

A New Era in Trout Fishing



Opening Day at Spruce Knob Lake, circa 1953.

Editor's Note: This is a reprint of an article published in the March 1966 issue of *West Virginia Conservation Magazine* (forerunner of *Wonderful West Virginia*). The subsequent article is a perspective on the trout program 40 years later.

By Roy Lee Harmon

The carnival atmosphere has departed from West Virginia trout streams and impoundments.

Opening day of the trout season in years past was a combination of the Fourth of July, New Year's Eve, the Mardi Gras and Saturday night in Rufftown. In other words it was marked by a conspicuous hullaballoo.

The fishin' fever which had attacked every angler had bubbled and boiled as the buds swelled, the weather grew more balmy and opening day drew near. Then it

slopped over into a riotous time when a fisherman was hard put to find enough room to wet a line. It was almost impossible to fish without stepping on someone.

The end of an era has come for the anglers.

The future is brighter. Now opening day of the trout season is entirely up to the individual angler. A warm spell in February which brings on the first symptom of fishin' fever can be your own personal opening day. The season may never be closed again.

While a few fishermen lamented the passing of the old opening day traffic jams and the crowded conditions on every trout stream or impoundment, their laments are fading fast before the new order of things, which means better year-round fishing.

THE WIDE-OPEN season was inaugurated for sound scientific

reasons. It was not done in a hurry, but was decreed only after considerable planning and research. This year every stream or lake will not be clogged with anxious anglers on opening day -- simply because there will not be a specific opening day.

Now, instead of letting fishin' fever build up to a high pitch to be shared with the multitudes, a trout fisherman can simply grab his fishing tackle and take himself away to his favorite fishing spots the first day he thinks the weather and stream conditions are right. As a matter of fact, some good catches were reported last month. Restocking of the streams was started early in January. Weekly stockings are scheduled March through May in better waters. The fish are there for the taking -- and they'll be there throughout the year.

Those who wanted to fish and "get away from it all" used to be

badly frustrated on the official opening day and for several days afterward. But those same individuals will be able henceforth to leave the milling mob and really commune with nature. They will have a better chance to bring home a mess of fish. Fishing will be more fun. Yes, the new plan is better!

More trout will be taken in West Virginia. This state has long had an outstanding trout management program—and now it is bigger and better. Fish now being stocked average 10 inches, larger than what most states stock. More trout than ever before will be planted in state waters -- and it will be possible to fish without dodging the spinner of wild-casting anglers. Solitude and real fishing fun are staging a comeback.

T.R. Samsell, chief of the Game and Fish Division, Department of Natural Resources, sets forth sound reasons for the pleasing change Samsell points out that West Virginia has a limited amount of trout water and little natural reproduction. A good restocking program is absolutely necessary since trout fishing in West Virginia is largely a put-and-take proposition.

UNDER THE OLD ORDER of things there was that frantic, crowded opening day and a quick depletion of the fish supply. Under the new order the

fisherman will know that the fish are available and it is squarely up to him to land them. He will know that heavy first-day or first-week fishing has not reduced the fish population.

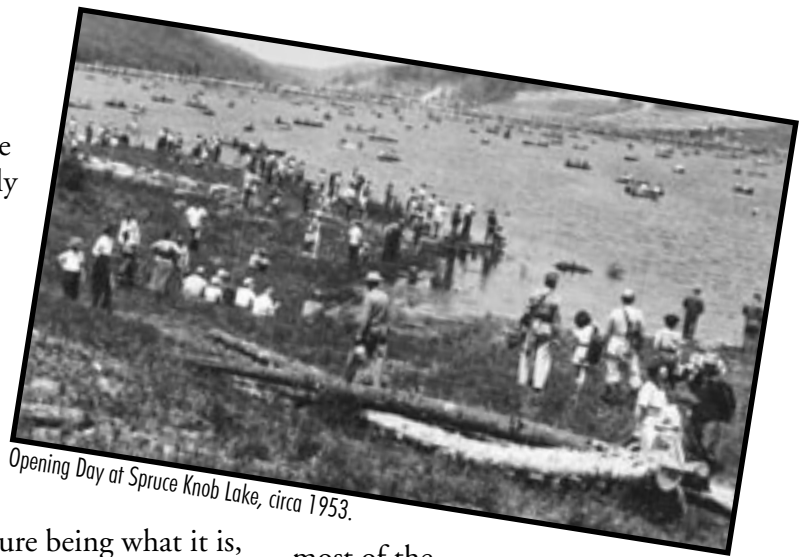
Human nature being what it is, the man or woman who knows it is now possible and legal to go trout fishing whenever fancy dictates will fish for pleasure instead of trying to make a killing on opening day. The fish just won't be gone. There will always be tomorrow--and more fishing.

Samsell points out that the year-round open season provides at least two extra months of the use of prime trout water. He says it will also allow fuller use of the hatcheries and thus provide more pounds of fish every year. Furthermore, it will attract more tourists to West Virginia for the early trout fishing.

Samsell also stresses the fact that the passing of opening day crowds will bring more reasonable and pleasing use of facilities such as camping areas, alleviation of health problems associated with the

old opening madness, and provide more enjoyment for all who fish West Virginia streams.

He declares: "The new plan is decreasing total fishing pressure on native trout water since



Opening Day at Spruce Knob Lake, circa 1953.

most of the intense pressure was associated with opening day." Samsell summed it up as follows: "Basically, the new system will permit a fuller use of a natural resource -- our trout waters -- and provide a higher quality of trout fishing. It will enable us to provide more fishing opportunities to more people for the present and future. In fact it is doing that very thing already."

ON THE WRITER'S first trout fishing expedition on Glade Creek in Raleigh County this year he experienced no traffic jams either on the roads or on the streams. Winter still lingered in the lap of spring. But there was solitude and peace. Furthermore some trout

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Roadsides became parking lots and makeshift campsites on Opening Day as illustrated by this 1963 photo.



were caught -- without getting in anybody's way. Others were already enjoying fishing this particular stream as well as others in West Virginia. And they don't have to fight to get to the creek.

Since West Virginia trout fishing is largely a put-and-take proposition, it will be interesting to know that there will be more putting and more taking than ever before this year.

Last year the restocking was upped by 20,000 pounds, making a total of 374,707 pounds planted in state streams and impoundments. This year the increase will be about 20,000 pounds again, making the grand total near 395,000. Multiply that by three and you get the approximate number of fish.

Meanwhile, if you haven't celebrated your own personal "opening day," you're not too late.

Some of the more hardy anglers, those who are undaunted by snow and low temperatures, enjoyed the opening day their fancy dictated back in January.

BOB MONARCHY, sports editor of the *Raleigh Register* in Beckley, tried his luck on Camp Creek in mid-January and found his luck good. Of course, he had a little bad luck, too, when a hefty rainbow got under the ice, after being hooked, and managed to get away. The pool Monarchy was fishing was partially covered with ice. But he reported:

"They hit everything I threw in. They were hungry and no insects were falling in the water."

Ice fishing is becoming popular at Spruce Knob Lake.

There's something for fishermen to remember as they celebrate their own opening day during a mild spell in winter in future years.

The Era Continues-- 40 Years Later

By Mike Shingleton

In 1966, trout fishing in West Virginia was changed forever by the elimination of opening day. Anglers no longer had to wait until the end of April to go trout fishing. Gone were the elbow to elbow fishing experiences and tangled lines, common with previous opening days. An angler could choose their own "opening day" that suited him, based on weather, opportunity, or whim. Forty years later the majority of anglers still support and enjoy trout fishing year round.

In 1966, approximately 395,000 pounds of 10-inch trout were stocked into numerous West Virginia waters. Today, an average of 750,000 pounds of 12-inch trout are stocked into nearly 200 streams and small impoundments.

Forty years ago some anglers complained about truck followers catching all the trout from a water before they had an opportunity to fish on the weekend. In response to angler complaints, tagging

studies were conducted in 1963, 1966 and 1974. These tagging studies were conducted to determine the percentage of trout caught the day a water was stocked and the percentage of trout remaining after certain time periods had elapsed. Those studies revealed that an average of 85 percent of the trout were still available two days after a stocking. An average of 66 percent of the trout remained for anglers one week after the stocking, and 50 percent were still present to be caught two weeks after a stocking. These studies were conducted at Spruce Knob Lake and the North Fork of the South Branch.

Anglers still complain that truck followers catch the trout before they have an opportunity to fish. In response to this, and to verify and duplicate previous studies, the Division of Natural Resources is currently conducting a similar study. Tagged trout have again

been stocked into Spruce Knob Lake and the North Fork of the South Branch. Tagged trout have also been stocked into Mountwood Lake in Wood County. Tagged trout will be stocked into additional



The wild trout fishery has benefited from fingerling stockings made possible by a year-round season.

Steve Brown



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Far from the maddening crowd, a solitary angler quietly goes after a native brook trout in Big Run of Gandy Creek. (Note log K-dam created to improve trout habitat in background).

selected waters in 2007.

One aspect of trout fishing that was not used much 40 years ago, but is a direct beneficiary of year-round fishing, is the fingerling stocking program. Prior to the ending of opening day, hatcheries did not have the capacity to hold surplus fingerling trout. All available hatchery capacity was devoted to the rearing of stockable or catchable-sized trout.

Today, over 300,000 surplus fingerlings, primarily brown trout, are annually reared and stocked into about 90 waters that will support trout year round. These stockings are carried out by WRS personnel,

along with many volunteers from Trout Unlimited, Izaak Walton League and other organizations.

These stockings have developed long-term fisheries that are used by many anglers who enjoy fishing for “wild trout.”

Year-round trout fishing, supported by hatchery produced trout and the fingerling trout stocking efforts, has also had an

additional benefit. Although, many anglers still enjoy fishing for West Virginia’s only native trout –the brookie– fishing pressure on this resource has been offset by the Division’s various stocking programs.

Was trout fishing made better 40 years ago with the abolition of

opening day? Is trout fishing better now than it was 40 years ago? Can trout fishing get better in the next 40 years? The answer to all of these questions is YES! The challenge facing resource managers is how best to meet the desires and needs of all trout anglers for the future.

The solution or answer to these changes could be new regulations such as delayed harvest, the addition of new catch-and-release areas, more areas dedicated to children, or new waters stocked in areas with no or few opportunities to fish for trout. The answers to some anglers would seem simple and easy – but they are not. There must be a balance of trout fishing opportunities that benefit all anglers without significantly impacting other anglers and, most importantly, without having a negative effect on the resource itself.

Mike Shingleton is Assistant Chief of Coldwater Fisheries stationed in Elkins.

WAS TROUT FISHING MADE BETTER 40 YEARS AGO WITH THE ABOLITION OF OPENING DAY? IS TROUT FISHING BETTER NOW THAN IT WAS 40 YEARS AGO? CAN TROUT FISHING GET BETTER IN THE NEXT 40 YEARS? THE ANSWER TO ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS IS YES!