

BROWN TROUT- (*Salmo trutta*)



Common Names: Brown trout, German brown trout, German trout, European brown trout, brownie, brown

Lake Michigan Sport Catch in Wisconsin: 40,000-60,000 per year

Preferred Temperature Range: 65-75 °F, 18-24 °C

Predators for Adults – Sea Lamprey, humans
for Juveniles – Larger carnivorous fish

Length: 16-30 inches

Weight: 2-16 pounds

State Record: 8/23/78; 32 pounds, 8oz.; from Lake Michigan

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Bureau of Fisheries Management

PUBL-FM-104 08
July 2008

Identification: Brown trout caught in Lake Michigan have an overall silvery color with “X” shaped marking on the back and upper half of their body, a squared tail, small and numerous spots on their head, the inside of their mouth white, and 12 or less rays in their anal fin. Spawning brown trout in September and October will have an overall tan to reddish brown color with distinctive black and red spots.

Distribution: Native to Europe and western Asia from Iceland to Afghanistan. Introduced into North America as early as 1883 (New York and Michigan). Now found throughout Canada and the United States from the Great Lakes eastward and from the Rocky Mountains west to the Pacific Ocean. Successfully stocked in the Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan since 1966 and now common along the shore from Marinette south to Kenosha.

The brown trout, a native of Europe, was brought to North America in 1883 where it was subsequently introduced into lakes and streams throughout the United States and Canada. Brown trout were first stocked into Lake Michigan in 1883 but these early plantings did not survive well. Because of this early failure, few brown trout were stocked into the Great Lakes in the years that followed. This stocking policy changed in the mid-1960s when, as part of the Great Lakes rehabilitation effort, brown trout were once again stocked into Lake Michigan. This time survival of the fish was excellent. The number of brown trout annually stocked into Lake Michigan by Wisconsin has steadily increased to approximately 1,000,000.

Brown trout have adapted well and are now an important part of the Lake Michigan fish community. These fish live in water that is warmer and shallower than that preferred by other trout or salmon. A challenge to anglers, brown trout are wary and often easy to “spook.” The popularity of brown trout has steadily increased over the past several years, and they are now aggressively sought by many Great Lakes anglers.

Wisconsin has two different strains of brown trout brood stock used to produce fish for

the state’s stocking program. The brood fish are kept at St. Croix and Wild Rose State Fish Hatcheries. Breeding of the adult fish takes place in October and September. Fertilized eggs and fry are shipped to Brule River, Kettle Moraine, Nevin, Thunder River, and Langlade State Fish Hatcheries for rearing. Stocking of the fish takes place the next autumn when the fish are fingerlings or during the following spring and early summer when they are yearlings.

After being stocked into Lake Michigan, brown trout grow fast, feeding on crayfish, insects, and small fish. In 2 to 3 years they attain an average weight of 5 to 6 pounds. At 2 to 4 years of age, the brown trout become mature and return to the stocking sites in the autumn to spawn. The male brown trout develops a kype, or hooked jaw, during mating season, similar to a coho or chinook salmon. Spawning takes place in shallow, gravelly headwaters of streams or on rocky reefs near the shore. Because little successful natural reproduction occurs, brown trout must be stocked each year to maintain the fishery.

Brown trout can be caught by anglers on a year-round basis. Some of the best brown trout fishing is done in the springtime with light tackle. Best catches are made from Marinette to Algoma. Favorite techniques include trolling or casting minnow-type plugs and spoons. In the summer, trolling in Green Bay produces very good catches of brown trout. Small spoons and plugs are trolled 2 to 5 miles offshore, at depths of 15-30 feet in water 50-70 feet deep. Between October and June, brown trout provide an excellent sport fishery in the cooling water discharge plumes of power plants from Kewaunee south. Live bait, small spoons, jigs, and plugs are most often used in these areas.

Funding for Wisconsin’s brown trout stocking program comes from the Great Lakes fishermen through their purchase of fishing licenses and the Great Lakes Salmon and Trout Stamp. In the future, approximately 1,000,000 brown trout will be planted in the Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan each year. This level of stocking should help ensure high quality brown trout fishing in future years.