

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 1, 2004

From: Steve Eder
To: Regulations Committee
Subject: New Approaches to Missouri Trout Management

An important part of implementing the Department's "Plan for Missouri Trout Fishing" is to review management of all trout areas and to review, clarify and simplify trout fishing regulations whenever possible. In the early part of this year, Fisheries, Protection and Resource Science staff conducted a comprehensive review of the Department's trout program. Staff reviewed information on trout populations, stocking, hatchery production, public expectations, habitat quality and other factors. As a result of this review, we are recommending a new approach to the management of Missouri's trout streams that will classify most of our waters into one of three categories:

Blue Ribbon Waters:

Waters in this category are of two main types: 1) large, cold rivers representing the best quality trout habitat in Missouri, or 2) smaller streams capable of supporting naturally-reproducing rainbow trout populations. Our management objective for all Blue Ribbon waters will be to sustain the maximum number of adult trout using restrictive length and daily limits, tackle restrictions and gigging restrictions. We expect these areas to provide excellent catch-and-release fishing opportunities and the occasional opportunity to harvest a trophy. Portions of the Current River, Eleven Point River and North Fork of the White River are in this category. These large streams will be stocked with either rainbow trout (Eleven Point) or brown trout (Current and North Fork). Smaller streams in this category will be managed for wild rainbow trout and will not be stocked. This includes portions of Crane Creek, Barren Fork Creek, Blue Springs Creek, Little Piney Creek, Mill Creek and Spring Creek. Regulations for all Blue Ribbon streams will be an 18-inch minimum length limit on all trout, a daily limit of one (1), fishing restricted to flies and artificial lures only and gigging in these stream sections will be prohibited. All waters formerly classified as Wild Trout Management Areas are in the Blue Ribbon category along with the former Current River Special Trout Management Area (Table 1).

Red Ribbon Waters:

Generally, these are also areas of high quality trout habitat, though they may have thermal or habitat bottlenecks that reduce habitat quality. In these areas, we want to enhance the survival of stocked trout through harvest restrictions and allow them to grow to larger sizes. We also want to allow traditional use of these waters for gigging of nongame fish. We expect these areas will provide good catch-and-release fishing opportunities and a chance to harvest quality-sized trout. These areas will be stocked primarily with brown trout, but rainbow trout from nearby stocked areas or natural reproduction will be present in the proposed Red Ribbon waters. These areas include portions of the Meramec River, North Fork of the White River and Roubidoux Creek. A 15-inch minimum length limit will apply to all trout, the daily limit will be two (2) trout and gigging will be allowed. Fishing will be restricted to flies and artificial lures on the Meramec River and Roubidoux Creek. All types of bait, lures or flies will be allowed in the

Red Ribbon area of the North Fork of the White River because there are no trout areas nearby that could accommodate displaced bait anglers. All three of these areas were formerly classified as Special Trout Management Areas (Table 1).

White Ribbon Waters:

These are coldwater streams capable of supporting trout populations all year. These areas will be regularly stocked with rainbow trout and some areas will receive occasional stockings of brown trout. We expect these areas to provide great opportunities for anglers to catch and harvest trout and the occasional chance to harvest a large trout using any legal fishing method they wish. Harvest opportunities will be provided through regular stockings of rainbow trout. The opportunity to occasionally harvest a large trout will be provided through the release of a limited number of surplus rainbow trout broodstock in these areas and the stocking of brown trout in some White Ribbon Waters (see proposed statewide brown trout length limit below). Streams in this category include portions of Capps Creek, Current River, Eleven Point River, Little Piney Creek, Niangua River, Roaring River, Roubidoux Creek and Stone Mill Spring Branch. There will be no length limits on rainbow trout in these waters, the daily limit will be four trout and all types of flies, lures and bait will be allowed. Giggling of nongame fish will be permitted. These areas were formerly Trout Management Areas and the Niangua River Special Trout Management Area (Table 1).

Other Related Proposals:

The statewide reduction in the daily limit of trout from 5 to 4 per day, will also be in effect in Missouri's trout parks, urban winter trout management areas and Lake Taneycomo. No other changes to daily limits, length limits or tackle restrictions at the trout parks or Lake Taneycomo are proposed.

Brown trout are produced in more limited quantities in Missouri's trout hatchery system than rainbow trout, but because of their lower vulnerability to angling, they are more likely to grow to large sizes in the wild. Generally, they are stocked in areas where length limits protect them from harvest, but they may move into nearby stream reaches without length limits (i.e. trout parks or Trout Management Areas). As a result, many brown trout are harvested before they can reach larger sizes. In an effort to enhance the survival of small brown trout wherever they are found, and provide an additional tool for producing large trout in some White Ribbon areas, we are proposing a statewide 15-inch minimum length limit on brown trout in all streams, except tributaries to Lake Taneycomo where a 20-inch minimum length limit still applies. Initially, brown trout stockings will be restricted to areas where they are currently stocked. Any expansion of brown trout stocking will only be conducted after consultation with management partners.

The trout permit is currently a requirement for possessing trout outside of a trout park and for fishing during the winter catch-and-release season in the trout parks. Recently, the Regulations Committee adopted a rule that will require a trout permit for all anglers fishing during the winter catch-and-release season at Stone Mill Spring Branch. We are now proposing a similar requirement of all anglers fishing upstream of the U.S. Highway 65 bridge in Lake Taneycomo. Unlike the trout parks and Stone Mill, we are proposing this rule would apply all year in this area. Unlike many other areas where trout are stocked and native sport fish are also caught, angling success in upper Lake Taneycomo is almost entirely dependent upon trout stocking. During public review of "A Plan for Missouri Trout Fishing," many anglers supported the concept of requiring a trout permit for fishing in any trout area. Because of this angler acceptance and the need for trout stocking to support the upper Taneycomo fishery, a trout permit should be required for fishing in that area. Such a requirement is philosophically consistent with the tradition of requiring a daily fishing tag for fishing in the trout parks where the fisheries are also dependent upon stocking.

The number of winter trout fisheries in Community Assistance Program lakes and ponds continues to increase, and we are planning a new winter trout fishery in Jefferson City this year. We would like to maintain as much consistency as possible in our management of these areas to simplify regulations for anglers. New winter trout lakes are being managed with a “delayed harvest approach” where a period of catch-and-release fishing after stocking protects the stocked trout and allows more anglers to catch trout. In an effort to simplify regulations, we are proposing that the catch-and-release season extend from November 1 through January 31 in all winter trout lakes and we are proposing one amendment to achieve this consistency. Similarly, Department staff in the St. Louis region would like to clarify and simplify their regulation limiting fishing after a daily limit of trout has been harvested.

c: John Hoskins, Kevin Richards, Rich Wehnes, Mike Kruse, George Kromrey, Fisheries Regional Supervisors, Hatchery Managers, Protection Regional Supervisors

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