plan initially Developed in 2016?

Following the philosophy that guided the development of Virginia's Deer, Bear, and Turkey Management Plans, the Virginia Stocked Trout Management Plan was originally developed to represent the interests of all Virginians interested in stocked trout management. VDWR collaborated with Virginia Tech's Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation to implement the public and technical processes for plan development. During the planning process, public stakeholders focused on the values that are important in establishing goals for management of stocked trout, whereas fisheries management professionals focused on the technical aspects of how to attain the goals of stocked trout management.

To identify important issues in stocked trout management, ten public meetings were conducted throughout Virginia to begin the planning process. Approximately 150 Virginians attended the public meetings from October 2013 through February 2014. The issues identified by public meeting participants provided a starting point for Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) discussions.

The SAC, composed of 11 Virginia citizens representing the diverse interests in stocked trout fishing, was tasked with identifying important values related to stocked trout fishing and developing draft goals to address those values. The SAC members represented various interests from across the western part of the state, including public landowners, sporting interests, non-consumptive interests, and conservationists. The SAC met four times between December 2014 and May 2015 to assist VDWR in developing the 2016 plan.

A Stocked Trout Technical Advisory Committee (Technical Committee), composed of VDWR biologists, hatchery staff, and conservation police officers with expertise in stocked trout management, provided scientific information and technical feedback to the SAC. Specifically, the Technical Committee drafted and presented the technical background information on stocked trout production and management in Virginia, refined the values and goals developed by the SAC, identified the objectives and potential strategies to achieve the SAC's draft goals, and drafted the final plan (e.g., writing, compiling technical sections with SAC input).

Faculty and graduate students from Virginia Tech's Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation provided overall guidance and administrative support for the planning approach and processes. Virginia Tech personnel facilitated planning meetings (e.g., public meetings, meetings of the SAC and Technical Committee, regional public input) and provided other administrative and logistical support (e.g., drafted meeting notes, communication and mailings.

How the Plan is being Revised

Revision of the plan in 2026 is similar to the process of initial development as it involves both public and stakeholder input and VDWR staff input. A VDWR Stocked Trout Technical Committee was developed to review the plan and suggest revisions based on the 2025 stocked trout angler survey and the current state of the program. Comments from the Technical Committee were incorporated into a revised draft plan. The draft plan was then open to public and stakeholder comments during July and August of 2026. The VDWR Stocked Trout Technical Committee reviewed the comments and made edits to the revised plan as feasible. The revised 2026 Stocked Trout Management Plan was submitted to the Board for review in August 2026.

Plan Format

The Plan includes sections relating to the management of stocked trout, an angler survey conducted by VDWR in 2025, and hatchery production of stocked trout in Virginia. The original SAC in 2015 described five major issues related to management of stocked trout, which still currently apply to the program. The major issue areas included funding and administration for the stocked trout program, stocking announcements, recruitment and retention of trout anglers, ecosystem effects of stocking trout, and recreational opportunities. The Plan lists specific objectives designed to attain the goals and suggests strategies clarifying how each objective might be achieved.

Interim Changes to the Plan

The Plan is designed to provide guidance and priorities to help manage Virginia's stocked trout program through 2031. Issues and public values related to stocked trout fishing should not change dramatically over the 5-year period. However, a plan should be a dynamic and flexible tool that remains responsive to changing social, environmental, technical, and administrative conditions. To keep the Plan relevant and responsive to the programmatic goal directions provided by the public, specific objectives and strategies may be added, deleted, or amended by VDWR as circumstances demand. As adaptive changes in management approaches (i.e., objectives) are necessary, VDWR will submit interim updates for public and stakeholder review before implementing changes; updated objectives will be provided as addenda to the Plan on VDWR's website.

Glossary

- *Catchable-Size Stocked Trout* – Trout stocked by VDWR that are greater than seven inches in length, typically 10-11 inches.
- *Designated Stocked Trout Water* – Water body where catchable-size trout are stocked by VDWR, and a Virginia Trout License is required 1 October through 15 June.
- *Native Trout* – Brook Trout that are hatched and reared in a wild environment through natural reproduction. Brook Trout are the only native trout to Virginia; therefore wild Brook Trout is synonymous with native trout.
- *Put and Take* – Trout management program where catchable-size trout can be harvested immediately following stocking.
- *Southern Appalachian Brook Trout* – A specific strain of Brook Trout indigenous to watersheds in southwestern Virginia exhibiting unique genetic characteristics.
- *Sterile Trout* – Trout that are unable to reproduce under any conditions. Triploids and Tiger Trout are examples of sterile trout.
- *Stocked Trout* – Trout hatched from eggs and / or reared in captivity (hatchery or fish culture station) and then released into a wild environment.
- *Wild Trout* – Trout that are hatched and reared in a wild environment through natural reproduction. Wild trout in Virginia includes naturally reproducing Brook, Brown, and Rainbow Trout.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

MANAGEMENT

There is no such person as an "average" stocked trout angler in Virginia. If you asked ten different stocked trout anglers what they would like to see in VDWR's Stocked Trout Program, you would most likely get a wide variety of answers. Stocking hatchery-reared trout into a stream or small impoundment is completely artificial, and therefore can be manipulated in many ways. Where and when trout are stocked, the size and number of fish stocked, and how and when anglers are informed of trout stocking are management options that VDWR utilizes in its stocked trout program. VDWR has been responsive to the requests of Virginia's stocked trout anglers. Over the past four decades, the Department has made changes to the general put-and-take program and initiated several programs to meet the social and demographic needs of the stocked trout angling community.

History of Trout Stocking in Virginia

By the early 20th century, stream and river ecosystems in the eastern U.S. had become severely degraded. Extensive logging, mining, dam construction, and other human impacts impaired water quality and stream bottom conditions to the point that trout could no longer reproduce or even exist in many waters. Outstanding recreational fisheries declined or vanished. Early pioneers in fish and wildlife conservation focused on stocking hatchery fish to rebuild wild populations and in many cases to provide "instant" recreation. One of the most successfully propagated fishes proved to be trout. Trout were raised to adult size on artificial feed more easily than other species. Anglers embraced the concept of stocking fish of legal harvest size. For these reasons, hatchery trout were stocked in coldwater streams to augment fisheries where native trout populations had declined or disappeared entirely. They were also introduced to water bodies where they had not previously existed, such as warmwater environments where they could survive only during colder months.

VDWR first stocked hatchery Rainbow and Brook Trout in Virginia streams in the late 1920s. Some of the first streams to be stocked were located in the newly formed Shenandoah National Park. Initially, VDWR operated two trout hatcheries: Marion Hatchery (Smyth County) was VDWR's first trout hatchery opening in 1930, and Montebello Hatchery (Nelson County) began operating in 1931. Coursey Springs Fish Culture Station in Bath County was added to VDWR's hatchery system in 1964. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service began operating federal trout hatcheries at Paint Bank (Craig County) and Wytheville (Wythe County) in the 1960s. While under federal management, trout from these two facilities were stocked only in waters located within the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. Both Paint Bank and Wytheville hatcheries were acquired by VDWR in the 1980s. At the request of anglers and to provide more diverse fisheries, VDWR began stocking Brown Trout in 1961.

In 1958, Virginia became one of the first states to require a separate license to fish for stocked trout. The revenue from the trout license was dedicated solely toward production of hatchery trout. Historically, trout were stocked only where the public had fishing access, accessibility for stocking was adequate, and water quality and temperature were suitable for trout throughout most of the year. A signed agreement between private landowners and VDWR to allow public access was required before trout were stocked in waters on private lands. Larger impoundments were excluded from the program because VDWR hatcheries could not produce enough trout to sustain a desirable fishery. In the early years of the program, stocking focused mostly on streams, with about 130-150 waters receiving trout. The number of waters stocked by VDWR peaked in the 1970s at close to 240, located across 40 counties primarily in the western and southwestern portion of the Commonwealth.

A statewide inventory of coldwater streams was conducted by VDWR in the late 1970s. The purpose of this project was to identify and classify all wild trout populations. Many streams being stocked with hatchery trout were found to harbor exceptional wild trout populations. For this reason, stocking trout was discontinued in many streams in the early 1980s. More waters were added when the Delayed Harvest and Urban Trout programs were introduced in the 1990s and the Youth program was introduced in 2017. The number of waters stocked by the Department has ranged from 175-195 over the last four decades.

Trout Fishing Season

Virginia's trout season had an "Opening Day" from the 1930s until 1995. Opening Day fluctuated between the third Saturday in March and the first Saturday in April with fishing beginning at a designated time in the morning. Trout season ran from opening day to December 31 (the majority of stocked trout waters would not support trout from June-September due to high water temperatures). Stocked trout waters were closed to fishing up to three months before opening day, and trout were stocked during this "pre-season" period. Historically, most waters received three stockings (one pre-season, and two in-season). Additional two-week, in-season closures of stocked waters preceded post-opening day, in-season stockings. Different regions of western Virginia were closed to trout fishing for in-season stockings at different times so that some trout waters were always open to fishing. Select waters were stocked as late as June and some waters received a single fall stocking in October. Statewide surveys of trout license buyers in 1986 and 1993 indicated support for transitioning to a year-round trout season increased from

58% to 75%. Citing the support for a year-round season, opening day was discontinued in 1996. Currently, trout stocking occurs from October 1 through May 31, and there is no closed season.

Regulations

In the early years of the program, daily creel limits were fairly liberal, allowing anglers to harvest up to 12 trout. Over time, the creel limit was reduced incrementally to the current limit of six trout per day. To provide fairness and ensure a sporting ethic, anglers are only permitted to fish with one rod and during daylight hours in stocked trout waters.

Law Enforcement

As the title of "Game Warden" evolved to "Conservation Police Officer (CPO)," so did the diversity of the Stocked Trout Program. Prior to 1996 when trout were stocked prior to opening day, CPOs spent day and night patrolling streams and lakes ensuring that poachers would not steal the opportunity of the ethical fishermen who waited with family and friends for this special day. This law enforcement effort was significant, as many of these waters were stocked and then closed to angling for several weeks. During the "Opening Day" era, special operations on trout streams were conducted by law enforcement officials, bringing CPOs from eastern Virginia to the western counties. One significant hurdle for law enforcement came with the Fair Labor Standards Act . This prevented CPOs from working extended hours that they were not compensated for and made them unavailable except during approved overtime.

CPOs deal with traffic issues as some anglers follow the trout truck from hatcheries to stocking locations. While the need to watch streams in the old pre-season period no longer exists, CPOs currently assist with stocking events, provide traffic control, gather information for biologists, and enforce laws and regulations. The most frequent violations on trout streams are fishing after obtaining the daily limit, exceeding creel limits, snagging, littering, and fishing without proper licenses. CPOs' contact with anglers ensures they are properly licensed and obey creel and size limits. These contacts vary from a thank you to a warning, summons, or arrest. CPOs are the most noticeable field representatives for VDWR and thus have extensive contact with trout anglers. Anglers are quick to let the CPOs know how they feel about the quality of VDWR's trout stocking program.

Trends in Participation

Prior to 1996, when "Opening Day" was preceded by a season closure and a large pre-season stocking emphasis, large numbers of anglers fished for stocked trout. Conflicts between anglers and landowners over the years led to a decline in private waters available for public-stocked-trout fishing. In order to address issues related to large opening day crowds (e.g., litter, traffic congestion), the trout program shifted to a year- round season with the hope of reducing crowding on these waters and better utilizing limited hatchery space. Trout-angler surveys (2001, 2008 and 2015) conducted since the creation of the year-round season have found close to

80% of trout anglers prefer not having an opening day and approximately 70% of anglers surveyed in 2025 rated the current program as Excellent/Good.

Sales of annual trout licenses declined from over 100,000 per year in the mid-1990s to fewer than 50,000 in recent years. When sportsman and lifetime trout fishing license sales are included, the total number of licensed trout anglers appears to have remained relatively constant.

Funding

Virginia's regulations require anglers fishing for stocked trout in designated stocked trout waters to purchase a trout license in addition to a regular freshwater fishing license. The intent of the separate trout license was to financially support hatchery trout production. Essentially considered a "pay to participate" program. While all revenue from trout license sales goes directly toward catchable trout production, these revenues alone do not support the entire program. Sixty-four percent of trout anglers surveyed in 2008 stated that they purchased a basic freshwater fishing license primarily to fish for trout. If those additional basic freshwater fishing license sales are added to trout license sales, the funds still do not meet the needs of the hatchery system, which in 2025 amounted to approximately $3.3 million. This figure does not include costs associated with VDWR's management staff or law enforcement activities associated with the stocked trout program.

Catchable Trout (Designated Stocked Trout Waters)

The catchable trout-stocking program is the most popular component of VDWR's trout program and accounts for approximately 80% of trout angling effort in Virginia. Roughly 800,000 catchable trout (490,000 pounds) are stocked into 138 streams and 37 ponds and lakes (213 different stream sections and impoundments) for the 100,000 anglers that pursue them (Figure 1). "Designated Stocked Trout Waters" include waters stocked with catchable-size trout and are listed by the agency Director in the Annual Trout Stocking Plan. Stocked catchable-size trout support general Put-and-Take, Delayed Harvest, Urban, Fee Area, Trout Heritage and Catch and Release fisheries. These waters are considered designated stocked trout waters, which only require a trout license from October 1 through June 15. Youth Waters are also supported by catchable size trout from April 1 through June 15. All catchable-size stocked trout are at least seven inches in length when stocked. However, VDWR attempts to produce fish with an average length of 10 ½ inch (0.45 lb.) for stocking these waters.

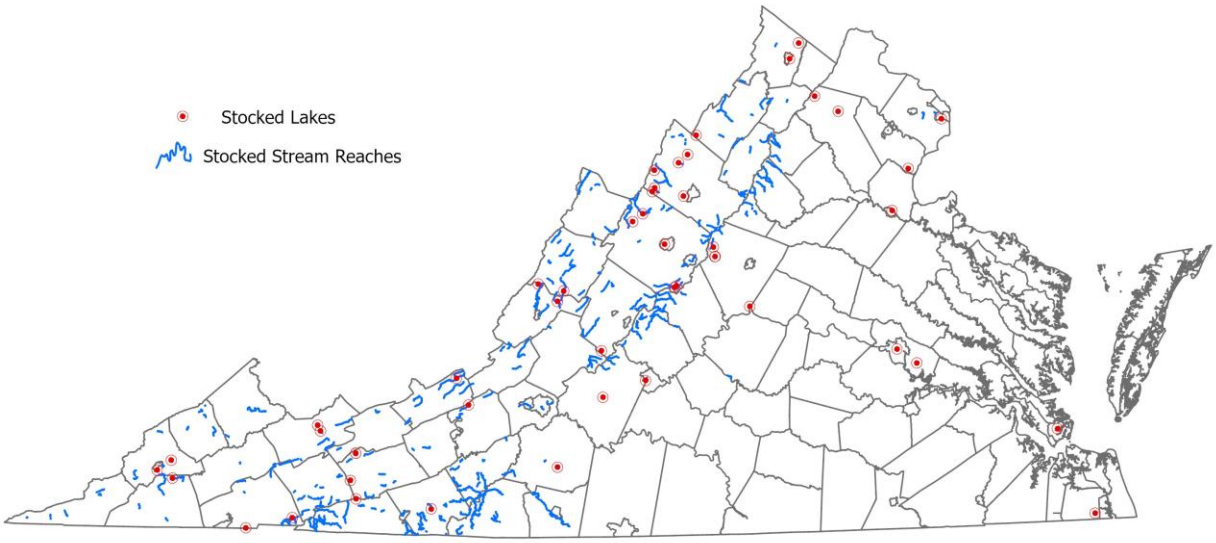


Figure 1. Location of waters listed in the 2025 Catchable Trout Stocking Plan.

General Put-and-Take Waters

Put-and-take stocked trout fishing draws the most interest and attention from anglers probably because of the availability of catchable-size trout, liberal gear restrictions, and ease of capture. Eighty-two percent of the waters stocked with catchable-size trout currently fall under the put-and-take category.

Delayed Harvest Waters

The delayed harvest program was launched in 1989. The intent of this program is to incorporate aspects of both catch-and-release and put-and-take trout fishing. Streams in this program are generally large and provide good trout habitat. However, water temperature often limits trout survival through the summer months. Catchable-size trout are stocked typically once in fall, winter, and spring. From October 1 through the following May 31, only artificial lures may be used, and all fish must be released unharmed. From June 1 through September 30, general trout regulations are in effect, and trout may be harvested. A trout license is required to fish these waters from October 1 through June 15. There are currently 17 streams in the delayed harvest program (Figure 2).

Urban Waters

In 1993, VDWR initiated its Urban Fishing Program at three ponds in urban and suburban areas. These prototypes evolved into eight permanent sites across the Commonwealth (Figure 2) over the following 25 years: Cook Lake (Alexandria), Ivy Creek Park Pond (Lynchburg City), Locust Shade Park Lake (Prince William), Dorey Park Lake (Henrico), Shield

Lake (Richmond), Northwest River Park Lake (Chesapeake), Old Cossey Pond (Fredericksburg) and Armstead Point Park Pond (Hampton City). Due to site logistics and issues, waters may be added or dropped from the program from time to time. The sites share common components – they are small ponds managed by their localities (Parks and Recreation Departments) and lie within urban areas.

The motivation for this program is to bring trout angling to densely populated areas, and provide urban residents an opportunity they may not otherwise have. Currently, all urban fishing program sites are stocked with catchable Rainbow and Brown Trout five times per season (November – April). There were originally ten trout stockings during the season. One stocking about every 2.5 weeks which was determined to be the appropriate frequency as a compromise between attaining target catch rate of one fish per hour and hatchery-hauling constraints. Considering available resources, stockings were reduced years ago. Currently, there are five trout stockings per season (more fish per stocking, but less frequent stocking events). When funds are available urban waters that can accommodate Catfish are also stocked with large Channel Catfish during warmer months when water temperatures are too high for trout.

The Urban Trout Program generated heavy fishing participation, estimated at 12,500 angling hours per acre annually in the mid-2000s with 36 acres of water in the program. Average catch rate was around 0.5 fish per hour, which, for these fisheries, is considered high relative to national catch estimates due to intense fishing pressure. The Urban Trout Program may serve to attract new anglers, as past surveys indicated 5% of users had fished for less than one year, and 19% had fished for less than five years. Juvenile usage comprised 15-20% of the total with much of the remainder made up of senior citizens.

Youth Waters

Youth waters are designated by the Director and will only be considered Youth-Only Stocked Trout Waters from April 1 through June 15. Only youth age 15 and under are allowed to fish during that period. Adults can assist youth only by baiting the hook, casting, and removing the fish from the hook. Adults cannot assist with setting the hook or retrieving the fish. The daily creel limit is three trout. Adults assisting youth are not required to have a fishing license or a trout license. Parking or access fees may be required at some locations.

Youth-Only Waters will be stocked three times between April 1 and June 15. Stocking times may vary depending on the distance from the hatchery to the receiving water. DWR will strive to stock between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm. Stocking dates for Youth Waters are listed in the regulation digest annually and on the DWR website. DWR may postpone or change the date of any of these stocking events due to circumstances that compromise the resource or public safety. There are currently eight waters in the Youth Program including Northern Fauquier Community Park Pond, South River – Basic Park (Waynesboro), Cave Mountain Lake (Rockbridge), Glen Alton Pond (Giles), Franklin County Park Pond (Franklin), Ivy Creek (Lynchburg), South Fork Clinch River (Tazewell), and Two Ponds (Smyth) (Figure 2).

Fee-Fishing Areas

The Fee Fishing, or "pay-as-you-go" trout program, began in 1964 when the Clinch Mountain Fee Fishing Area opened. Today, VDWR manages three fee-fishing areas located in western Virginia: Clinch Mountain, Crooked Creek, and the Douthat Lake Fee Fishing Areas (Figure 2). The primary goal of the fee-fishing program was to provide inexpensive trout fishing opportunities for vacationers, both resident and non-resident. Today, these areas also provide anglers an opportunity to experience a more traditional "opening day" as well as to fish for frequently stocked trout throughout the season. During the fee season, anglers may fish one of the fee areas with a basic freshwater fishing license and a daily fishing permit ($8), which is required of all anglers over the age of 12. Children 11 and under may fish without a permit as long as they are accompanied by a licensed adult, and the combined creel does not exceed that of the adult (6 trout, 7" minimum length). Revenue generated from the daily permit sales are used to offset the cost of trout production and stocking at the fee areas. Fee Fishing begins at 9:00 am on the first Saturday in April. Fishing hours and seasons may vary among the fee areas. Fee areas are closed to fishing five days prior to opening day. Outside of the fee season, these areas revert to designated stocked trout waters, and a trout license is required instead of a daily permit. A daily permit is required to fish the Clinch Mountain and Crooked Creek fee areas from the first Saturday in April through September 30. Douthat Lake Fee Fishing Area requires a daily permit from the first Saturday in April through June 15 and from September 15 through October 31.

Clinch Mountain Fee Fishing Area is located in southwestern Virginia about 7 miles west of Saltville. The area consists of approximately 7 miles of Big Tumbling Creek and its two major tributaries, Briar Cove Creek and Laurel Bed Creek. Trout are stocked four times a week during the fee season. Outside of the fee season, the area is managed as designated stocked trout waters to the gate at the foot of the mountain.

Crooked Creek Fee Fishing Area is located in Carroll County about 5 miles east of Galax. This area consists of a 5-mile stocked section and a 2-mile section managed as a wild trout fishery. Trout are stocked four times a week during the fee season.

Douthat Lake Fee Fishing Area is located in Bath County and lies within Douthat State Park. This area includes Douthat State Park Lake (60 acres) and 4 miles of Wilson Creek. Trout are stocked twice per week throughout the fee period. Outside of the fee season, the area is managed as designated stocked trout waters. From June 16 to September 14 no trout are stocked and no daily fee or trout license is required.

Anglers who visited VDWR's fee areas purchased 22,337 permits in 2025 an increase from 17,379 permits in 2014. However, participation declined from the 1970s when 37,022 permits were sold at the Clinch Mountain Fee Fishing Area alone in 1973. Part of the decline in permit sales can be attributed to the substantial increase in trout fishing opportunities, which began in 1983 through the elimination of the May closure and increased numbers of in-season trout stocking on general stocked waters. Additionally, the cost of the daily permit increased from $1 to $8. Although the number of annual permit sales declined, the program remains popular with anglers and provides a quality experience for catchable stocked trout, particularly through the summer after stocking has ceased on the general designated trout waters.

Trout Heritage Day

Heritage Day began in 2001, to provide a similar experience to opening day for anglers who enjoyed the excitement and social aspect of the opening day of trout season. Select waters are stocked prior to or on the first Saturday in April to create an announced stocking event. These streams and impoundments are closed to fishing the Friday prior to the first Saturday in April for stocking, and reopen to fishing the following day at 9:00 am. The stocking for Heritage Day counts as one of the standard allocated stockings for that water. There were 20 Trout Heritage waters in 2025 (Figure 2).

Fingerling Stocking

The fingerling-stocking program is designed to take advantage of the natural potential of deep reservoirs, coldwater tailwaters, and spring-fed streams to produce quality trout fishing opportunities where wild trout fisheries are not possible due to the lack of natural reproduction. Because summer water temperatures are usually a limiting factor to trout health, under this program a stream or reservoir must provide suitable, year-round water temperatures, have good habitat, and be productive enough to provide adequate food for good growth. VDWR utilizes Brook, Rainbow, and Brown Trout in the fingerling program. The species utilized depends upon habitat conditions of the receiving water and specific management objectives. Suitable waters are stocked once or twice annually with fingerling or sub-catchable (smaller than the legal size limit of 7") trout, and often length limits and angler gear restrictions are imposed to protect these sub-legal size fish until they reach harvestable size. These fish will often be caught several times before they eventually reach harvestable size. During this time, trout lose most of their hatchery characteristics, both in appearance and behavior, and create a fishery that approaches a wild one in terms of fishing experience. Some of Virginia's most exciting trout fishing opportunities can be found within the fingerling-stocking program. By stocking small fish once or twice a year, a high-quality fishery can be developed at a fraction of the cost of the more common put-and-take program. VDWR typically stocks approximately 133,000 fingerling trout in different stream reaches and impoundments (Figure 2).

*Some stream sections that receive fingerling trout are located entirely on private lands, and VDWR manages these fisheries in cooperation with the private landowners using a permit system. A free permit is required to fish these streams and can be obtained during license purchase from VDWR's license webpage: https://dwr.virginia.gov/licenses/. In 2024, approximately 13,165 permits were issued for the three streams in this program (Mossy Creek, Buffalo Creek, and South River). This compares to 5,600 in 2014, before the permits were easily obtained during the license process.

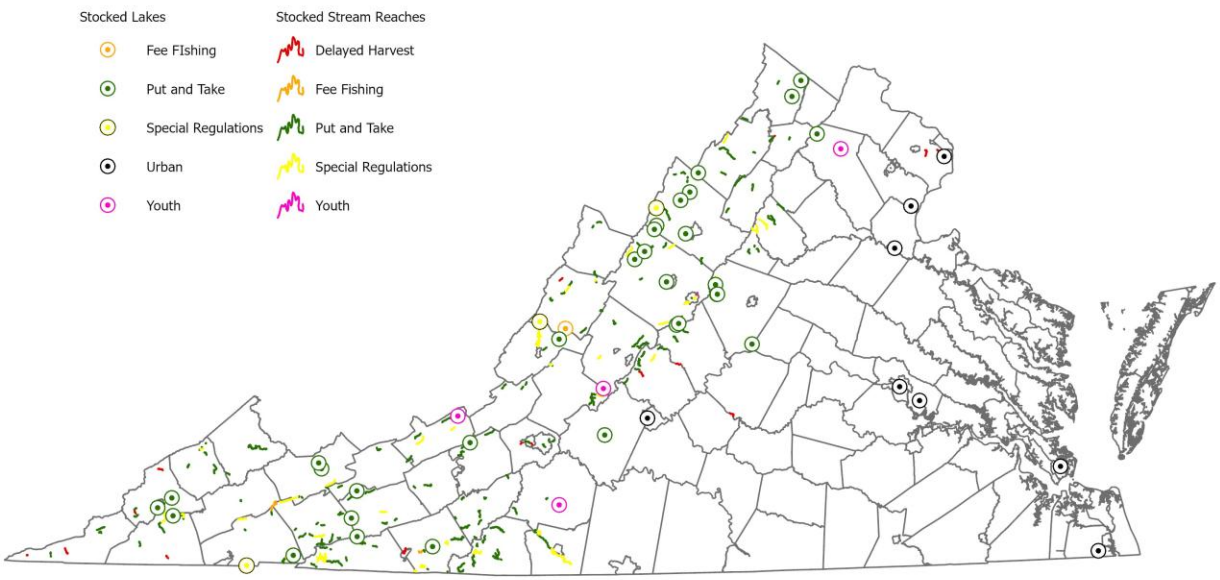


Figure 2. Location of Delayed Harvest, Fee Fishing, Urban, Trout Heritage, and Fingerling stocked waters.

Kids Fishing Events

VDWR provides stocked trout for children-only fishing events. This program is extremely popular, as thousands of children participate in these events annually. Events are held on both streams and impoundments, and must occur on VDWR-designated stocked trout waters during the stocking season (October 1 – May 31) for VDWR to stock. The stocking for the event counts as one of the standard allocated stockings for that particular water. VDWR only provides trout for one event per water body per year. Events that are sponsored by the Deparment and held on designated stocked trout waters will be closed to adults (anglers over 15 years of age) from noon the day before the event until the conclusion of the event (only in the posted section). Waters scheduled for an event and not sponsored by VDWR may be closed by the managing sponsor or landowner for one day prior to the event. Events can only be for one day and must conclude no later than 4:00 pm, at which time the designated stocked water opens to all licensed anglers. VDWR stocked trout for 30 children's fishing events in 2025.

How is the amount of trout stocked determined?

In the "Opening Day" era, trout stocking densities were determined primarily by fishing pressure. Biologists and CPOs counted anglers on designated stocked trout waters on Opening Day, and those numbers were used to generate the stocking allocation for those waters the following year. Depending on the water being stocked, 3-4 trout were stocked per angler. Currently, biologists use a formula where miles of stream stocked, stream width, local population numbers, physical habitat, proximity to other Put-and-Take waters, and stocking distribution are rated to determine the amount of trout to be stocked.

STREAMS:	**WEIGHTING FACTOR**
A. Stream Width	
15’	1
15-30’	2
30-50’	3
50’+	4
B. Population Proximity	
>75,000 People	5
50,000 to 75,000 People	4
35,000 to 50,000 People	3
10,000 to 35,000 People	2
3,500 to 10,000 People	1
<3,500 People	0
C. Physical Habitat	
>35% pools- most with good depth (>3') Abundant overhead cover Very dependable flows	2
20% to 35% pools- some with good depth (>3') Good overhead cover Good flows except during severe drought	1
<20% pools- shallow (<3') Limited overhead cover Possible frequent low flow events	0
D. Proximity to Put-and-Take	
No other PNT waters within 10-mile drive	2
Only 1 PNT water within 10-mile drive	1
Two or more within 10-mile drive	0
E. Distribution Potential	
67%+ of reach is accessible by stocking trucks/staff	2
34%-66% is accessible by stocking trucks/staff	1
<33% of reach is accessible by stocking trucks/staff	0

How to determine number of fish stock per mile per stocking for streams:

- add all weighting factors
- multiply weighting factor by 50 for total trout per mile
- multiply by total miles of accessible/stocked stream
- on approved urban streams, multiply weighting factor by 75

IMPOUNDMENTS:

A. Size	**Standard Stocking Rate**
< 5 acres	175/acre
6-10 acres	100/acre
10-25 acres	50/acre
> 25 acres	40/acre

B. Fishing Pressure	**Weighting Factor**
Light	0.5
Moderate	0.75
Heavy	1.0

Multiply the fishing pressure factor by the recommended stocking rate to get number per acre for each stocking.

Currently, VDWR stocks trout by pounds rather than number. The amount of pounds is converted from the number allocated for each site. Thus, the number of fish stocked may fluctuate among stockings at each site based on the average size of individual fish.

How is the frequency of stocking determined?

General put-and-take stocked trout waters are classified as A, B, or C. This classification determines how many times the water will be stocked and within what time period. The stocking frequencies of the following categories are subject to change based on available funding for the stocked trout program.

Category A: Waters have consistently suitable flow and temperature conditions for survival of trout from October 1 through June 15. The waters provide good depth, cover and food for survival of holdover-stocked trout. Streams where fall stocking is frequently delayed due to low flow conditions generally are not considered Category A waters. Stocked eight times between October 1 and May 31.

Category B: Waters have consistently suitable conditions for holding stocked trout from November 1 through May 31. Waters generally provide good size, depth and cover to provide a quality angling experience under normal flow conditions. Waters provide adequate conditions for survival of stocked trout through the stocking season. These waters typically have delayed stockings in the fall due to low flow. Stocked five times between October 1 and May 31.

Category C: These are generally very small streams or ponds that provide limited fishing opportunity and are only suitable for holding trout during very good flow conditions. Most of these waters are small, publicly owned streams that have been stocked historically and remain in the program. These waters typically have delayed stockings in the fall due to low flow. Stocked three times between October 1 and May 31.

Delayed Harvest waters are stocked three times between October 1 and May 31.
Urban Trout Waters are stocked five times between November 1 and April 15.
Youth Waters are stocked three times between April 1 and June 15.

How is the species of trout stocked determined?

Rainbow Trout:

- used in all lake and stream stockings, except where special conditions (see below * in Sterile Trout section) or specific management plans warrant other species.

Brown Trout:

- used in all lake and stream stockings, except where special conditions (see below * in Sterile Trout section) or specific management plans warrant other species.
- used only when physical habitat and food availability is adequate
- used in two-story reservoirs as fingerling stockings
- should not be stocked where they could establish a wild population within a native trout drainage.
- will not be stocked where VDWR aquatic biologists determine they would negatively impact populations of threatened or endangered species.

Brook Trout:

- required where VDWR stocks trout in areas with marginal native trout populations
- recommended in lakes that are fed by streams that contain native trout populations.
- recommended in streams with tributaries that contain native trout populations.
- may be substituted for Rainbow Trout in most other situations

Tiger Trout:

- used in all lake and stream stockings, except where special conditions (see below * in Sterile Trout section) or specific management plans warrant other species.
- will not be stocked where VDWR aquatic biologists determine they would negatively impact populations of threatened or endangered species.
- recommended in lakes that are fed by streams that contain native trout populations.
- recommended in streams with tributaries that contain native trout populations.

Sterile Trout

Normal trout are “diploid”, meaning each individual fish has two pairs of chromosomes. Triploid trout have three pairs of chromosomes and are essentially sterile (cannot reproduce).

How and where VDWR produces triploid trout is discussed in the "Production" section of this document.

Goal: to stock triploid and Tiger Trout in waters where the genetic purity of native trout is to be protected, or where stocked trout natural reproduction is not desired.

Objectives: Annually produce adequate numbers of triploid Rainbow, Brook and Brown Trout to meet the Department's needs.

Use of Triploid Trout
Priority:

- Watersheds with known populations of pure Southern Appalachian Brook Trout
- Streams originating within the boundaries of Shenandoah National Park.
- Waters with native trout populations are present. *
- Fingerlings in the put-n-grow program (streams and reservoirs).

*Tiger Trout and Triploid Rainbow or Brown Trout can be stocked into waters designated to receive only Brook Trout when diploid Brook Trout are not available.

When all triploid allocation requests have been filled, surplus triploid trout can be substituted for diploid trout in any water where VDWR is stocking trout.

How are trout stockings advertised to the public?

Currently, the majority of stockings on general Put and Take, Delayed Harvest, Catch and Release and Youth Waters are announced each day at approximately 4:00 pm on VDWR's website Daily Trout Stocking Schedule | Virginia DWR and on the Trout Stocking Line 434-525-FISH (3474). Waters stocked on Saturday may not be listed until the following Monday.

Exceptions include: 1) waters in the Trout Heritage Program, which are pre-announced to be stocked for the first Saturday in April, 2) waters stocked for children-only fishing events and in Youth Only waters, which are pre-announced, 3) Pre-announced waters which are listed in the regulation digest.

What waters are stocked, and where are they located?

An updated list of Designated Stocked Trout Waters is located in the Virginia Freshwater Fishing and Watercraft Owner's Guide and on VDWR's website. An interactive mapping application for stocked trout waters, special regulation waters, and wild trout waters is available by clicking on the link to stocked trout interactive map on VDWR's website https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/10346bba8db04f86bbe502eb9da749a7/page/Page?views=Map-Layers. Maps identifying locations of stocked trout waters may also be published in the Department's magazine *Virginia Wildlife*.

Adding New Waters to the Catchable Trout Program

Ideal candidate waters for the Catchable Trout Stocking Program would be considered transition habitats between coldwater and warmwater communities. These waters, under natural conditions, provide limited recreational fishing but can provide excellent trout fishing opportunities on at least a seasonal basis. The following criteria should be used when adding waters to this program:

Habitat/Native Fauna:

- Streams should not currently support a significant wild trout fishery or the potential for establishment of one. No Class I or Class II wild trout stream will be considered for the program, and Class III and Class IV waters will only be considered after careful evaluation of current angling potential and potential impact of stocking on resident populations.
- If waters are within the known range of Southern Appalachian Brook Trout, additional analysis of Brook Trout populations within the drainage may be necessary. Only sterile (triploid) trout should be stocked in watersheds known to contain Southern Appalachian Brook Trout.
- Waters to be considered should not support a significant warmwater population of gamefish.
- If waters contain a federal or state listed threatened or endangered species, an evaluation, in consultation with Department aquatic non-game biologists, must be made to determine potential effects on the species or its habitat. If it is determined that stocking may significantly affect that species, the water should not be added to the program.
- Only waters that will rate at least a Category B Catchable Trout fishery should be added. No lake over 20 acres in size should be considered for catchable trout stocking and streams should be between 15 and 75 feet in width.
- Streams should have at least 20% pool habitat with average pool depths of 3 feet or greater and should have adequate cover to retain trout in the stocked section.
- All waters should be capable of sustaining trout through June 30th and have adequate water quality that will not stress trout or cause substantial disease or mortality.
- Allocations for these waters must follow the approved trout stocking allocation guidelines

Public Access:

- The area must be accessible to the general public without payment of a fee for fishing. VDWR will consider areas that charge a daily use fee to all users as long as the fee is not designed for profit but is used for maintenance of the facilities and area. The amount of the fee should be considered to determine if it is reasonable and that anglers would be willing to pay in order to access the area.
- The area must have adequate parking to avoid causing unsafe traffic hazards and must be open to anglers year-round.
- Streams should have a least one continuous mile of open water. VDWR's historic guideline for stocking streams is to not stock within 1/4 mile of posted property.

If public water or natural barriers to fish migration are located at either end of a proposed section of water, the minimum length can be reduced accordingly. Posting of a very short section of water or posting of one side of the stream does not restrict consideration of a stream for the program as long as anglers can easily access the remaining section of stream or the opposite bank.

- Staff shall get signed landowner authorization on all new waters. VDWR has an approved landowner public fishing agreement form available.

Geographic Factors:

- Generally, the catchable trout program will be limited to the traditional trout counties lying west of U.S. Highway 29 and abutting the Blue Ridge, except for the Urban Fishing Waters and Delayed Harvest Waters, which are available statewide.
- VDWR's goal is to retain, expand, and improve the program where possible. Therefore, additions to the catchable trout stocking program will be considered throughout the approved region without limiting numbers of waters by county or region. However, VDWR will give higher priority to areas that have limited trout fishing opportunity and to areas that better serve high population densities. Additions to the program should be used to substitute for removal of undesirable waters where appropriate.

ANGLER SURVEY: 2025

In May 2025, VDWR conducted a survey of stocked Trout anglers both within Virginia and from out-of-state. Anglers were eligible to receive a survey invitation if they were between 18 and 85 years of age. Survey invitations were sent to 14,678 anglers that had purchased an annual license with trout fishing privileges between May 14, 2024-2025 or purchased a lifetime trout fishing license between 2016-2025. Anglers were chosen from all four VDWR Regions randomly with higher probability in regions with high trout privilege license sales. The survey was distributed by email. There were no on the water surveys completed due to the lack of funding. Survey questions provided information on how long anglers fished, the number of trout caught, harvest preference, as well as preferences and opinions regarding fishing for stocked trout. This survey was designed to aid in the revision of the Stocked Trout Management Plan and to answer these questions:

1. What are current preferences of Stocked Trout Anglers.
2. What is the level of satisfaction of Stocked Trout Anglers.
3. What can be done to improve angler satisfaction with stocked trout management in Virginia?

Angler Characteristics

Respondents to the survey ranged in age from 18 to 84, with an average age of 49. Males comprised 88% of the respondents in 2025 compared to 92% in 2015. Women comprised 10% of the respondents and 2% did not respond to the question. Anglers fished for stocked trout in

Virginia an average of 12.5 days per year, traveling, on average, approximately 44 miles one-way per trip. Thirty-six percent of anglers indicated they had taken a youth (age 15 and under) stocked trout fishing in the last 12 months. Anglers on average caught 0.6 trout per hour. The majority (85%) of Stocked Trout Anglers prefer to receive information from VDWR through email, followed by GoOutdoors VA app (36%), VDWR website (32%) and Text/SMS messaging (21%).

Types of Anglers

In 2025 the majority (44%) of anglers considered themselves advanced experience trout anglers. Only 11% defined themselves as beginner or novice. Anglers differed in several ways, including the type of tackle they fish with, how often they harvest stocked trout, how much money they spend pursuing stocked trout, how often they fish, and what waters they prefer to fish.

Table 1. Angler Preference of VDWR Designated Stocked Trout Waters. Multiple choices.

Percent of Anglers Preferring Various Regulation Designations	
Put and Take Waters	52%
Catch and Release	38%
Urban Trout	24%
Delayed Harvest	24%
DWR Fee Fishing	22%
Private Fishing Areas	21%
Other Special Regs	14%
Youth-Only	3%

Year-round Season

Since 1996, VDWR has maintained a year-round trout season with stockings occurring from October through May. This year-round season eliminated the opening day of trout season for stocked fish, which generally occurred on the first Saturday in April. In 2015 Virginia's trout anglers overwhelmingly support the year-round season (Figure 3). Since the results were so overwhelming in 2015 these questions were not asked in 2025 to shorten the survey.

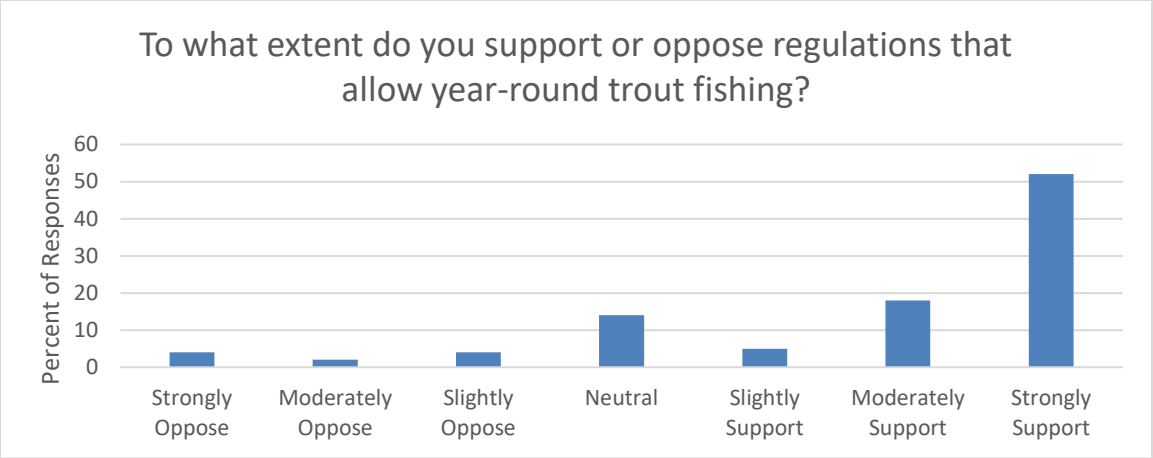


Figure 3. Support for year-round trout season from 2015 mail survey.

An alternative way of looking at angler preference for the year-round season versus having a defined opening day was asked during the 2015 creel surveys. Anglers strongly opposed VDWR returning to having a spring stocked trout season that included an opening day (Figure 4).

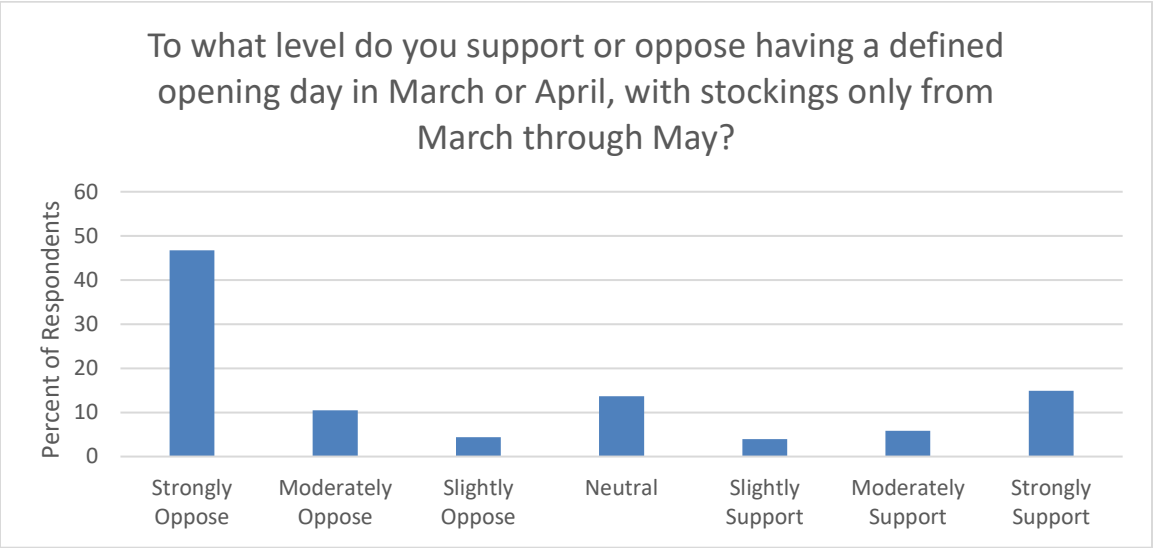


Figure 4. Support for having an opening day and spring trout season from 2015 creel survey.

Stocking Announcements

Virginia's stocked trout anglers differ greatly in how they prefer stockings to be announced. Nearly equal proportions prefer the three possible announcement types (announced

prior to stocking, announced at 4 PM the day of stocking (current system), and requesting stocking dates (upon request). Not announced was the least preferred (Figure 5).

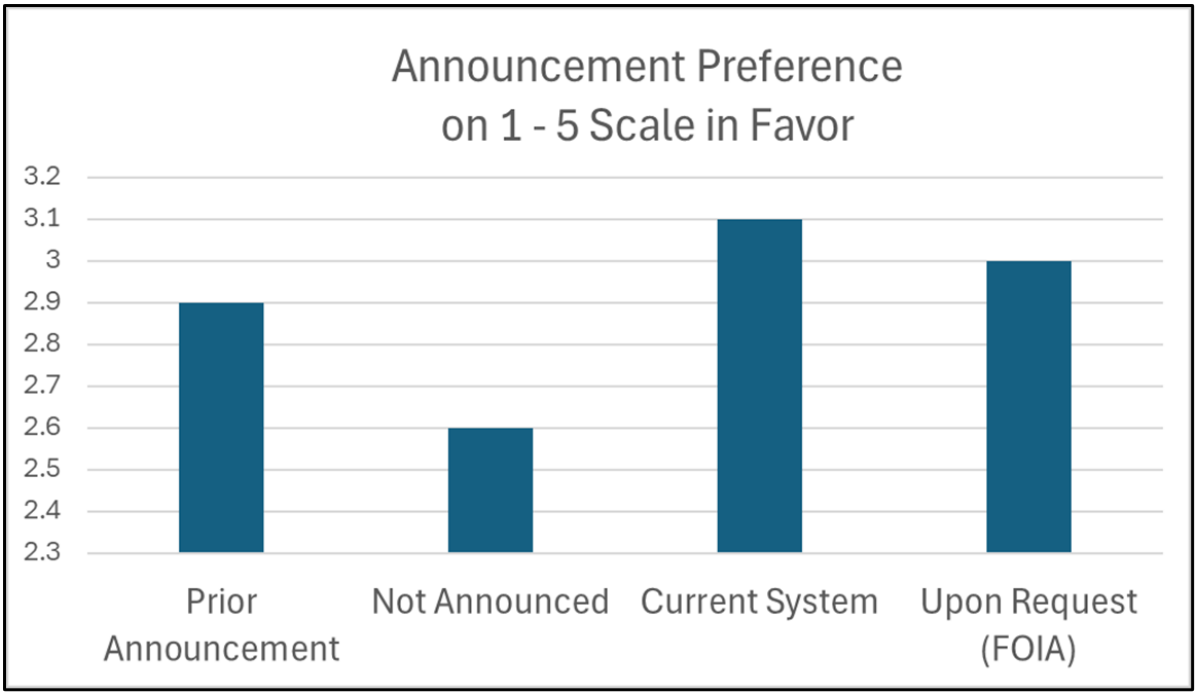
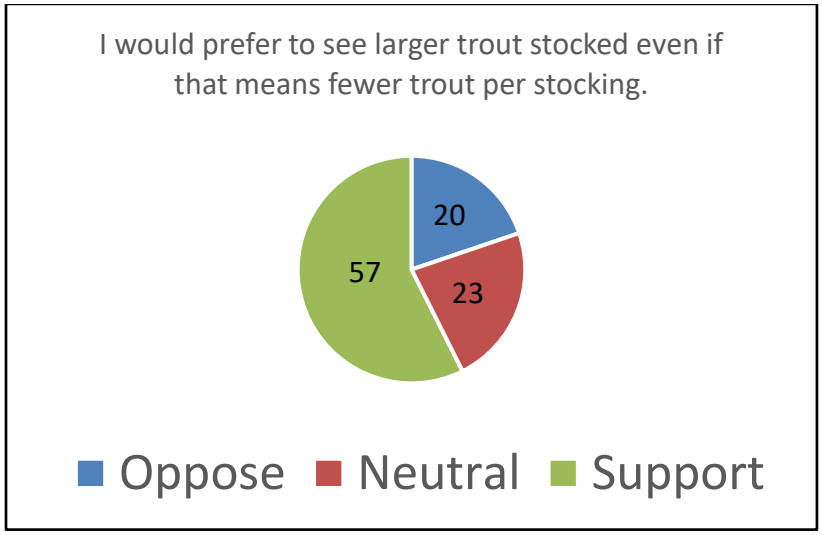


Figure 5. Preferences for how trout stockings are announced in 2025.

Anglers often desire to catch more and larger trout. However, hatcheries cannot satisfy these competing goals simultaneously. The production of more trout will mean that the average size is smaller. Conversely, to produce larger-than-average trout, fewer trout will be produced. When asked how acceptable different trout stocking options are, slightly more Virginia trout anglers favored VDWR stocking fewer, but larger trout. However, a portion of anglers (49%) preferred stocking of more trout, even if those trout were smaller (Figure 6).



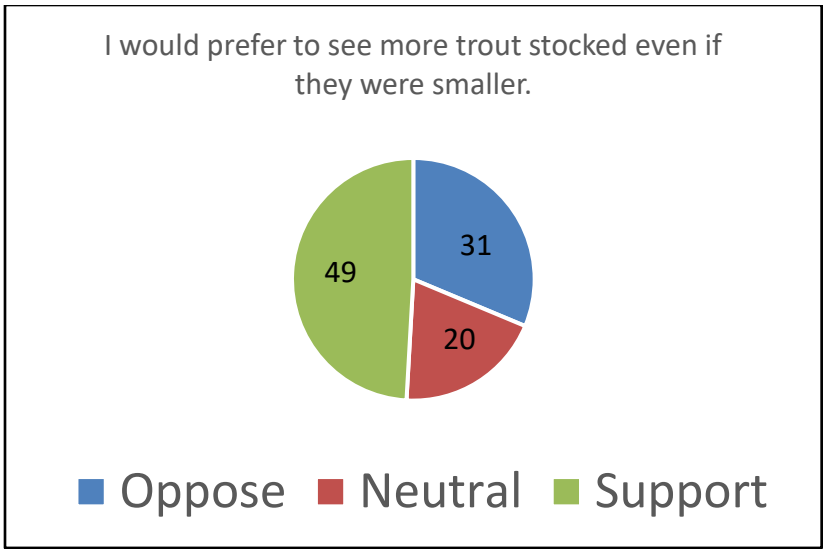


Figure 6. Support for stocking more but smaller trout or fewer but larger trout in 2025.

Motivations to Fish

Motivations represent outcomes anglers desire from their fishing experiences. Anglers fish for a variety of reasons including opportunity for relaxation, joy of catching fish, and to get away from the daily routine. Conversely, catching fish to eat, catching trophy fish, and to be alone were less important reasons why anglers fish for stocked trout. Generally, respondents found natural settings (non-catch attributes) of trout fishing to be more important than actually catching fish.

Satisfaction with Fishing

While motivations represent the desired outcomes of fishing, satisfaction relates to the perceived fulfillment of those outcomes. Overall, Virginia's stocked trout anglers were satisfied with the variety of trout fishing programs managed by VDWR: catchable stocked trout waters, delayed harvest, urban waters, Heritage Day, and Fee Fishing areas. The majority (70%) of stocked trout anglers were either neutral or satisfied with their fishing experience and with the management of the program in the last 12 months (Figure 7).

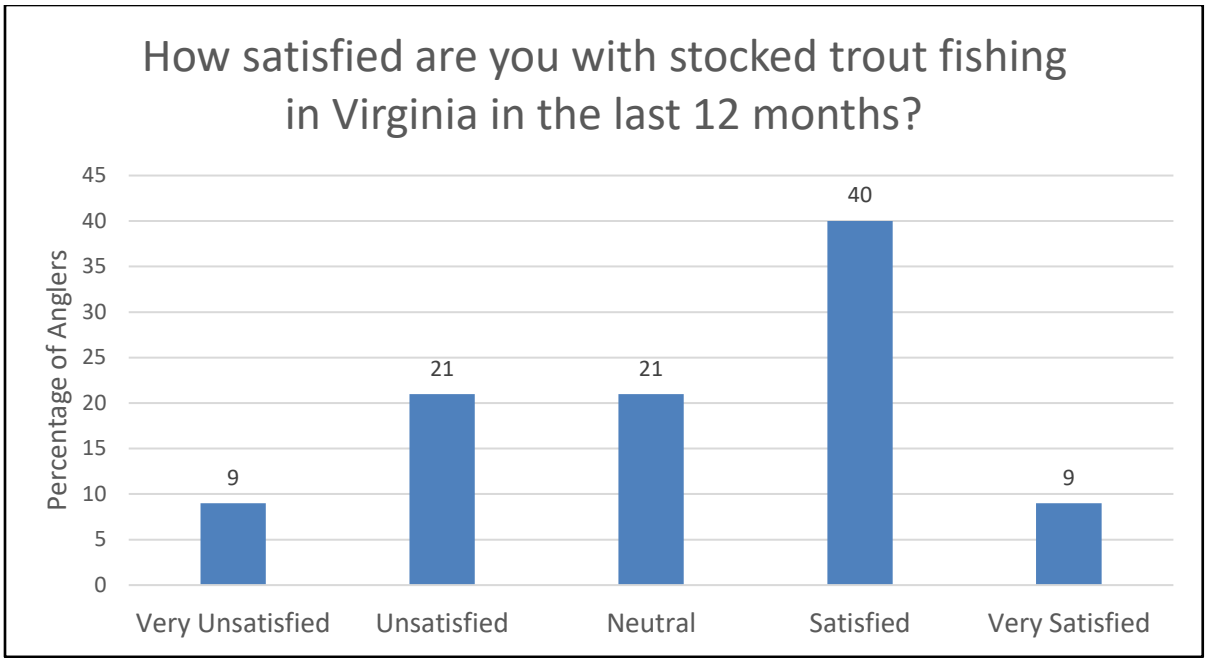


Figure 7. Angler satisfaction with stocked trout fishing during the last 2024-2025.

Harvest Orientation

Forty-nine percent of anglers stated they almost always or often keep the stocked trout they catch (Figure 8). Thirty-two percent of anglers never or rarely harvest stocked trout.

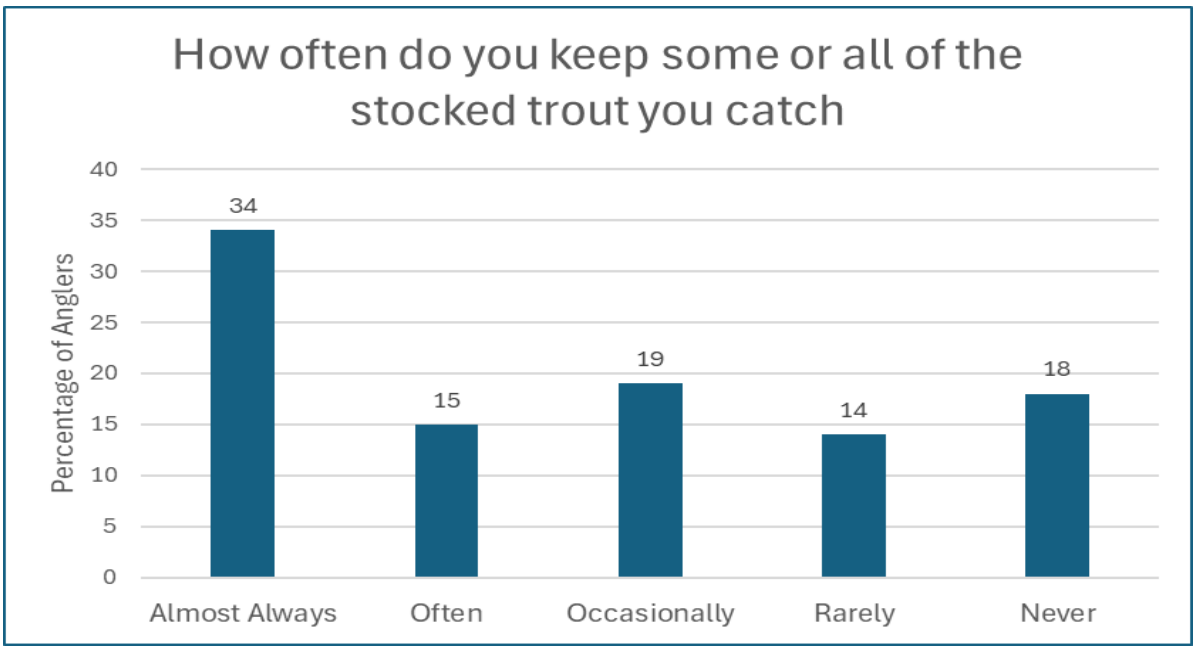


Figure 8. Relative frequency of how often anglers harvest stocked trout in 2025.

Trends in Participation

Not all anglers fish for stocked trout every year. Anglers who cease to participate are referred to as lapsed anglers. The "drop in–drop out" rate of lapsed anglers is due to a number of factors. Many anglers cite too many work and family commitments as a constraint to fishing. Others participate in other recreational activities rather than fishing for stocked trout. Finally, others continue to fish, but not for stocked trout. Nearly 70% of lapsed trout anglers intend to participate in the future despite being busy with commitments because fishing for stocked trout is a relaxing experience, and they enjoy being outdoors. Therefore, many lapsed anglers are not lapsed forever but tend to "drop in and drop out."

HATCHERY PRODUCTION

To meet production and distribution needs, VDWR operates five coldwater fish culture facilities (Table 2). Each facility can rear fingerlings to catchable size, but only three of the five have hatching capability. This presents some logistical challenges regarding transport and distribution, particularly in regard to biosecurity (concern for introduction of pathogens or parasites). While the hatcheries share characteristics, they vary in key production elements (Table 2). VDWR would like to update facilities to meet contemporary fishery demands while also protecting natural resources, but this is costly and, as a result, has been slower than desired.

The facilities range in age from approximately 80 years (Marion Fish Culture Station) to the most recently renovated, Coursey Springs, which was renovated in 2010. The average age of Virginia's Coldwater production facilities is around 65 years, and only one major renovation (Coursey Springs Fish Culture Station) has been completed for the coldwater system in the past 60 years. No hatching capability was added during the renovation. Despite this, facilities have taken small steps to improve and maintain production, including new filtration and oxygen systems at some facilities. As a result, total fish production could remain consistent given adequate funding is available for feed, oxygen and hatchery supplies.

Table 2. Hatchery comparison table: Virginia's Department of Wildlife Resources has five coldwater Fish Culture Stations (FCS's) that vary in species reared, construction era, and production technology.

Fish Culture Station	Construction Era	Species Reared	Species Spawned	Triploid Egg Production	Oxygen Supplement	UV Filtration	Challenges
Coursey Springs	2010	Brown Trout	NA	NA	Yes	No	Water Flow
	(renovated)	Brook Trout					Lack of Filtration
		Rainbow Trout					No Hatching Capability
		Tiger Trout					
Marion	1930s	Brown Trout	Brown Trout	No	No	No	Crumbling Infrasturcture
		Brook Trout	Brook Trout				Lack of Filtration
		Rainbow Trout	Rainbow Trout				Water Drainage Pathogen
							No Oxygen Supplement
							Deferred Maintenance
Montbello	1930s	Brown Trout	NA	NA	No	Yes	No Hatching Capability
		Brook Trout					No Oxygen Supplement
		Rainbow Trout					Water Flow
		Tiger Trout					
Paint Bank	1960s	Brown Trout	Brown Trout	Yes	Yes	No	Deferred Maintenance
		Brook Trout	Brook Trout				
		Rainbow Trout	Rainbow Trout				
		Tiger Trout	Tiger Trout				
Wytheville	1960s	Brown Trout	Brown Trout	Yes	Yes	Yes	Deferred Maintenance
		Brook Trout	Rainbow Trout				
		Rainbow Trout	Tiger Trout				
		Tiger Trout					

Historically, fish production numbers have not been collected in a consistent manner across facilities and were not stored digitally. With global developments in computational access and power, data collection has changed drastically. In recent years, this trend has changed for VDWR, and data are gathered more consistently and assembled in an easily accessible, digital format. Over the past five years DWR has stocked an average of 784,218 catchable trout per year with an annual average total weight of 529,763 (average size equals 0.67 pounds per fish). Additionally, DWR has stocked an average of 145,812 fingerlings per year with an annual average total weight of 9,728 pounds (average weight equals .07 pounds per fish). With hatchery updates these numbers have potential to increase (generally, when number of fish increases, the size decreases, and vice versa), but constraints like deferred maintenance, fish health stressors at high density, and biosecurity present consistent challenges.

Each facility works as part of a statewide production team to meet state stocking needs. Generally, each facility focuses on stocking particular counties (Figure 9). In order to balance resources across the state, facilities stock outside their designated area when necessary.

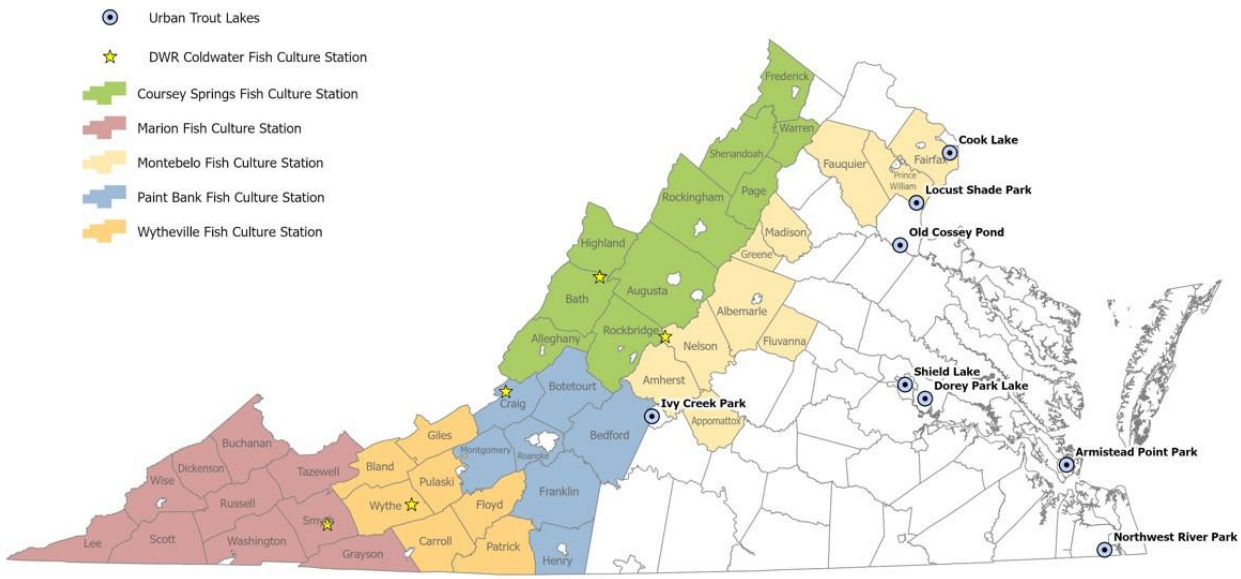


Figure 9. Trout production facility locations and the geographic areas they service. Urban Trout lakes are serviced by Montebello and Coursey Springs Fish Culture Stations.

Growth to stocking size

In Virginia, most stocked trout are grown to catchable size prior to stocking. This allows for immediate harvest, and may limit holdover in areas where undesirable. Growth to stocking size (at least 7") varies among species and rearing conditions, but some general rules apply. For instance, fish in an indoor facility with tight environmental control can reach stocking size in as little as six months. However, those are under ideal conditions that are often unrealistic outside of expensive and complicated indoor production systems. In an outdoor setting, with natural environmental fluctuations and high rearing densities, growth rates vary, and trout may take up to a year or more to reach stocking size.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity is defined as measures taken to prevent exposure to harmful biological, chemical, or physical agents that may cause adverse health effects in humans or animals. These agents include infectious microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites, and also non-infectious entities, such as toxins, contaminants, and poor water quality. Biosecurity practices are often initiated in aquaculture facilities in order to meet economic, public health, production, and fish health objectives. Specifically, certain biosecurity practices seek to:

1. Reduce the risk of pathogen introduction into a facility;
2. Minimize the risk of disease spread throughout a facility;
3. Minimize the risk of disease spread out of the facility through cultured product;
4. Reduce conditions that increase the risk of stress and disease susceptibility in a population;
5. Promote overall fish health;
6. Protect economic investment and reputation; and

7. Protect human health.

Pathogens may enter a system at several critical points and pose a hazard to susceptible fish. These include, but are not limited to, imported live fish or fish products (e.g., eggs, fingerlings, broodstock), contaminated source water, commercial feeds, live feed, frozen foods, inanimate objects, such as equipment, that can transmit a pathogen from one population to another, or vectors such as humans or animals (including predatory birds or mammals). Identification of pathogens that are potential threats and pathogens that have been historically diagnosed on-site should be identified prior to drafting a biosecurity plan. Additionally, the most significant threats to the biosecurity of a facility (e.g., untreated surface water, importation of commercially raised fish for rearing or forage on-site, transfer of fish between state hatcheries, equipment that is used in multiple systems or shared between hatcheries, nearby nesting sites of fish-eating birds) should be identified and specifically addressed by the four essential elements of any biosecurity plan: 1) disease prevention, 2) security precautions, 3) cleaning and disinfection, and 4) disease surveillance.

Biosecurity plans should be tailored to an individual facility; a generic biosecurity plan should never be applied to an aquaculture facility; existing staff, budget constraints, estimated risk, and available equipment all need to be considered. Biosecurity plans are dynamic documents that should be reviewed on a regular basis and amended when situations change. The first step in drafting a biosecurity plan is to critically examine each portion of the facility and all aspects of production to identify potential biosecurity risks or hazards. The guidelines should then be developed to minimize each potential risk to an acceptable level. While some risk is unavoidable, the goal is to create a workable, enforceable, and practical biosecurity plan with an *acceptable* level of risk.

VDWR has initiated a standardized, system-wide disease monitoring plan for the VDWR coldwater fish cultural and rearing facilities in order to assess and classify each facility. This allows for the development of effective site-specific biosecurity plans, while reducing risk of pathogen transfer among the agency's fish rearing facilities and between fish captive-reared and wild stocks. In addition, it increases the ability for the agency to manage potential ecological impacts of captive fish rearing and stocking. Production and stocking strategies have been diligently adjusted to account for both fish health concerns and to protect natural resources but also with the goal of maintaining fish production. VDWR is also investigating other pathways to reduce the risk of pathogen transfer from stocked fish to wild populations, including cooperative interagency efforts, improved collaboration with private industry, and assessment of our regulatory capacity.

Trout Species Produced By VDWR

Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)

Rainbow Trout prefer well oxygenated, high quality water less than 70 ˚F. Rainbow Trout typically live in shallow rivers with gravel bottoms, but have established self-sustaining populations in rivers with bedrock bottoms and spring creeks. Lake- resident Rainbow Trout inhabit cool, deep lakes with sufficient habitat to get through the hot summer months and that have an adequate food supply. Rainbow Trout eat a wide variety of prey, including insects, crustaceans, mollusks, and small fish. The primary food supply depends on habitat and availability of a particular prey within the habitat.

Rainbow Trout are native to the Pacific basin, from the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia, throughout the Aleutian Islands and southwest Alaska, the Pacific coast of British Columbia and southeast Alaska, and south along the west coast of the U.S. to northern Mexico. Rainbow Trout were originally found inland in the western U.S. occasionally as far east as the Rocky Mountains, west of the continental divide and downstream of waterfalls and other natural barriers. Since 1875, Rainbow Trout have been widely introduced throughout the U.S. and the world. The first Rainbow Trout producing hatchery, was established on San Leandro Creek in northern California in 1870, and began Rainbow Trout production in 1871. The first shipment of fish to other hatcheries occurred in 1875, shipping fish to Caledonia, New York, and in 1876, to Northville, Michigan. In 1877, the first National Fish Hatchery System was established on Campbell Creek in northern California. Some of the earliest Rainbow Trout propagation and stocking in Virginia may have occurred at the Montebello Fish Hatchery in Nelson County in the 1920s. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service records indicate that Rainbow Trout were released into Shenandoah National Park as early as 1943.

Rainbow Trout are the most popular and easily reared of the trout species because of their highly adaptable nature and rapid growth. Desirable traits include high survivability (tolerant of crowding), voracious feeding, excellent adaptability to artificial feeds, and ready availability as eggs, fingerlings, or adult stock at almost any time of year. Anglers regard Rainbow Trout highly due to its excellent fighting qualities, including frequent leaping when hooked. The fish is pursued using a multitude of angling techniques, which includes fly fishing, spinning, and casting with live and artificial baits, and trolling. The species is also excellent table fare, supporting an extensive commercial culture industry.

Rainbow Trout require cold water with an optimum growth temperature range of between 55 to 65 ˚F, high water quality, and nutritional feed with high fat and protein content. Each Virginia coldwater facility faces its own group of challenges in rearing Rainbow Trout, including fluctuating water temperatures and flow rates, water quality, space, predation, and disease control. Rainbow Trout are well suited for Virginia stocked trout waters because existing VDWR facilities match the species needs and Virginia anglers enjoy catching them. The coldwater hatchery system has several strains of Rainbow Trout that spawn at different times of the year.

Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*)

Brown Trout first arrived in the U.S. on February 24, 1883 as eggs aboard the German steamship *Werra*. These eggs were distributed to three hatcheries in the U.S.: Cold Harbor Hatchery on Long Island, NY, the Caledonia Fish Hatchery in western NY, and the U.S. Fish Commission hatchery in Northville, MI. Over the following years, these initial stocks were reinforced with the importation of more eggs from Western Europe. Brown Trout continue to be cultured in the U.S. for recreational uses to this day.

Brown Trout are used mainly for recreation purposes in the U.S., and unlike Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout rarely are raised for commercial food operations. They have a temperature range similar to Rainbow Trout, but can handle a wider range of water quality parameters than either Rainbow Trout or Brook Trout. This makes them a good candidate for stocking marginal waters where Rainbow or Brook Trout may not perform well. Additionally, Brown Trout have the best chance to "hold over" due to greater tolerance for marginal habitats and wariness to lures. This elusive behavior also makes them a favorite of many advanced anglers.

Brown Trout were first officially stocked in Virginia's waters in the 1950s by the Virginia Game Commission (now VDWR). These fish were obtained from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service White Sulphur Springs Fish Hatchery, and were stocked into the Roanoke River and the Smith River below Philpott Dam. In Virginia, Brown Trout fill a niche in larger streams and lakes. Unfortunately, they can be detrimental to native fishes due to their tendency to feed on other fish. As a result, biologists are now careful in the placement of Brown Trout to preserve native and naturalized fishes. Rearing by VDWR likely began in the 1960s after initial introductions indicated that anglers desired Brown Trout for sport.

Brown Trout prefer deep streams with moderate to slow currents, which allows them to perform well in large lakes with an adequate forage base. They prefer rocky, coarse river and lake bottoms, and feed on a wide variety of forage including algae, aquatic invertebrates and other fish.

Brown Trout tend to grow slower to 10 inches than either Rainbow or Brook Trout. However, upon reaching a size that allows them to prey on other fish, Brown Trout may grow faster than comparably aged Rainbow or Brook Trout. While they are susceptible to some bacterial infections common to cultured trout, Brown Trout demonstrate a natural resistance to Whirling disease, which can be devastating to Rainbow Trout.

Brook Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*)

Brook Trout prefer water temperatures below 65 ˚F and do not tolerate higher water temperatures as well as Rainbow and Brown Trout. Brook Trout require very high water quality that is well oxygenated. They inhabit large and small lakes, rivers, streams, creeks and spring

ponds, but prefer small spring ponds and small spring-fed streams that are typically headwaters to larger tributaries. Preferred stream habitat includes sand and gravel bottoms with very little siltation. Brook Trout prey on a wide variety of items, with younger fish feeding on small insects and adults feeding on many types of aquatic insects, terrestrial insects, snails, worms, and small fishes.

Brook Trout are native to a wide area of Eastern North America (including Virginia). They range from the Hudson Bay basin in Canada east, to the Canadian maritime provinces, and south through the Appalachian Mountains to Georgia. The southern range of native Brook Trout has been reduced to high elevation, remote streams due to habitat loss and introductions of Brown and Rainbow Trout. Their range expanded westward as early as 1850 through intentional introductions. Brook Trout may have been stocked out of Montebello Hatchery as early as the 1920s or 1930s.

Although Brook Trout are popular with anglers, they can be difficult to rear in some hatcheries. Brook Trout are more sensitive to temperature, crowding, low oxygen, and other aquaculture stresses that can make it more difficult to rear in captivity than Brown or Rainbow Trout. Brook Trout require an optimum growth temperature of about 59 ˚F, very high water quality, and nutritional feed with high fat and protein content. Brook Trout are especially difficult to rear at facilities that encounter drastic temperature changes, water flow fluctuations, and water quality issues. At most aquaculture facilities, Brook Trout must remain in the upper sections of raceways to obtain optimum water quality for growth and fish health.

Desirable qualities of Brook Trout include their colorful appearance, native appeal, and adaptability to artificial feeds. Brook Trout are particularly popular among fly fishermen. Many anglers prefer the taste of Brook Trout to that of other trout. Due to its status as the only trout native to Virginia, many conservation-minded anglers practice catch-and-release fishing for Brook Trout.

Tiger Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis x Salmo trutta*)

A Tiger Trout is a sterile hybrid created with a male Brook Trout and a female Brown Trout. Although it's rare, Tiger Trout do occur in the wild where both wild Brown Trout and wild Brook Trout occur. Tiger Trout were first documented in the wild in the early 1900s. The VDWR raised and stocked tiger trout decades ago. However, the egg survival rate with the methods at that time was very low, which led to reduced numbers of fish to stock and as a result the program was discontinued. Starting in the fall of 2020, Paint Bank Fish Hatchery began the process of creating eggs for Tiger Trout utilizing improved modern methods to increase egg survival and hatch. After the eggs are hatched, some are shipped to other coldwater VDWR hatchery and production facilities to be raised to catchable size.

Tiger Trout have a brown/gray body with an orange/yellow underside and exaggerated vermiculation patterns, resulting in the name. The pectoral, pelvic and anal fins are orange, while the tail fin is square and slightly forked. Since Tiger Trout cannot reproduce, they are considered a non-invasive species and can be stocked in many types of waters.

Triploid Trout

Triploid fish have three sets of chromosomes, instead of the two sets (diploid) normally found in trout. Female triploids do not develop eggs and although male triploids develop sperm, they are much less fertile than normal diploid fish. Triploids are effectively sterile and rarely occur naturally. Triploid varieties of many species of fish have been created for commercial and recreational purposes. Because triploid fish do not reproduce, they put more energy into growth and produce larger fish at reproductive age than fertile, diploid fish. In Virginia, triploid varieties of Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout, and Brook Trout are produced by subjecting freshly fertilized eggs to either heat or pressure shocks. Several states stock triploid trout, including Idaho, North Carolina, Arizona, and Virginia. Virginia stocks triploids as catchable fish to prevent interbreeding with Southern Appalachian Brook Trout stocks. In addition, triploids are utilized as a measure to prevent the establishment of natural-reproducing populations of Rainbow, Brown, and Brook Trout in undesirable waters.

Triploid production in Virginia began in 2005, at Paint Bank Hatchery with Rainbow Trout. At that time, Virginia produced about 15,000 triploid fingerlings. Currently, Paint Bank and Wytheville hatcheries create triploid Brook, Brown and Rainbow Trout. In 2014, VDWR produced approximately 400,000 triploid fingerlings. Extra triploids not used for specific watersheds are stocked as needed in any stocked trout water. Some of VDWR's hatcheries also grow triploids to produce "big fish" for stocking purposes. Triploid fish do not differ in physical appearance compared to diploid fish. The desirable qualities of triploid fish (i.e., reproductive sterility, rapid growth) have resulted in increased demand for them. Triploid trout, especially Brook Trout, are harder to rear in the hatchery system. Fertilization, hatch, and survival rates of triploids are lower than those of diploids. Thus, more eggs are required to make triploids than diploids. Hatcheries are improving triploid production techniques and VDWR likely will continue to use triploids in the future.

VALUES, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

The five goals from the 2016 Plan are still significant for this revised plan. These goals reflect the values of a diverse public and are broad statements of principles and ideals about what should be accomplished with stocked trout management in Virginia. As the underpinning for the direction of stocked trout management, these guiding public values should be relatively stable for the period of the plan.

Specific objectives follow each set of value and goal statements. Based on the goals identified, the Technical Committee established specific objectives to help guide the attainment of each goal. Objectives are the technical expression of the public vision found in the goal statements. Objectives are generally more specific, quantifiable, and have milestones for achievement.

Potential strategies clarify how each objective might be achieved. As with objectives, technical management decisions about specific operational strategies to achieve public values are largely the realm of fisheries professionals. Implemented strategies will be based on the best available science, anticipated efficacy, public acceptability, and expected costs. While this is not an operational plan detailing all the specific steps, actions, or costs to achieve objectives, these strategies represent some of the approaches, techniques, and programs that will be considered to accomplish objectives.

FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION

The stocked trout program depends upon the revenue generated from the sale of trout licenses and general fishing licenses. <u>None of the funding for the program is derived from general state taxes.</u> A trout license and a freshwater fishing license are both required to fish for stocked trout in Virginia. A 2008 survey revealed that 64% of trout license buyers purchased these two licenses to fish solely for stocked trout. The revenue from these "double" license sales is significant. Sales of annual trout licenses have decreased in recent years, while sales of sportsman and lifetime trout licenses have increased substantially. The decrease in sales of annual licenses resulted in a net decrease in revenue to support hatchery production of catchable-size trout and maintain hatchery facilities. ***In 2012, it cost VDWR $2.77 to hatch, raise, transport and stock a pound of Trout. That cost in 2025 increased 113% to $5.90 per pound of Trout produced.*** *The lack of license cost increases and sources of additional funding coupled with inflation cost of fish feed, oxygen, hauling supplies and overall hatchery maintenance is crippling the program's ability to reach optimum production.*

Value Statement

To continue current operations, the stocked trout program must account for costs associated with trout production, support regular facility maintenance and transporting trout to the water. Currently, freshwater fishing and trout license fees are used for the operating costs of the stocked Trout program. These license sales alone no longer contribute enough to sustain the

program at an optimum Trout production level. **The increasing costs associated with raising and transporting stocked trout limit the scope of the current program and create financial challenges. Increased inflation and lack of additional funding are leading to future reduced Trout production and operational modifications.**

Goal Statement

Maintain a productive and adequately funded stocked trout program, including investigation of alternative funding and resource mechanisms to meet current and anticipated future demands. Establish operational modification and production reduction scenarios to adjust for reduced revenue to program cost ratio. Maintain an open and transparent decision-making process regarding management of stocked trout.

As of August 5, 2026. Based on VDWR's current budget reductions the department will be reducing production of trout and stocking frequencies based on Objective 3 and some of the associated strategies below. VDWR will not be eliminating any designated stocked trout waters to aid in budget reductions. All waters stocked in the previous season will be stocking in the upcoming season. The pounds of fish stocked per stocking will also remain the same, stockings will just be less frequent. The 2026 – 2027 stocking season is planned to operate as follows: A waters will be stocked 5 times, B waters will be stocked 3 times, and C waters will be stocked 2 times, Catch and Release waters will be stocked 2 times, and Urban waters will be stocked 3 times. Douthat Lake fee fishing area will be stocked 3 times every 2 weeks, and Crooked Creek and Clinch Mountain fee fishing areas will be stocked 3 times weekly. As stated above, this is the planned operation for the 2026 – 2027 stocking season. This stocking strategy is subject to change based on feed cost, oxygen cost, or other operational adjustments.

Objectives and Strategies

1. Conduct a financial evaluation of the trout program annually and develop strategies based on those results.
    a. Conduct an updated detailed evaluation of license sales and types of licenses to assess effects on VDWR revenues.
    b. Identify and evaluate different approaches to increase license sales including approaches of other states, for example multi-year licenses, rollover licenses and automatic renewal or notification.
    c. Evaluate demographic trends for potential impacts on future license sales.
    d. Estimate the annual operating cost of the stocked trout program including the cost-per fish.
    e. Identify annual maintenance and equipment costs for renovations at coldwater hatchery facilities and equipment and develop strategies to address costs and future needs.
    f. Identify opportunities to establish partnerships with interested parties, both private and public, to achieve objectives of the Stocked Trout Management Plan.
    g. Require a Trout License for sub-catchable waters (Lakes-Trout in Possession)
    h. Improve efficiency of hatchery production through research and development.
    i. Increase the cost of trout license and daily fee fishing permits

2. Publish an annual report detailing accomplishments and progress in achieving objectives of the Stocked Trout Management Plan by September 30 each year.
    a. Compile an annual stocking report detailing quantity in pounds and numbers of fish stocked for the period from October of the previous year through May.
    b. Compile an annual report detailing USFS forest stamp revenue projects on stocked trout waters located on USDA lands.
    c. In the case of production shortages, a reduction in stocking will be made on a percentage basis statewide.
    d. Report on progress made relative to specific plan objectives using multiple media outlets (e.g., VDWR website, Outdoor Report, press releases, social media) to improve public awareness of the program.

3. Modify production and stocking operations to account for 25% reduction in program funding. Probable actions to reduce production and maintain a quality fishing experience.
    a. Decrease Trout production statewide to reduce fish feed cost.
    b. Decrease frequency of stockings to maintain stocking densities.
        - Category A waters are stocked 6 times per season.
        - Category B waters are stocked 4 times per season.
        - Category C waters are stocked 2 times per season.
        - Delayed Harvest stocked 3 times per season.
        - Urban Waters stocked 4 times per season.
        - Catch and Release stocked 2 times per season.

        Optional
        - Change A waters to B waters.
        - Change B waters to C waters.
    c. Begin Fee Fishing Stocking June 1.
    d. Douthat Fee Fishing becomes A water.
    e. Investigate angler assistance stocking fish distribution.
    f. Reduce percentage of trout stocked in fee fishing areas.

4. Modify production and stocking operations to account for 35% reduction in program funding. Probable actions to reduce production and maintain a quality fishing experience.
    a. Decrease Trout production statewide to reduce fish feed cost.
    b. Decrease frequency of stockings to maintain stocking densities.
        - Category A waters are stocked 5 times per season.
        - Category B waters are stocked 3 times per season.
        - Category C waters are stocked 2 times per season.
        - Delayed Harvest stocked 3 times per season.
        - Urban Waters stocked 3 times per season.
        - Catch and Release stocked 2 times per season.

        Optional
        - Change A waters to B waters.
        - Change B waters to C waters.

c. Change Fee Fishing Areas to Category A Waters.
d. Eliminate stocking of 20% lakes/ponds and streams statewide.
e. Investigate angler assistance stocking program.
f. Reduce percentage of trout stocked in fee fishing areas.

5. Modify production and stocking operations to account for 50% reduction in program funding. Probable actions to reduce production and maintain a quality fishing experience.
    a. Decrease Trout production statewide to reduce fish feed cost.
    b. Decrease frequency of stockings to maintain stocking densities.
        - Category A waters are stocked 4 times per season.
        - Category B waters are stocked 3 times per season.
        - Category C waters are stocked 2 times per season.
        - Delayed Harvest stocked 2 times per season.
        - Urban Waters stocked 2 times per season.
        - Catch and Release stocked 2 times per season.

        Optional
        - Change A waters to B waters.
        - Change B waters to C waters.
    c. Change Fee Fishing Areas to Category B Waters.
    d. Eliminate stocking of 25% lakes/ponds and streams statewide.
    e. Investigate angler assistance stocking program.
    f. Reduce percentage of trout stocked in fee fishing areas.

6. Incorporate private hatchery and volunteer support to reduce propagation and stocking cost.
    a. Support a cooperative hatchery program between VDWR and small volunteer hatcheries. VDWR would supply fingerling trout and feed and volunteer groups (TU, schools, fishing clubs, etc.) would raise and stock catchable size trout in VDWR designated stocked trout waters.
    b. Purchase catchable-size trout from private hatcheries utilizing funds from a variety of sponsors or special dedicated VDWR fund. Private hatcheries would stock the trout in designated VDWR stocked trout waters.

STOCKING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Under current policies, VDWR announces waters that have been stocked at 4:00 p.m. each day. The stocking events currently announced in advance are those waters stocked for Heritage Day, pre-announced stockings in select waters, urban waters, youth-only stockings and for kids fishing events. Virginia trout anglers are divided over the issue of announcing stocking events. A 2025 survey showed that on a scale of 1 – 5 Virginia trout anglers slightly preferred the current policy of delayed stocking announcements at 3.1, 3.0 for upon request and 2.9 for Prior announcement. Fewer trout anglers preferred no announcement of stocking events at 2.6. The issue of when to announce stocking events is important because of concerns regarding fairness of access to stocked trout. Prior announcement of stocking events allows anglers to plan fishing trips but announced stockings sometimes cause crowding and traffic safety issues

when many anglers arrive at the announced time and place. Unannounced stocking events may alleviate some of the crowding and safety issues, but favor those anglers who follow the hatchery trucks, or learn of the trucks' destinations via phone trees, or see stocking schedules through social media.

Prior to 1996, stocked trout fishing began on Opening Day (Saturday in late March or early April) each year. Many anglers enjoyed this announced stocking. However, several issues existed regarding opening day. Landowners concerned with crowding withdrew some stocking sites each year. Also, hatcheries can produce better quality trout if streams and lakes are stocked throughout the year. A 2015 Angler survey indicated that about 75% of anglers support a year-round season with stockings occurring from October through May. In 2001, VDWR began Heritage Day which provides an "opening-day" experience on the first Saturday in April. This announced stocking event occurs on 20 waters each year. Trout are stocked that week and the site is closed to fishing until 9:00 AM on Saturday. Angler counts conducted by VDWR indicate that fishing pressure is 3-4 times less on Heritage Day when compared to Opening Day counts on the same waters.

Value Statement

Virginia's trout anglers have diverse expectations of how trout stockings should be announced. The ability to plan fishing trips is valued by many anglers who prefer that VDWR announce stockings before they occur. Others feel that unannounced stockings provide for more equitable access to stocked trout and a more natural fishing experience that is less crowded. Trout stocking announcements should be diverse, allow for increased participation, and advanced trip planning to meet the desires of different stakeholders. Various forms of announcements should be investigated given the opportunity. Currently some anglers request the stocking schedule through FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) and post on social media sites limiting VDWR's opportunity to vary announcements.

Goal Statement

Announce stockings using a variety of strategies if possible (including prior monthly announcements, increase pre-announced stockings) to provide equitable access to the resource. In addition to existing Heritage Day events, pre-announced, and youth-only waters stockings will be announced in advance to allow anglers to plan fishing trips to coincide with known stockings. Stockings will also be announced on the website at the end of the day when stocking occurs.

Objectives and Strategies

1. By October 1st, announce in advance stocking events in Trout Heritage waters, Youth waters, urban trout waters, and pre-announced waters. Scheduled stockings are subject to change due to inclement weather, or unforeseen circumstances.
    a. List Trout Heritage waters annually in the Fishing Regulation Digest and on the website.

   b. List dates for pre-announced waters annually in the Fishing Regulation Digest and on the website.
   c. Stock fee fishing areas on a regular basis multiple times per week, as described in the Fishing Regulation Digest and on the website.
   d. Announce stockings for kid's fishing events at least 30 days in advance on VDWR website and social media
   e. For urban trout waters, announce the week that stockings will occur at least 30 days in advance via the VDWR website, the Outdoor Report, the Trout Line, press releases to local media, and social media.

2. Identify a prior announcement strategy (by 7/1/2026) for all stocking events.

   a. Announce stocking events on the third Friday of the month for the next month to promote trout fishing and increase fairness among anglers.
   b. List monthly stockings on VDWR website and advertise through social media.
   c. Investigate strategies pertaining to temporary closures immediately following stocking.
   d. Investigate different stocking densities and frequencies of announced stockings to increase fairness among anglers.
   e. Scheduled stockings are subject to change due to inclement weather, or unforeseen circumstances.
   f. Assess angler use, opinions, and satisfaction with monthly announced stockings after 2 years.
   g. Investigate other methods of announcing stockings (e.g. weekly, bi-weekly, etc.)

3. Continue announcing stocking events at 4 PM the day of stocking
   a. Announce each day's stocking events at 4 PM online, through social media, and on the Trout Line.
4. Compile an annual stocking report detailing quantity in pounds and numbers of fish stocked for the period from October of the previous year through May.
   a. Post the report on VDWR's website.
   b. Announce the availability of the report via the Outdoor Report and social media.

ANGLER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Approximately 96,000 anglers fished for stocked trout in Virginia last year. Results from a 2023 statewide angler survey indicated that 32% of all Virginia anglers fished for stocked trout. The 2025 stocked trout angler survey indicated the average age of licensed trout anglers is 48, suggesting that a bright future for stocked trout fishing requires the continued recruitment of new and younger anglers. The increasingly diverse human population in Virginia presents opportunities to reach out to new angling stakeholders. Additionally, roughly half of all trout license buyers do not purchase a license the following year and thus, retention of current anglers remains a high priority. These convergent demographic trends suggest that participation in fishing for stocked trout in Virginia may decline in the future, unless VDWR initiates awareness strategies to counteract them.

Value Statement

The future of the stocked trout program relies on continuing the effort to recruit and retain anglers. If current participation in trout angling decreases the stocked trout program will decline because trout anglers financially support the program. Fortunately, the 2025 stocked trout angler survey indicated no increase in average age since 2015. The stocked trout program benefits local economies and strengthens communities as anglers seek recreational fishing opportunities. Stocked trout fishing increases environmental stewardship, outdoor participation, and preserves the long-standing tradition of fishing for stocked trout. Therefore, VDWR should evaluate current and proposed policies to promote recruitment and retention of trout anglers, especially youth.

Goal Statement

Inform and educate existing and potential future anglers and promote fishing for stocked trout to recruit younger and more diverse anglers to the sport and to retain those already engaged.

Objectives and Strategies

1. By July 1, 2030, increase youth (under 16 years of age) participation in the stocked trout program by 5%.
    a. Evaluate the number of license buyers ages 16-20 every three years and compare with historical data.
    b. Quantify youth participation at kids' trout fishing events.
    c. Maintain the number and distribution of kids' trout fishing events, including urban areas.
    d. Schedule pre-announced stocking events to promote trout fishing at desired times (e.g., first fall stockings, holiday weekends, free fishing weekend, and school break periods).
    e. Develop a competitive grant program that funds (e.g., fishing equipment and trout from private sources) non-VDWR groups hosting kids' fishing events open to the public.
    f. Promote fishing education in schools (e.g., trout in the classroom, fishing clubs, etc.).
    g. Determine recruitment from Youth waters and kid's fishing events in future angler surveys.

2. By July 1, 2030, increase participation among females and minority populations in the stocked trout program by 10%.
    a. Track number of females purchasing trout license.
    b. Assess the potential for including fishing for stocked trout in programs aimed at increasing participation of females and minorities.
    c. Develop educational material to target specific ethnic groups.
    d. Promote stocked trout fishing opportunities among college outdoor activity organizations.
    e. Promote urban fishing to attract more females and minorities.

3. By July 1, 2030, recruit new anglers to the stocked trout program to maintain 100,000 trout-license buyers (including lifetime license) annually.
    a. Assess angler participation, and motivations, constraints to participation, and management preferences in fishing for stocked trout via a statewide survey every 5 years.
    b. Modify the procedure for purchasing trout license online to assess prior license buying behavior.
    c. Encourage trout license purchases among anglers who seek specialized fishing opportunities by creating special regulation fisheries throughout Virginia.
    d. Promote stocked trout fishing opportunities among college outdoor activity organizations.
    e. Assess the feasibility of changing the regulations on delayed-harvest waters to allow harvest sooner (e.g., Memorial Day weekend).
    f. Increase information available to trout anglers by maintaining an online record of stocking information (e.g., number stocked, pounds stocked, and average size by county and/or water).
    g. Promote stocked trout fishing through other agencies, local governments, and other organizations.
    h. Investigate adding "Trophy" waters to the stocking program.

4. Increase participation of non-residents by 10% in the stocked trout by program July 1, 2032.
    a. Monitor non-resident participation in stocked trout fishing through sales of non-resident license sales.
    b. Assess participation by non-resident anglers through VDWR creel surveys.
    c. Increase information available to trout anglers by maintaining an online record of stocking information (e.g., number stocked, pounds stocked, and average size by county and/or water).
    d. Conduct a survey of former and current non-resident anglers to assess motivations, constraints, license costs and options, and management preferences.
    e. Collaborate with Virginia Department of Tourism to promote stocked trout fishing in Virginia to anglers in surrounding states.
    f. Advertise stocked trout fishing in regional media outlets (e.g., regional magazines, websites, TV shows, social media).

5. Develop and implement marketing strategies to promote the stocked trout program by July 1, 2028.
    a. Monitor traffic on social media sites.
    b. Assess angler participation, and motivations, constraints to participation, and management preferences in fishing for stocked trout via a statewide survey every 5 years.
    c. Promote trout fishing as an outdoor experience (tie into motivations).
    d. Promote fishing for stocked trout by posting information and photos on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other social media outlets.

e. Promote stocked trout fishing through other agencies, local governments, and other organizations.
f. Increase information available to trout anglers by maintaining an online record of stocking information (e.g., number stocked, pounds stocked, and average size by county and/or water).
g. Identify schools and contact people that can help disseminate information about stocked trout fishing opportunities to students.
h. By July 1, 2029, launch an easy-to-use online resource providing details (directions, amenities, etc.) for each stocked trout fishing water.
i. Publish 6 articles per year informing the public of stocked trout fishing opportunities (VDWR website/blog, the Outdoor Report, and VDWR social media).

ECOSYSTEM EFFECTS

Catchable stocked trout interact with other fish and aquatic organisms, including native species when introduced into streams or lakes, which may cause concerns about whether those interactions negatively affect the species already present. High angler use associated with some catchable trout stocking sites may harm riparian buffers, and/or increase erosion, littering, and sedimentation.

Value Statement

VDWR should balance the benefits of stocked trout fishing with effects on the ecosystem. Virginia anglers should value wild and native trout in addition to stocked trout and the effects of trout stocking on native aquatic species should be considered. Virginia stocked trout anglers should value the protection of habitat and the conservation of quality trout habitat.

Goal Statement

Manage trout stocking to optimize recreational opportunities while minimizing adverse impacts on aquatic and surrounding habitats, wild and native trout, and other aquatic species. Manage habitat in stocked trout waters and preserve the aesthetics of the angling experience.

Objectives and Strategies

1. Continue implementing strategies to minimize the effects of stocking on existing wild and native trout.
    a. Develop and publish the list of waters that contain existing native trout populations.
    b. Continue to monitor wild trout distribution through the Coldwater Streams Survey.
    c. No new native trout waters that have a Class I or II coldwater stream classification will be added to the Catchable Stocked Trout Program.
    d. Identify stocked trout waters that wild trout inhabit the reaches where DWR stocks.

   e. When waters containing wild or native trout are stocked, VDWR will consider a variety of strategies to minimize the effects of stocking on wild fish, including not stocking trout, the species of trout being stocked, location and timing of stocking, and the use of sterile fish.
   f. Continue research and development into fish production, focusing on the production of sterile trout.
   g. Support research efforts aimed at determining hatchery trout impacts on wild trout populations.

2. Develop strategies to minimize the effects of stocking trout on existing/resident aquatic organisms in waters currently being stocked and when new waters are being proposed for addition to the stocked trout program by January 1, 2027.
   a. In an effort to minimize the effects of stocking trout on resident aquatic species, VDWR will consider a variety of strategies, including not stocking trout, the species of trout being stocked, location and timing of stocking, and the use of sterile trout.
   b. When a new water is proposed to be added to the stocked trout program, VDWR aquatic non-game/diversity biologists (including USFS staff if applicable) will be consulted to determine if stocking hatchery trout poses a threat to any resident aquatic species.

3. Develop strategies to minimize the effects of stocking and angler use on sensitive riparian terrestrial species and habitat in waters currently being stocked and when new waters are being proposed for addition to the stocked trout program by January 1, 2027.
   a. In an effort to minimize the effects of stocking and angler use on resident riparian species or habitat, VDWR will consider a variety of strategies, including not stocking trout and the location and timing of stocking.
   b. When a new water is proposed to be added to the stocked trout program, VDWR terrestrial non-game/diversity biologists (including USFS staff if applicable) will be consulted to determine if stocking hatchery trout (angler impacts) poses a threat to any resident riparian species or habitat.

4. Develop strategies to address habitat issues in stocked trout waters by January 1, 2029.
   a. Identify waters most-suited for collaborative management habitat issues.
   b. Develop a list of potential collaborators for management habitat issues, and establish formal relationships where feasible.
   c. Collaborate with USFS to best utilize forest stamp revenues.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Stocked trout anglers differ in a number of characteristics, such as motivation for fishing, harvest practices, and type of equipment used. Anglers also seek different outcomes from their fishing experiences. Some anglers fish to get away from it all, while other anglers enjoy the social aspect of fishing with others. Some anglers release all or most of the fish they catch, while others look forward to keeping the trout they catch. Some anglers prefer to catch larger fish while others prefer to catch more fish, even if they are smaller. Since the "average angler" does

not really exist, a "one-size-fits-all" management strategy satisfies few anglers. Thus, managers face the challenge of providing a wide variety of fishing opportunities to satisfy a diverse group of anglers.

Stocked trout generally create recreational fisheries in locations where natural fisheries do not exist. The demand for stocked trout fishing opportunities exceeds the current ability of VDWR to supply the fish needed. Numerous streams and lakes in Virginia meet biological criteria to support stocked trout fisheries but are not currently stocked due to hatchery system limitations or concerns about access to the water. In addition, decisions about adding new waters to the stocked trout program must include consideration of labor force, trout production and funding to adequately enforce fishing regulations. Virginia's Conservation Police Officers frequently assist in stocking trout and their enforcement of trout fishing regulations is key to successful management of the resource.

Value Statement

The stocked program exists to create or enhance recreational fishing opportunities. These opportunities promote positive interactions with natural settings, relaxation, and social/family experiences. Trout angling provides opportunities to harvest or catch-and-release fish, stimulates local economies and encourages tourism. VDWR should consider the diverse preferences of anglers, including the balance between the number and size of fish stocked, in developing and selecting management strategies.

Goal Statement

Provide a diversity of stocked trout fishing experiences designed to meet diverse angler preferences and increase participation. Improve access to stocked trout waters for all anglers.

Objectives and Strategies

1. Expand stocked trout fishing opportunities designed to appeal to a variety of angler preferences. This may include trophy trout fisheries, catch-and-release fishing, delayed harvest, urban waters, and youth fishing opportunities by July 1, 2030.
    a. Develop a list of potential waters suitable for alternative management strategies.
    b. Identify new management strategies, for example developing trophy trout fisheries.
    c. Expand existing alternative management programs, such as catch-and-release, delayed harvest, special regulation, urban waters, and youth fishing opportunities.
    d. Evaluate current hatchery production techniques to meet the demand for new management strategies including size and number of fish, timing, frequency of stocking, and opportunities for reallocation of stocked fish.

2. Identify 6 waters statewide to be managed with alternative management strategies (e.g., catch and release, delayed harvest, youth only, etc.) by July 1, 2028. This may include the conversion of current stocked waters to a new designation.
    a. Establish criteria to prioritize waters for inclusion in the alternative management strategies program (e.g., angler use, proximity to other stocked waters, geographic location, habitat).
    b. Conduct creel surveys on several waters selected for alternative management strategies to measure angler use and satisfaction.

3. Increase angler access to stocked trout waters where appropriate.
    a. Identify locations that need increased access or where no improvement to existing access is desired by January 1, 2028.
    b. Collaborate with partners and localities to develop facilities that improve access.
    c. Provide more ADA-compliant or barrier-free access to stocked trout waters.

Appendix A. Trout Technical Committee members.

Name	Agency Position
Brian Beers	Manager, Paint Bank Hatchery
Brad Fink	Region 4, Coldwater Aquatic Biologist
Jackson Dierberg	Region 4, Conservation Police Officer
John Odenkirk	Region 4, District Aquatic Biologist
Steve Owens	Region 3, District Aquatic Biologist
George Palmer	Region 2, District Aquatic Biologist
Steve Reeser	Region 4, Regional Aquatic Manager
Butch Bates	Manager, Wytheville Hatchery
Brendon Delbos	Statewide Hatchery Coordinator
Derrick Kekic	Region 4, Conservation Police Officer
Eric Wooding	Manager, Coursey Springs Fish Cultural Station

Appendix B. Summary of public comments

The 2026-2035 Stocked Trout Management Plan went out to public comment from July 7th through August 5th, 2026.

A total of 395 comments were received. The main concerns identified were the reductions in stocked trout, concerns over sustainable funding and license fees, and how stocking information is released. Other major items identified included interactions between stocked trout and native and naturalized trout resources, the importance of youth involvement, and concerns about the loss of individual water bodies identified in potential reductions.

The issue that received the most feedback was information sharing – the proposal to release the trout stocking schedule on the third Saturday of the month prior to stocking. The majority of the comments – 96 – expressed opposition to sharing information on the trout schedule, citing crowding, ethics, and fishery impact. Significant support was present for the proposal – 60 – comments cited fairness in knowing when fish would be released as well as the ability to plan fishing trips in advance.

A total of 142 comments addressed funding and license fees. Of those, 106 expressed support for increasing license fees to maintain or enhance the trout program. Most of the supportive comments indicated that any revenue should offset or eliminate the cuts and reductions outlined in the plan. In contrast, 36 comments identified resistance to either fee increases or any fees in general to fish. These commentors found a fee increase unacceptable, often citing concerns with the management of the program or their unwillingness to provide more support for a program that would provide fewer services.

Further prioritizing native, wild, or naturalized trout populations was mentioned in 18 comments, several of which were from organizations representing anglers. These comments asked DWR to consider reducing the potential impacts of stocked trout on existing trout resources through shifts, reductions, or discontinuation of stocking in specific waters.

The future of the stocked trout program and the impact on youths was mentioned in 15 comments. These commentors cited concern that the program would not be viable in the future if cuts were implemented and highlighted the importance of youth events in getting people engaged in the sport.

Another common item was concern about eliminating one of the fee fishing areas – Douthat State Park. Seven anglers expressed concern about losing this site, mentioning how important it was to them and how much they enjoyed fishing for trout at this park managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Another theme across the comments was the willingness of anglers to offer solutions – changes to stocking regimes, changes in bag limits, changes in season etc. – that would assist DWR in maintaining trout opportunities in the face of the challenges identified in the plan. The Stocked Trout Team is actively considering the impacts of these proposals, but because many of them require regulatory action, such as changing the creel limit, they are beyond the scope of the plan but will be given due consideration during the next Sportfishing Regulation cycle, tentatively scheduled for 2028.