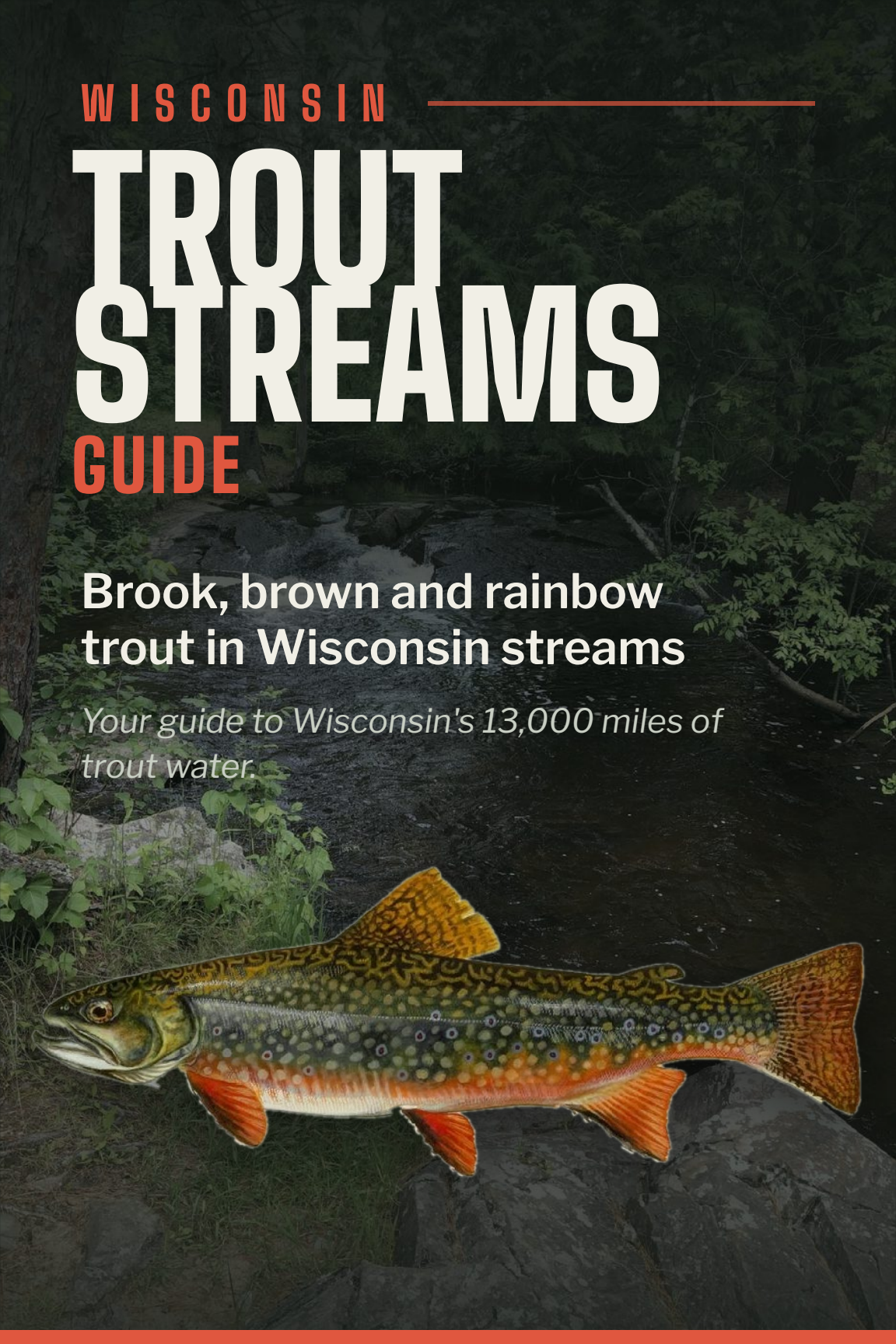
WISCONSIN

TROUT STREAMS GUIDE

Brook, brown and rainbow trout in Wisconsin streams

Your guide to Wisconsin's 13,000 miles of trout water.



WISCONSIN

TROUT STREAMS

Guide

Brook, brown and rainbow trout in Wisconsin streams



Wisconsin Trout Streams Guide
First edition, October 2026

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Read this first. Fishing rules change every year and differ by lake. Everything about seasons, sizes and bag limits in this book is for the 2026–27 season, checked 2026-10-08. Always check the current Wisconsin DNR rules and your lake's own rules before you fish. Depth maps are not for navigation. Ice is never guaranteed safe. You are responsible for your own safety and for following the law.

Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

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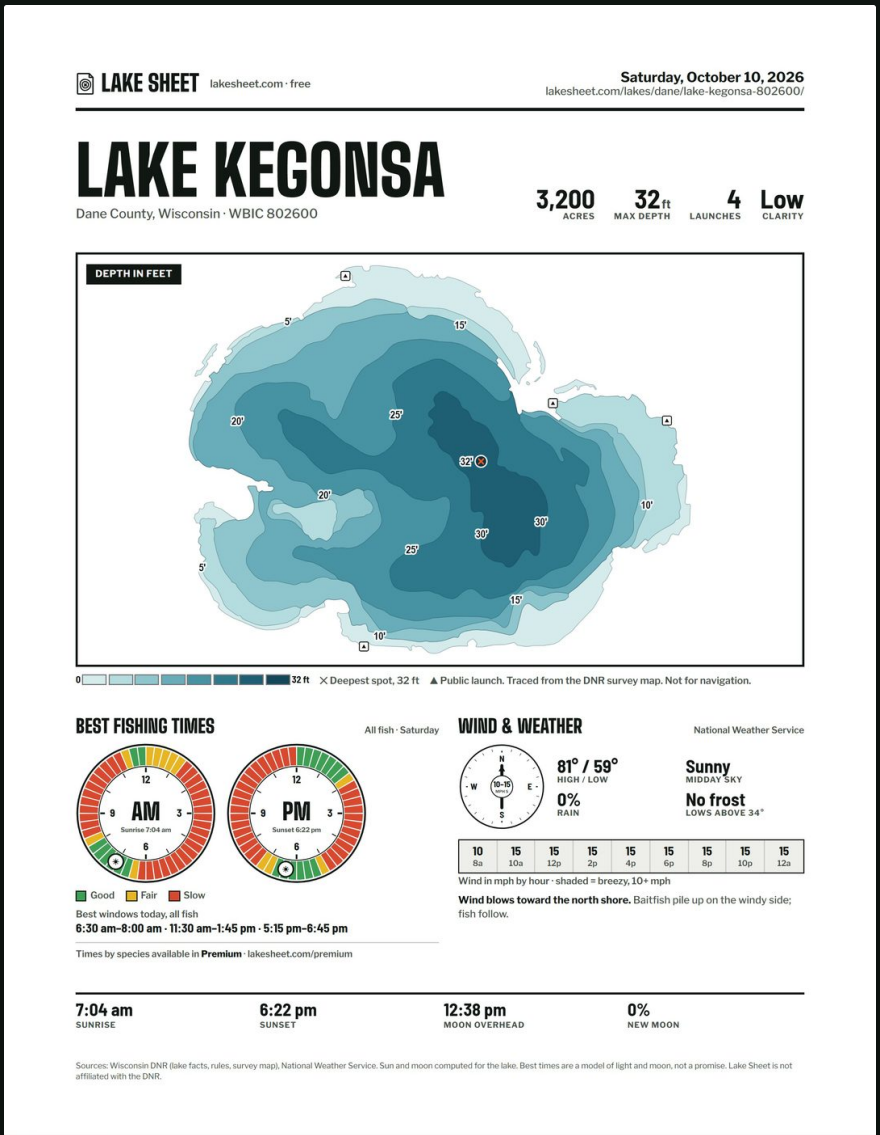
FREE WITH THIS BOOK

YOUR FREE LAKE SHEET

Free for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes: two printable pages, made for the boat. This is the real sheet for Lake Kegonsa.



LAKE SHEET lakesheet.com · free

Saturday, October 10, 2026
lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

LAKE KEGONSA

Dane County, Wisconsin · WBIC 802600

3,200	32 ft	4	Low
ACRES	MAX DEPTH	LAUNCHES	CLARITY

DEPTH IN FEET

5' 15' 20' 25' 32' 20' 10' 30' 30' 25' 5' 15' 10'

0 32 ft · ✕ Deepest spot, 32 ft · ▲ Public launch. Traced from the DNR survey map. Not for navigation.

BEST FISHING TIMES

All fish · Saturday

AM — Sunrise 7:04 am

PM — Sunset 6:22 pm

Good · Fair · Slow

Best windows today, all fish
6:30 am–8:00 am · 11:30 am–1:45 pm · 5:15 pm–6:45 pm

Times by species available in **Premium** · lakesheet.com/premium

WIND & WEATHER

National Weather Service

81° / 59°
HIGH / LOW

0%
RAIN

Sunny
MIDDAY SKY

No frost
LOWS ABOVE 34°

10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
8a	10a	12p	2p	4p	6p	8p	10p	12a

Wind in mph by hour · shaded = breezy, 10+ mph

Wind blows toward the north shore. Baitfish pile up on the windy side; fish follow.

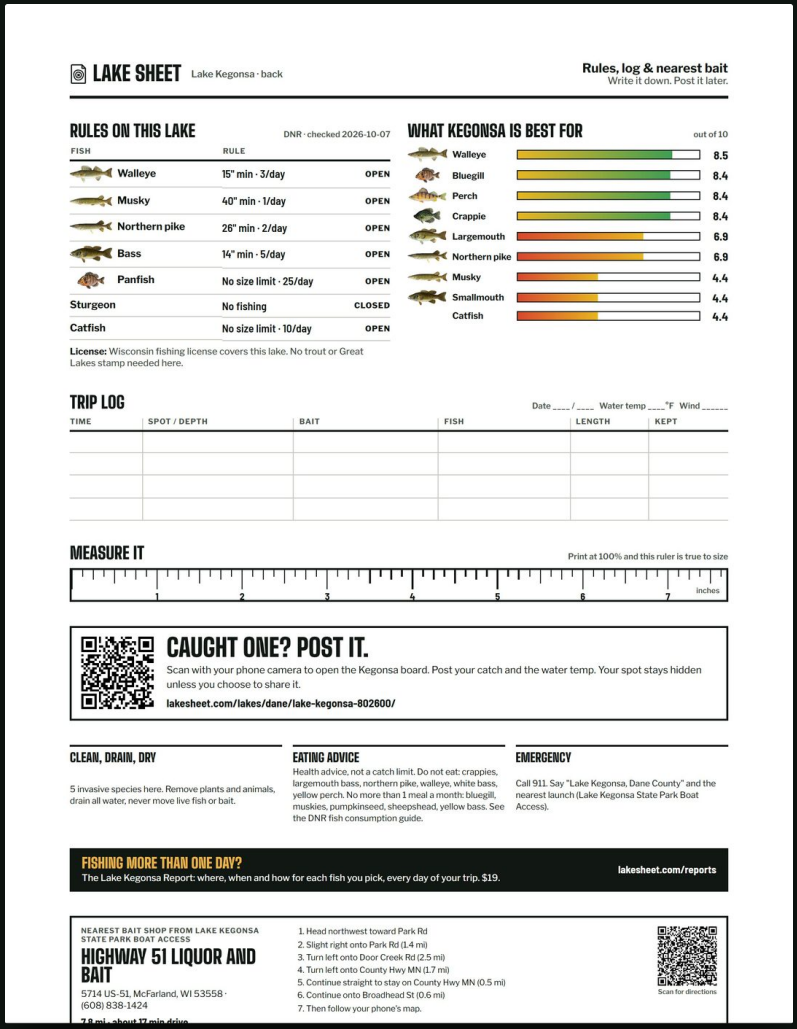
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

Sources: Wisconsin DNR (lake facts, rules, survey map), National Weather Service. Sun and moon computed for the lake. Best times are a model of light and moon, not a promise. Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the DNR.

1. **Depth map** traced from the DNR survey, deepest spot marked (traced lakes)
2. **Lake facts:** acres, max depth, launches, clarity
3. **Best times** from the sun and moon on AM and PM dials
4. **Wind and weather** by the hour, and which shore the wind hits
5. **Sun and moon** times for the lake
6. **Sources and date** on every fact

THE BACK OF THE SHEET

RULES, LOG & NEAREST BAIT



LAKE SHEET Lake Kegonsa · back

Rules, log & nearest bait
Write it down. Post it later.

RULES ON THIS LAKE

DNR · checked 2026-10-07

FISH	RULE	
Walleye	15" min · 3/day	OPEN
Musky	40" min · 1/day	OPEN
Northern pike	26" min · 2/day	OPEN
Bass	14" min · 5/day	OPEN
Panfish	No size limit · 25/day	OPEN
Sturgeon	No fishing	CLOSED
Catfish	No size limit · 10/day	OPEN

License: Wisconsin fishing license covers this lake. No trout or Great Lakes stamp needed here.

WHAT KEGONSA IS BEST FOR

out of 10

Walleye	8.5
Bluegill	8.4
Perch	8.4
Crappie	8.4
Largemouth	6.9
Northern pike	6.9
Musky	4.4
Smallmouth	4.4
Catfish	4.4

TRIP LOG

Date ____ / ____ Water temp ____°F Wind _____

TIME	SPOT / DEPTH	BAIT	FISH	LENGTH	KEPT

MEASURE IT

Print at 100% and this ruler is true to size

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 inches

CAUGHT ONE? POST IT.

Scan with your phone camera to open the Kegonsa board. Post your catch and the water temp. Your spot stays hidden unless you choose to share it.

lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

5 invasive species here. Remove plants and animals, drain all water, never move live fish or bait.

EATING ADVICE

Health advice, not a catch limit. Do not eat: crappies, largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, white bass, yellow perch. No more than 1 meal a month: bluegill, muskies, pumpkinseed, sheepshead, yellow bass. See the DNR fish consumption guide.

EMERGENCY

Call 911. Say "Lake Kegonsa, Dane County" and the nearest launch (Lake Kegonsa State Park Boat Access).

FISHING MORE THAN ONE DAY?
The Lake Kegonsa Report: where, when and how for each fish you pick, every day of your trip. $19.
lakesheet.com/reports

NEAREST BAIT SHOP FROM LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK BOAT ACCESS

HIGHWAY 51 LIQUOR AND BAIT

5714 US-51, McFarland, WI 53558 · (608) 838-1424

7.8 mi · about 17 min drive

1. Head northwest toward Park Rd
2. Slight right onto Park Rd (1.4 mi)
3. Turn left onto Door Creek Rd (2.5 mi)
4. Turn left onto County Hwy MN (1.7 mi)
5. Continue straight to stay on County Hwy MN (0.5 mi)
6. Continue onto Broadhead St (0.6 mi)
7. Then follow your phone's map.

Scan for directions

1. **This lake's rules** for every fish, from the DNR
2. **What the lake is best for,** rated by fish
3. **Trip log** and a true-size **ruler**
4. **Invasive species** and eating advice
5. **Nearest bait shop** we know of, with turn-by-turn directions
6. Scan to post your catch

lakesheet.com

Find your lake, print it, take it in the boat

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is built to be carried in a vest pocket and used. Read Chapter 1 once so you can tell a brook trout from a brown and a rainbow. After that, jump to the month you're fishing in Chapter 3, pick a stream in Chapter 2, and use Chapter 6 to decide where to stand and where to cast when you get there.

IF YOU HAVE ONE EVENING

1. Find a stream near you in Chapter 2 (the DNR's "easy" list is in 2.7).
2. Check its rule color in Chapter 8 and buy your trout stamp.
3. Rig the worm drift or the spinner from Chapter 5.
4. Walk upstream, fish every riffle, run and pool (Chapter 6).

IF YOU'RE NEW TO TROUT

1. Chapter 1: what you're after.
2. Chapter 4: buy the budget kit.
3. Chapter 5: learn the worm drift and the spinner first.
4. Chapter 10: the questions everyone asks.

STREAMS ARE NOT LAKE SHEET LAKES

Lake Sheet makes a free sheet for every Wisconsin **lake**. It does not cover rivers or streams. The stream facts in this book come from the Wisconsin DNR's trout regulations, stream classifications and survey reports, not from Lake Sheet. Lake Sheet comes in where trout live in lakes: two-story lakes, spring ponds and stocked trout lakes (Chapter 7), and for the lakes near the streams you fish.

The QR codes. Most lakes named in this book have a code. Scan it with your phone camera to open that lake's free Lake Sheet: depth map, best times, wind, launches, the nearest bait shop and the lake's own rules.

The rules. Wisconsin changed its trout rules for 2026: streams now open on the first Saturday in April, and each stream has a color category. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season. Seasons and limits change every April 1, so check the current DNR trout guide before you keep a fish.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE TROUT

Three kinds of trout live in Wisconsin streams: the native brook trout, the brown trout brought over from Europe, and the rainbow trout from the Pacific coast. They look alike at a glance, but they live differently, spawn at different times, feed differently and fall under different rules on many streams. Knowing which one is on the end of your line is the first skill in trout fishing.

1.1 The brook trout · **1.2** The brown trout · **1.3** The rainbow trout · **1.4** Telling them apart · **1.5** Size, age and records · **1.6** Spawning · **1.7** What trout eat · **1.8** Cold water and how trout live

1.1
THE BROOK TROUT

BROOK TROUT

Salvelinus fontinalis



TELL IT BY	Wormlike light markings on a dark olive back and dorsal fin, red spots with blue halos on the sides, and lower fins edged in white with a black stripe behind it. Square tail.
LOOKS LIKE	Brown trout (dark spots on a light body, no white fin edges) and rainbow trout (pink stripe, small black spots all over the tail).
NATIVE?	Yes. The only stream trout native to Wisconsin. Browns and rainbows were brought in.
SIZE	5–7 inches in small headwater creeks; 16 inches or more is possible in bigger streams, spring ponds and lakes, but rare.
WISCONSIN RECORD	Inland: 9 lb 15 oz, John Mixis, Prairie River, Lincoln County, Sept. 2, 1944. Live-release record (inland): 19.5 in, Glen Lake, St. Croix County, Jan. 11, 2026.
EATS	Mostly insects: mayflies, caddisflies, stoneflies and midges in all stages, plus ants, beetles and hoppers that fall in, and small fish and crayfish when it's bigger.

The brook trout is the only stream trout native to Wisconsin. It isn't a true trout at all but a **char**, a cousin of the lake trout. Char like colder water than true trout: the DNR's trout plan gives an optimal range of about 50 to 57°F for char and about 57 to 64°F for trout and salmon. Among the char, though, brook trout are the most tolerant of warmer water.

Brook trout are the fish of small, cold headwater creeks, spring ponds and northern streams. In much of the Driftless Area they were almost wiped out

by the early 1900s, when erosion from hillside farming buried streams in silt. They have come back in many valleys, and the DNR now names **Brook Trout Reserves**: cold streams it expects to stay cold enough for brook trout as the climate warms. The DNR's trout guide warns that two of every three streams brook trout live in now could be too warm for them in 30 years.

> **OLD NAMES**
> Speckled trout, brookie, speck. A brook trout that lives in Lake Superior and runs up its streams is called a **coaster**.

1.2 THE BROWN TROUT

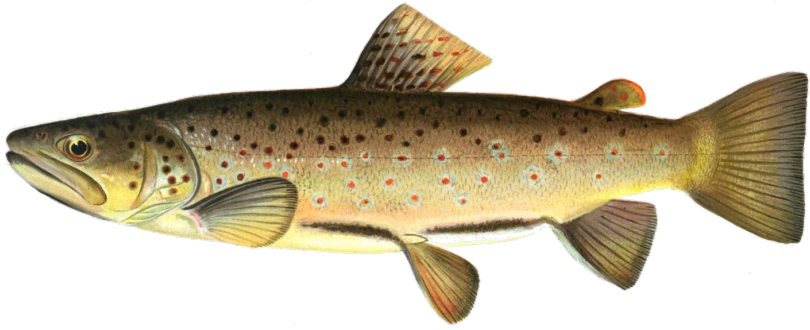

FIG 1.1 Brown trout. Black and red spots, often with pale halos, on a golden-brown body; few or no spots on the tail. Sherman Foote Denton, 1896.

The brown trout is native to Europe and western Asia. It was brought to North America in 1883 and has since been stocked in streams across the country. In Wisconsin it has gone wild ("naturalized") in many streams, and in many Driftless creeks it is now the most common trout. A 2024 DNR survey of Timber Coulee Creek in Vernon County counted an average of 2,587 brown trout per mile (Chapter 2).

Browns are the hardest of the three to fool. They are wary and easily spooked, and big ones turn to eating fish and feed mostly in low light and at night. They also live longer: browns as old as 9 years have turned up in Driftless streams, against 6 for brook trout.

1.3
THE RAINBOW TROUT



FIG 1.2 **Rainbow trout.** A pink to red band along the side and small black spots all over the back, fins and tail. Sherman Foote Denton, 1896.

Rainbows come from the Pacific coast, where they spawn in spring. Wisconsin stocks them in many streams and lakes, but the DNR says wild, self-sustaining rainbow populations are **uncommon** in Wisconsin streams. Spring and summer floods wash out their young, which hatch later than browns and brookies, and browns outcompete them. Most wild rainbows in Wisconsin are lake-run fish in Lake Superior tributaries. A rainbow that lives in a Great Lake and runs up rivers to spawn is a **steelhead**; those are covered in the Lake Michigan Salmon & Trout Guide.

So if you catch a rainbow in a Wisconsin stream, it was probably stocked. Rainbows are the trout of stocked ponds, two-story lakes and kids' fishing ponds (Chapter 7).

1.4
TELLING THEM APART

	BROOK TROUT	BROWN TROUT	RAINBOW TROUT
Back	Dark olive with light **wormlike markings**	Golden brown to olive, dark spots	Greenish or bluish, small black spots
Side spots	Light spots and **red spots with blue halos**	**Black and red spots**, often with pale halos	Small **black** spots; a **pink to red band**

Lower fins	Red-orange with a **white front edge** and black stripe	Plain, yellowish to brown	Plain, often pinkish
Tail	Square, few spots	Square, few or no spots	**Spotted all over** in rows
Native to Wisconsin?	Yes	No (Europe)	No (Pacific coast)
Spawns	Fall	Fall	Spring

ID marks from the DNR's trout guide and its 2008 brook and brown trout leaflets. Colors change with the stream, the season and the fish's size; spawning males darken and grow a hooked jaw called a kype.

Hybrids. A cross of a brook trout and a brown is a **tiger trout**, with bold wormlike markings over the whole body. A lake trout crossed with a brook trout is a **splake**. Both are rare in streams.

QUICK CHECKS STREAMSIDE

- White-edged lower fins: brook trout.
- Spotted tail: rainbow.
- Black and red spots, plain tail: brown.

DON'T

- Squeeze a fish to look it over. Wet your hand and hold it loosely.
- Keep a fish to "check later." On brook-trout-release streams, every brookie goes back right away.

1.5

SIZE, AGE AND RECORDS

Trout size depends on the water. The DNR's trout plan gives these typical sizes:

	SMALL HEADWATER CREEK	BIGGER STREAM, SPRING POND OR LAKE
Brook trout	5–7 inches	16 inches or more is possible, but uncommon
Brown trout	10–12 inches	18–24 inches or more is possible, but uncommon

Typical life span (small streams)	Brook trout: to age 3	Brown trout: to age 4

Wisconsin records (inland waters). Notice where the biggest fish came from: the brown and rainbow records came from lakes; the brook trout record came from a river.

FISH	HOOK AND LINE RECORD	LIVE-RELEASE RECORD (LENGTH)
Brook trout	9 lb 15 oz, John Mixis, Prairie River, Lincoln Co., Sept. 2, 1944	19.5 in, Sean Helling, Glen Lake, St. Croix Co., Jan. 11, 2026
Brown trout	18 lb 6 oz, 34.3 in, Perry McKittrick, Lake Geneva, Walworth Co., May 7, 1984	31.5 in, Jason Kline, Lake Geneva, Walworth Co., Sept. 23, 2023
Rainbow trout	12 lb 3 oz, 29.5 in, Will Lusthoff, Elbow Lake, Marinette Co., June 15, 2006	24.0 in, Andrew Downer, Ottawa Lake, Waukesha Co., Sept. 6, 2025
Tiger trout	2 lb 1 oz, 16.0 in, Scott Erickson, private pond, Racine Co., April 9, 2018	—

Wisconsin DNR Record Fish List, revised September 2026. Great Lakes ("outlying water") records are separate and much bigger.

1.6 SPAWNING

Brook and brown trout spawn in the fall. In Wisconsin, spawning usually starts in early October and ends in December, with the peak around mid-November. The stream harvest season closes October 15, before most spawning starts.

- **Where:** in gravel, usually at the tail of a pool or in a riffle where water flows down through the stones. Brook trout seek out spots where groundwater wells up through the bottom, and they can even spawn on the bottom of spring ponds.
- **How:** the female digs a nest called a **redd** by fanning gravel with her tail, lays her eggs, and covers them. Clean, oxygen-rich water flowing through the gravel keeps them alive; silt smothers them.
- **How many eggs:** an average female brook trout lays 300 to 400, from under 100 for a 5-inch fish to about 1,200 for a 14-inch fish. Brown trout

in central and northern Wisconsin lay from about 285 eggs (8-inch females) to 2,714 (20-inch females).

- **When they hatch:** fry come up out of the gravel from January to May. In good habitat 80 to 90% of eggs survive to hatch.

Rainbow trout spawn in spring, and their fry don't come out until about June, right when summer floods hit. That's a big reason wild rainbows rarely take hold in Wisconsin streams.

DON'T WALK ON REDDS

In fall and early spring, look for clean, light-colored ovals of gravel in shallow riffles and pool tails. Those are redds. Step around them, and don't fish to trout sitting on them. One boot can crush hundreds of eggs.

1.7

WHAT TROUT EAT

Stream trout eat whatever the current brings them, and that is mostly insects. These are general patterns anglers use:

FOOD	WHAT IT IS	WHEN IT MATTERS	WHAT IMITATES IT
Nymphs and larvae	Mayfly, caddis, stonefly and midge young living under rocks	All year; most of a trout's food	Nymph flies, a drifted worm
Hatching insects	Nymphs swimming up and adults on the surface	Spring through fall, often afternoons and evenings	Dry flies, emergers
Land insects	Ants, beetles, grasshoppers, crickets that fall in	July to September	Hopper and ant flies
Small fish	Sculpins, dace, minnows, small trout	All year, more as trout grow	Streamers, small spinners and crankbaits
Crayfish and worms	Washed in by rain and high water	After a rain	Worms, crayfish-colored streamers

A brown trout over about 14 inches eats more fish and crayfish and less of the small stuff. That's why streamers and minnow-shaped lures catch the big ones.

1.8

COLD WATER AND HOW TROUT LIVE

Trout need cold, clean water with plenty of oxygen. The DNR's trout plan reports that the warmest Wisconsin and Michigan streams where brook or brown trout were found had a three-day average of about 75.5°F, and that trout can't stand long stretches near 70°F. Optimal growth comes at roughly 50 to 61°F.

Groundwater is everything. In the Driftless Area, rain soaks into the ridges and comes out as springs in the valley bottoms at about 50°F all year. That spring water keeps streams cool in August and keeps them open and ice-free in January. Most Wisconsin trout water is wherever cold groundwater feeds a stream.

Trout hold, they don't wander. As trout grow, each fish claims a spot where the current brings food and where it can hide: behind a rock, under a bank, in the head of a pool. The best spot in a pool goes to the biggest fish. In winter they gather in deeper, slower water, often near springs. That habit is why reading water (Chapter 6) works: find the spots and you find the trout.

REMEMBER

- Cold, clean, spring-fed water = trout.
- Trout face upstream, waiting for food.
- Big fish take the best spots and feed most in low light.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Fishing warm water in August. If the stream is over about 70°F, go somewhere colder or go home.
- Calling every spotted fish a brown. Check the fins and tail.
- Walking through spawning gravel in fall.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE TROUT LIVE IN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin has more than 13,000 miles of trout streams, and the DNR classifies every one of them. They aren't spread evenly: they bunch up wherever cold groundwater feeds the streams. This chapter takes you region by region, names the streams worth a trip, and shows you how to find trout water near home.

2.1 Class 1, 2 and 3 · **2.2** The Driftless Area · **2.3** The Central Sands · **2.4** The Northwoods and Lake Superior · **2.5** The southeast · **2.6** Famous streams and their rules · **2.7** The DNR's "easy" list · **2.8** Stocking · **2.9** Finding trout water near you

2.1
CLASS 1, 2 AND 3

The DNR sorts trout streams into three classes by how well trout reproduce there.

CLASS	WHAT IT MEANS	MILES	SHARE
Class 1	High-quality water with enough natural reproduction to keep wild trout at or near what the stream can hold. **Not stocked as a rule.**	5,365	40%
Class 2	Some natural reproduction, but not enough to use all the food and space. **Stocked** to keep a good fishery. Trout survive and carry over; some grow bigger than average.	6,120	46%
Class 3	Marginal water with **no natural reproduction**. Stocked every year; usually no carryover from one year to the next.	1,786	14%

DNR trout stream classification page, checked October 2026. The DNR's stream map page counts 2,983 trout streams over 13,779 miles, up from 2,677 streams and 9,562 miles in 1980.

What the class means for you. Class 1 streams hold wild fish that are wary and often small in headwaters, but there are a lot of them. Class 2 streams mix wild and stocked fish and often have some bigger trout. Class 3 streams fish best soon after stocking in spring. The class doesn't set the rules; the color category does (Chapter 8).

2.2
THE DRIFTLESS AREA