



Roe Jan Brown-released to fight another day.

## Trout Fishing in Hillsdale

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Trout are our canaries in a coalmine. They are an excellent indicator of stream health, requiring clean, cold, well-oxygenated water to thrive. Without very high quality surface waters, trout just cannot survive. Hillsdale is fortunate to have several miles of trout streams including the Roeliff Jansen Kill, Taconic Creek, Agawamuck Creek and Green River with numerous smaller and unnamed tributaries contributing to them.

Our streams and their residents endure many perils including natural flood and drought cycles as well as man made impacts like pollution, invasive species, barriers and over-fishing. Erosion adds silt that smothers aquatic food sources and gravel spawning beds. Introduced Didymo algae (a.k.a. 'Rock Snot') now found in the Green River, also chokes the streambed. Loss of vegetation exposes water to heating and eliminates important breeding, feeding and cover areas for trout. Readers may recall the massive fish kill that resulted from the release of manure into the Roe Jan in the 90's or tales of unscrupulous 'sportsmen' using small explosives and chlorine to kill all the fish in a segment of stream. Maybe the most harmful and insidious are non-point sources of pollution such as chemicals, fertilizers and heated runoff from parking lots, roads, roofs, crop fields and lawns.

In 2009 and 2010, members of the community with help from the Columbia-Greene chapter of Trout Unlimited and the N.Y.S.D.E.C. Trees for Tributaries program planted several hundred small trees and shrubs on the banks and flood plain of the Roe Jan Kill through the Roe Jan Park in an effort to stabilize banks, introduce vegetative cover and provide shade to maintain cool stream temperatures. The plantings were quite successful and have already begun to knit together the soils that restrain the stream and will someday shade it again.

The past few years have been encouraging to again find Brook Trout in the Roe Jan alongside the more populous Brown Trout. 'Brookies' are the only trout native to our streams and even more sensitive to water degradation than the introduced Brown Trout which were brought to American waters from Europe in the late 1800's and have become naturalized in our streams. The D.E.C. formerly stocked Brown and Rainbow Trout (a western U.S. native) in town, but has not stocked the Roe Jan above the dam at Taconic Shores in Copake for a few decades. Subsequently, the upper Roe Jan's fish are primarily stream born and constitute a technically wild fishery. This is an invaluable resource worth conserving.

Fishery conservation requires 'stream sense'. Current general regulations (a license is required- see [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/31421.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/31421.html)) allow keeping 5 trout per day of any size. Imagine if every angler killed 5 trout per day! Don't target trout when water temperatures exceed 70° f. as stress and low oxygen levels will likely kill the fish after even a brief struggle on the line. Don't 'overplay' and exhaust a fish. Practice 'Catch & Release'; use barbless hooks or crush the barb flat with pliers so it's easier to remove without injury. Use alternatives to worms and other bait which fish tend to swallow deeply, making hook removal perilous. If hooked deeply, cut the line close and leave the hook in place to dissolve. Handle fish carefully; leave them in the water if possible but if you must grab them wet your hands to avoid wiping off the protective slime on their scales and never squeeze them or stick fingers in their gills. Revive trout before releasing by holding it gently in the water facing the current until it can swim on it's own. Practice good stream hygiene to prevent the spread of invasives like zebra mussel and didymo.

Limit your kill-Don't kill your limit. Instead, take a picture; the memory and satisfaction last much longer.



Trees For Tributaries planting day, 2009