

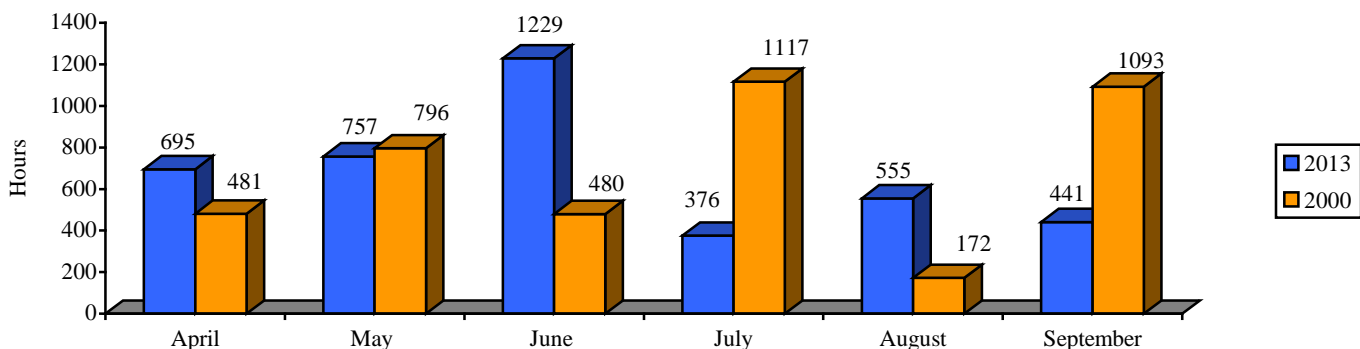


Whitetop Laurel Creek Angler Survey 2013

Whitetop Laurel Creek in Washington County is one of the best trout streams in Virginia and is ranked among the best in the country. The stream contains all three species of trout found in Virginia. Wild populations of rainbow and brown trout reproduce naturally in the creek. Native brook trout also compile a small percentage of the fishery. Whitetop Laurel Creek provides anglers with 12 miles of trout fishing opportunity with sections located in and around the Mount Rogers National Recreational Area. The stream has both stocked and special regulation areas. The stocked portions of the stream consist of three areas totaling 6.6 miles interspersed throughout the 12 miles of trout waters. Anglers fishing the stocked sections are required to follow all statewide trout fishing regulations and possess a trout stamp in addition to a freshwater fishing license. The special regulation section consists of two different areas totaling 5.4 miles and is managed by a single hook artificial lure regulation with a 12 inch minimum size limit on all trout.

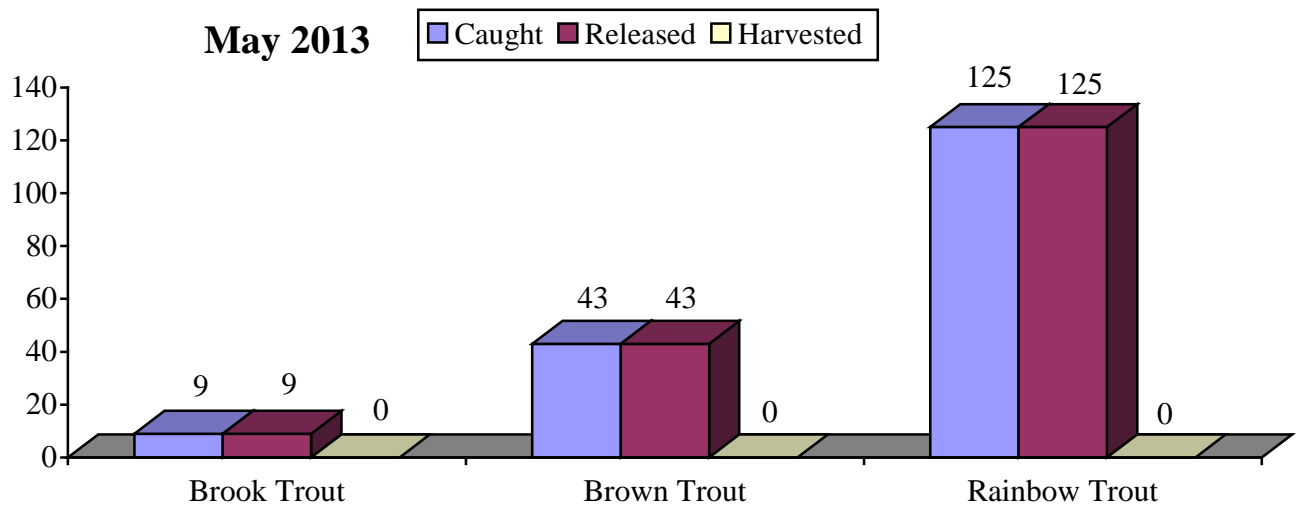
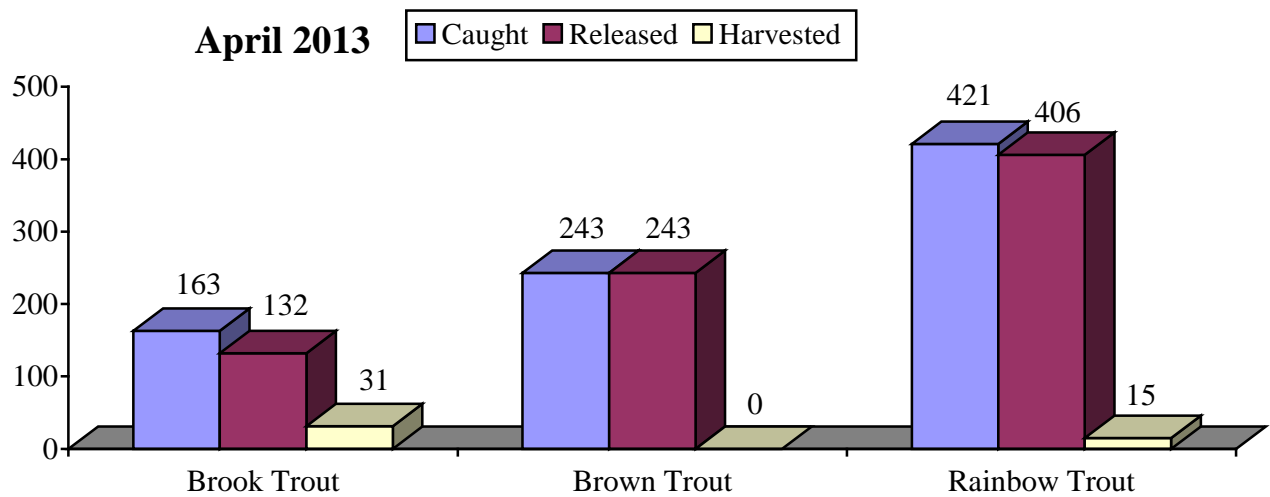
In April 2013, biologists with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries began an angler survey designed to gather information to help manage the resource. The survey consisted of 12 days per month through September 2013. Direct contact angler interviews were done on the special regulation portions only. Survey times (am, pm), survey direction (upstream, downstream), and survey days (weekday, weekend) were chosen randomly. Completion of the survey yielded the following results which are directly comparable to a past survey in 2000.

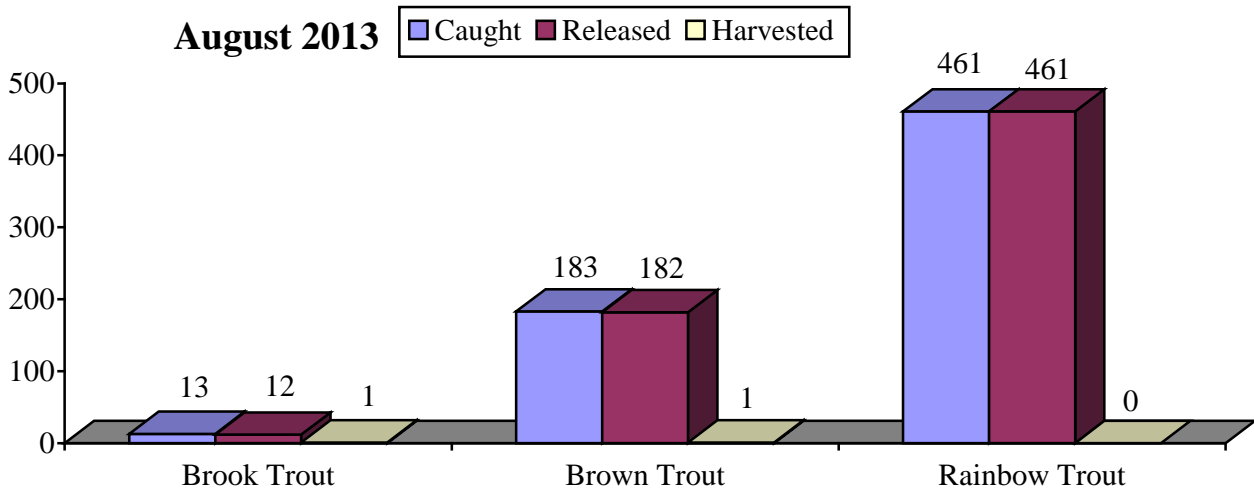
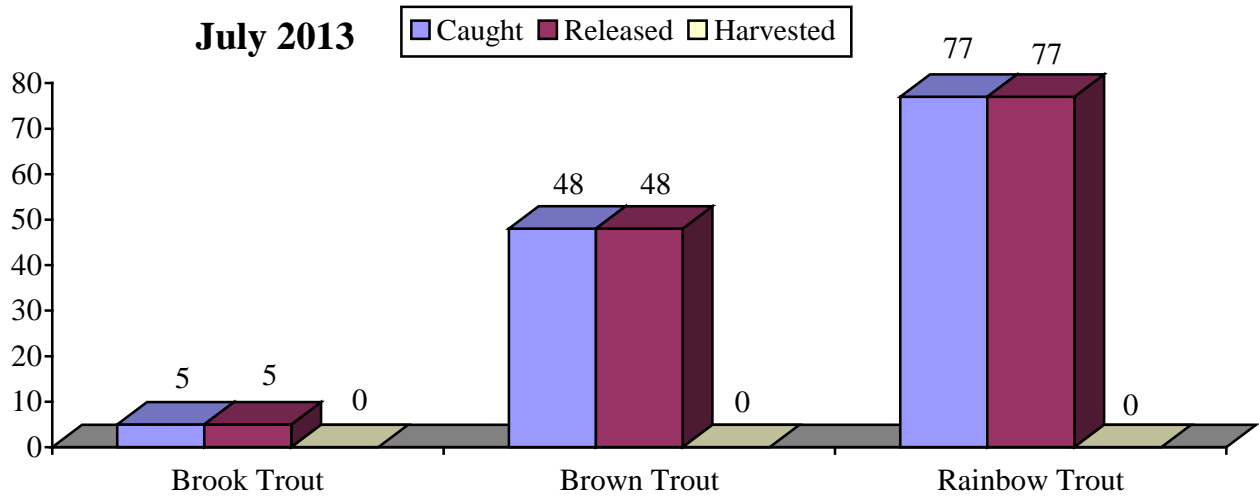
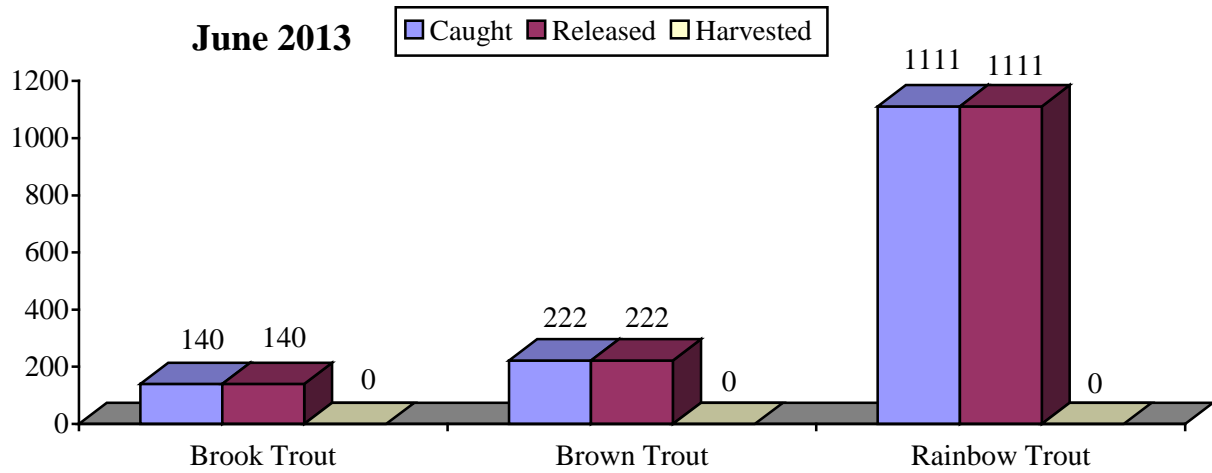
Total fishing effort was estimated to be 4,054 hours in the special regulation sections of Whitetop Laurel Creek in 2013 as compared to 4,140 hours in 2000. The following chart compares the monthly estimated fishing effort for the 2013 and 2000 angler surveys.

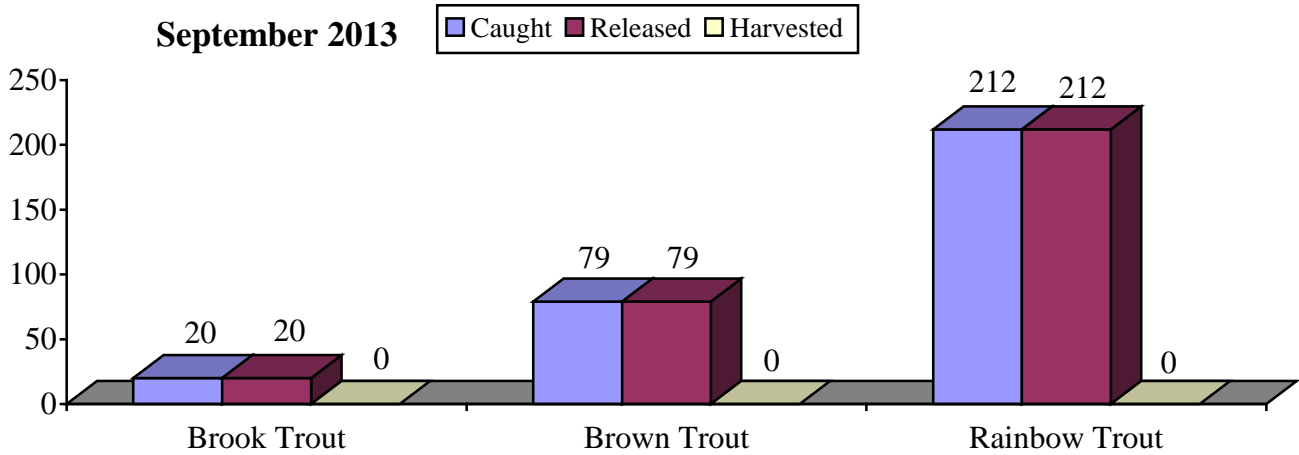


In 2013, forty-seven percent of intended fishing effort was focused toward brown trout and 46% toward rainbow, with the remaining 7% targeting brook trout. Anglers made an estimated 1,815 fishing trips during the 2013 survey compared to 1,746 in the 2000 angler survey.

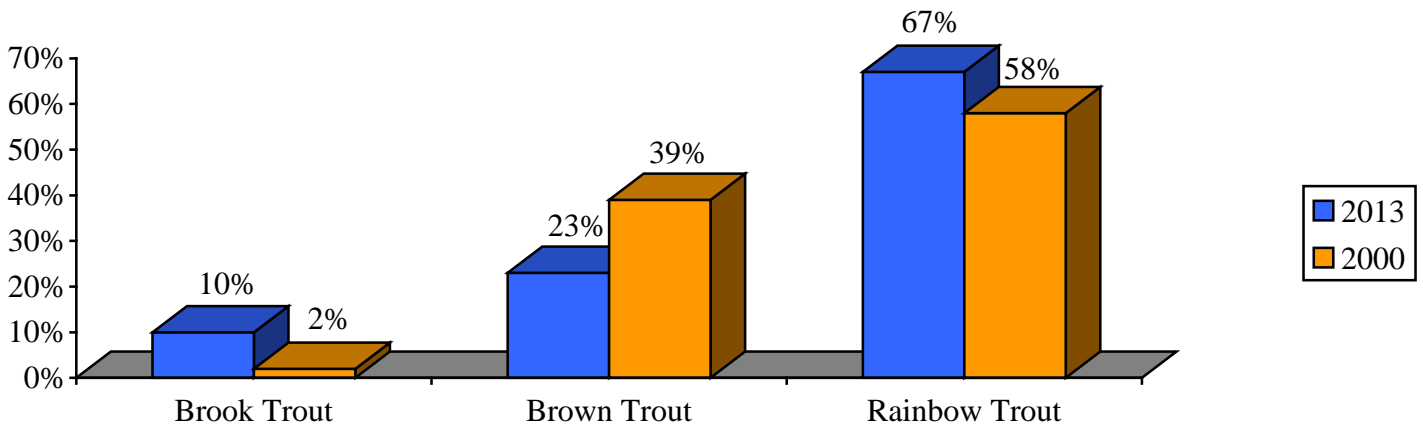
Anglers were questioned about the numbers and kind of trout they caught and what they were harvesting. The series of charts that follow shows by month the estimated numbers and species of trout anglers caught, released, and harvested for the 2013 survey. Species vary by month based on reported catches by anglers. It was estimated that over the entire 2013 survey period anglers harvested 1.3% of all trout caught and released 98.7%. This is comparable to the 2000 survey which indicated 99% of trout captured were released and only 1% harvested.







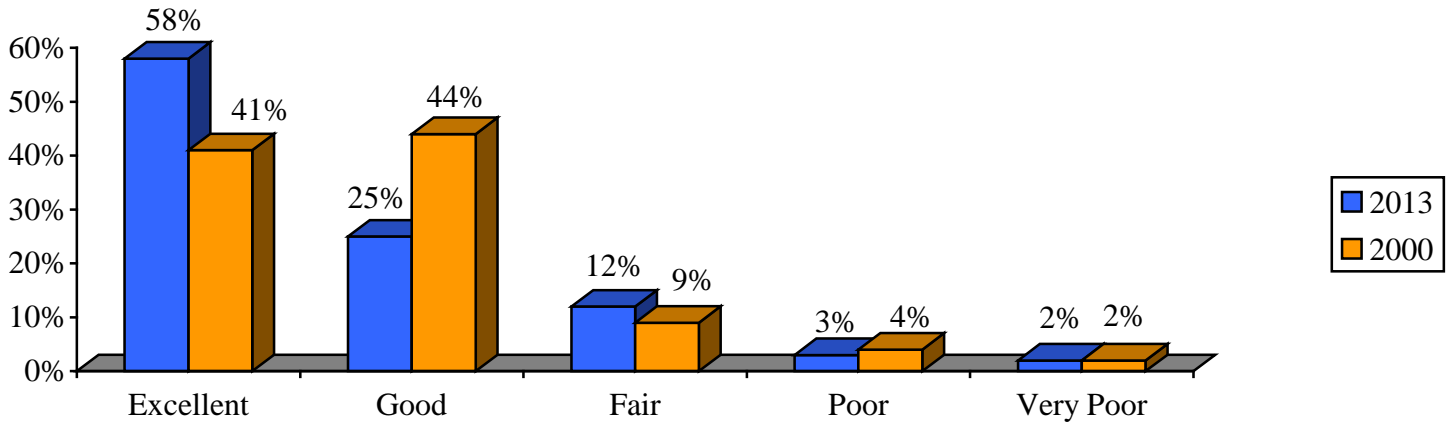
Most of the trout reported caught in the 2013 survey were rainbow trout 67%, 23% were brown trout and only 10% of the trout caught, were brook trout. These catch percentages differ from those reported in the 2000 survey as seen the following chart.



During both the 2013 and the 2000 surveys, anglers were classified as fly fishing or spin fishing. Eighty-two percent of the anglers fishing the special regulation sections in 2013 were classified as fly fishing anglers compared to 91% fly fishing anglers in the 2000 survey. The remaining anglers, 18% in 2013 and 9% in 2000 were classified as spin fishing anglers. While most anglers interviewed were in the fly-fishing category, only 46% of all anglers interviewed in 2013 were affiliated with an organized fishing group such as Trout Unlimited, compared to 40% in the 2000 survey. Most anglers, 52% in 2013 and 60% in 2000, reported having no angler group affiliation.

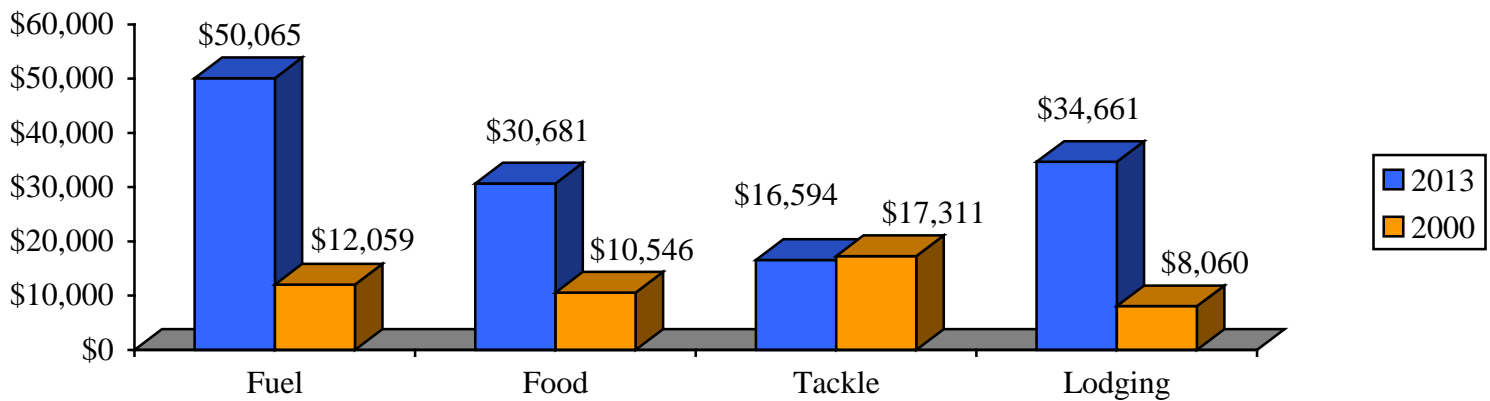
A majority of anglers had positive comments about their fishing experience on Whitetop Laurel Creek. Overall, anglers were highly satisfied with their fishing experience. Only 6% or less of the anglers rated their fishing experience as poor or very

poor. The following chart compares the 2013 and 2000 survey results for angler satisfaction.



Anglers fishing the special regulation sections of Whitetop Laurel Creek came from a variety of locations. Most, (64% in 2013 and 65% in 2000) came from Virginia, followed by (13% in 2013 and 21% in 2000) North Carolina and (8% in 2013 and 9% in 2000) Tennessee. The remaining percentages of anglers came from locations outside of the aforementioned states. Based on this information, Whitetop Laurel Creek plays an important role as a regional fishery.

Anglers also spent a considerable amount of money to fish on Whitetop Laurel Creek. Excluding all licenses, there was an estimated total expenditure of \$132,000 during the 2013 survey period from March through September. This amount was further split into four groups. An estimated \$16,594 was spent on fishing tackle, \$30,681 on food, \$50,065 on fuel and \$34,661 on lodging. The 2013 expenditures exceed the estimated 2000 expenditures for the same survey. The following chart compares estimated angler expenditures for the surveys.



An estimated 1,815 angler trips made during the survey period for 2013, and the average amount of money spent per fishing trip was \$73.00. This was a significant increase over that of 2000 which estimated 1,746 angler trips at an average trip expenditure of \$27.50 per trip.

It appears that the special regulation section of Whitetop Laurel Creek functions as a catch and release trout fishery. Fly-fishing is, by far, the most commonly used angling method. These anglers are making a substantial contribution to the local economy and are very satisfied with their fishing experience. The 2013 survey was similar to the 2000 survey, which was the first of its kind to be performed on a special regulation trout water in southwest Virginia. The information gathered will be used to evaluate current management strategies and practices.

Prepared by: George Palmer, Fisheries Biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries: (276) 781-0642; george.palmer@dgif.virginia.gov