WISCONSIN DNR
FISHERIES INFORMATION SHEET

Water: South Branch Oconto River **County:** Oconto **WBIC:** 480900 **Year:** 2012

The North and South Branches of the Oconto River join near Suring to form the Oconto River. The watershed is primarily forested with limited agricultural activity. The South Branch Oconto River has a total length of 54.6 miles and averages about 40 feet across in the lower reaches. The South Branch Oconto River Fishery Area was created in 1961. Since that time, the Department of Natural Resources has acquired over 450 acres of land bordering the river. As a result, over 11 miles of the South Branch of the Oconto River flows through the fishery area. The fishery area was established to enhance the native trout populations while improving access for anglers.

Brook and brown trout were stocked in most but not all years from 1994 to 2007 in the South Branch of the Oconto River. During most of those years, stocked fish originated from wild trout collected from the South Branch in the CTH T area of Oconto and Langlade counties. The wild trout program was a cooperative program carried out by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Oconto River Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Suring Sportsmen's Club. The wild fish were initially stocked only in the Fishery Area of the South Branch. A weir project was conducted in May/June 2007 to assess the contribution of stocked fish. Zero out of 140 brook trout had fin clips, and only 5% of brown trout captured were of hatchery origin. This data, along with surveys carried out at other locations along the South Branch Oconto River, suggested that the stocking of feral trout into this river system should be discontinued as no significant increase in the population was observed from these efforts. The natural reproduction of brook and brown trout in the upper sections of the river are adequate to maintain a healthy fishery within the South Branch of the Oconto River.

The South Branch Oconto River (Oconto County) was surveyed on August 21, 2012 to assess the brook and brown trout fishery. A 0.48 mile section of the river was sampled at the bridge crossing of CTH W, west of Mountain in the Town of Doty (T.31N.-R.15E. Section 26) (Figure 3). Previous trout surveys of the South Branch Oconto River (1999 - 2006) consisted of population estimates utilizing mark and recapture techniques over a two-day period. Recent surveys (2008 and later) comprised only one day of sampling at the same location. This section is considered a trend site, to be surveyed on a two-year rotation.

The overall health of the trout fisheries in the South Branch Oconto River is very good. Successful reproduction and recruitment of both brook and brown trout were evident from the length frequency of fish collected (Figures 1 and 2). Good numbers of legal sized brook and brown trout were also present.

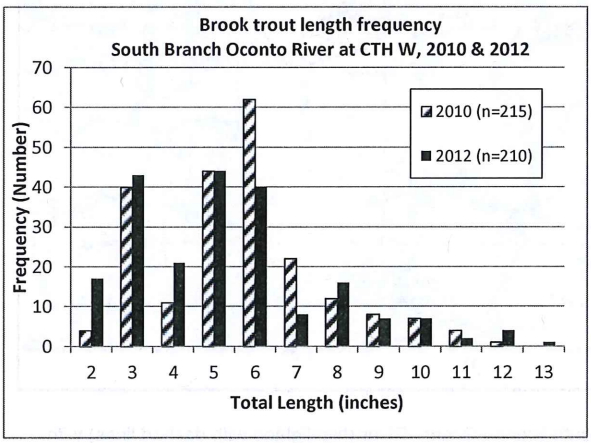

Figure 1. Brook trout length frequency for the South Branch Oconto River, Oconto County Wisconsin.

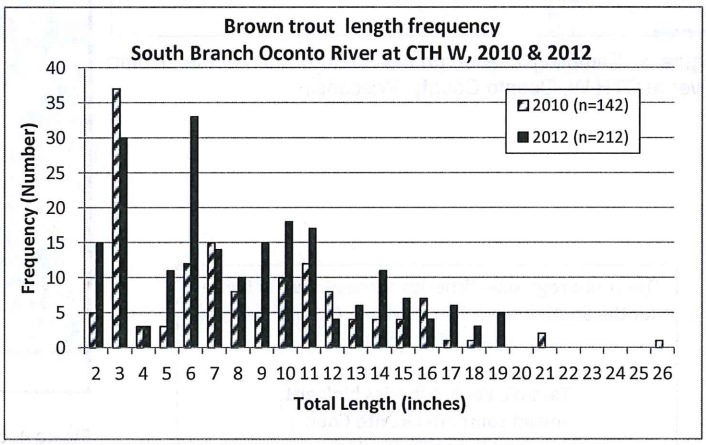

Figure 2. Brown trout length frequency for the South Branch Oconto River, Oconto County Wisconsin.

Brook Trout

A total of 210 brook trout were collected and ranged in length from 2.6 to13.2 inches (Figure 1). The average length of brook trout was 5.7 inches compared to 6.1 inches in 2010. The number of brook trout was 435 per mile in 2012 compared to 448 per mile in 2010. The length frequency chart suggests that several year classes of brook trout are contributing to the population.

Brown Trout

A total of 212 brown trout were collected and ranged in length from 2.4 to 19.9 inches (Figure 2). The average length of brown trout was 8.8 inches compared to 8.5 inches in 2010. The number of brown trout was 439 per mile in 2012 compared to 296 per mile in 2010. However, the largest brown captured in 2012 was 19 inches, while a 26 inch brown was netted in 2010.

There are many road crossing access points along the entire South Branch Oconto River. Major road crossings occur on County highways W, T and AA and State Highway 32. A parking area is also located at the end of Spruce Road with access to the Fishery Area.

The trout fishing season on the South Branch Oconto River begins on the first Saturday in May at 5:00 A.M. and runs through September 30. Anglers may participate in the early catch and release season for trout on the South Branch Oconto River downstream of CTH AA from the first Saturday in March. through the Sunday preceding the first Saturday in May.

The current fishing regulations (2012) classify the South Branch Oconto River upstream of the Menominee Reservation as a category 4 trout stream. A 12 inch minimum size limit for brown trout and an 8 inch minimum size limit for brook trout apply. The daily bag limit is 3 trout total.

The section of the South Branch Oconto River between CTH AA and STH 32 has special reguations whereby only artificial lures may be used. A 12 inch minimum size limit for brook trout and an 18 inch minimum size limit for brown trout apply. The daily bag limit is 1 trout total.

The remaining sections (Menominee Reservation downstream to CTH AA; STH 32 downstream to Oconto River) are category 2. The minimum size limit is 7 inches for all trout, with a daily bag limit of 5. See Figure 4.

Anglers are encouraged to obtain and review a current copy of the trout fishing regulations before fishing these areas. Trout fishing regulations can be downloaded from the DNR's website at:

http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/regulations/index.html

Additional information, including detailed access maps can be found at:

http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/fisheriesareas/2350southbrocontoriver.html

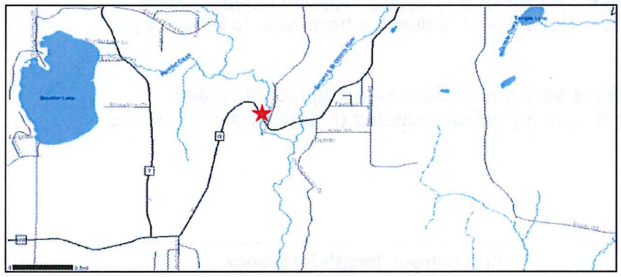

Figure 3. Sampling location on the South Branch of the Oconto River at CTH W, Oconto County, Wisconsin.

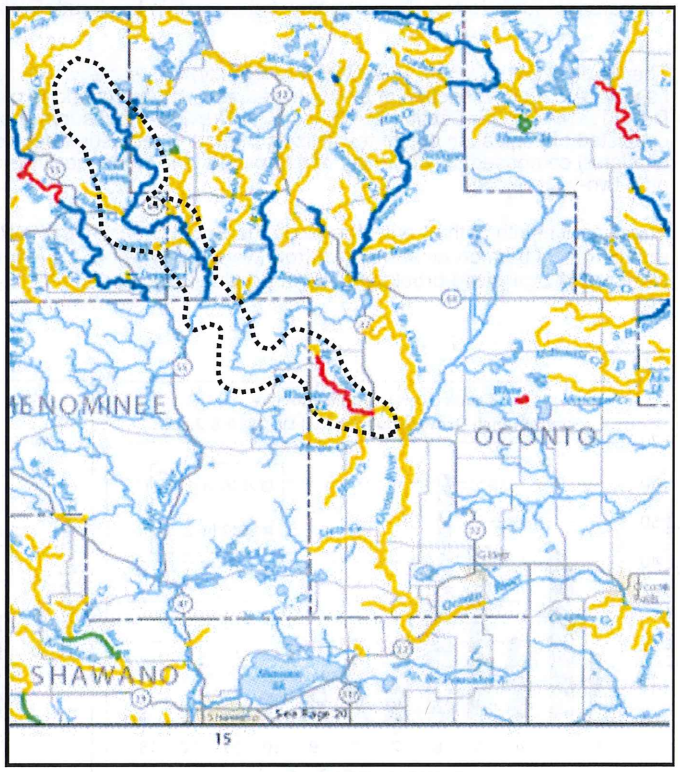

Figure 4. South Branch Oconto River (highlighted with dashed lines) with regulations.

Yellow – Category 2 – All trout species 7 inches minimum length limit daily bag limit 5

Blue – Category 4 – Brown & rainbow 12 inches, brook trout 8 inches minimum length limits daily bag limit 3 (in total)

Red – Category 5 - Special Regulation – Artificial lures, brown and rainbow 12 inches, brook trout 18 inches. Daily bag limit 1 (in total)

Menominee Reservation waters - Category 2 – Tribal policies also apply.

Questions regarding fisheries management activities for the South Branch Oconto River, Oconto County, can be directed to:

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