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17 Eastern States Announce Coordinated Strategy for Brook Trout Conservation

Unprecedented New Plan Sets Firm Targets for 2025

WASHINGTON – The future of the East’s premier native trout is looking up, thanks to a coalition of state and federal agencies, academic institutions and conservation organizations.

The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture today released a first-of-its-kind conservation strategy to restore healthy, fishable populations of eastern brook trout throughout their eastern native range. The Conservation Strategy is based on the status and threats information contained in the Joint Venture’s initial report, which was issued in May 2006.

The 2006 report found that only 5% of historical brook trout habitat remains intact. Populations have been eliminated or greatly reduced in almost half of the areas that historically supported brook trout. Poor land management practices are responsible for the majority of this decline.

“Once the partnership recognized the threats facing brook trout within its historic eastern range, we developed regional and range-wide strategies to take swift and deliberate steps to conserve strong populations and restore weaker ones,” said Steve Perry, Inland Fisheries Division Chief for the NH Fish and Game Department and Chair of the Joint Venture. “We created a model for fish conservation – a large-scale, habitat-focused conservation strategy for a species at risk. This strategy provides us with a roadmap to significantly improve brook trout populations by 2025.”

The report contains a set of aggressive range-wide and regional targets, including protection of highest quality habitat, improvement of 30% of damaged brook trout watersheds, and reintroduction of brook trout to 10% of those watersheds where they have disappeared. Using the 2006 status and threats data as a baseline, the Joint Venture will evaluate progress toward these targets at five year intervals.

In conjunction with the range-wide strategy released today, each of the Joint Venture states is developing a specialized plan based on that state's existing brook trout populations and dominant threats. Through these plans, the states will prioritize protection and restoration efforts to meet the collective targets outlined above. Projects will address priority needs in each state, ranging from restoring streamside habitat in Georgia to cleaning up pollution from abandoned coal mines in Pennsylvania to fixing road culverts to improve brook trout passage in Maine.

“The significance of these state efforts really can't be overstated,” said Gary Berti, Eastern Brook Trout Campaign Coordinator for Trout Unlimited and the Joint Venture's Communications Chair. “They are the ones who will do the hard work to make this range-wide plan a reality. And they will need support from conservation groups, watershed associations, landowners, businesses, educators, citizens and policy-makers at all levels to accomplish the ambitious goals laid out in this strategy.”

The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture partnership began in 2004 as a pilot project under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan. Active partners include fish and wildlife agencies from 17 states, federal agencies, conservation organizations and academic institutions. The Joint Venture is seeking additional partners and support to assist in the protection and restoration of brook trout habitat.

Brook trout are the only trout native to the streams and rivers of eastern United States. Once prolific throughout their historical range, brook trout populations have declined as land use changes have altered their habitat. These fish survive in only the coldest and cleanest water, and they serve as excellent indicators of the health of the watersheds they inhabit.

For more information on the range-wide eastern brook trout conservation strategy and state-specific plans, please visit www.easternbrooktrout.net.