

East Branch of the Delaware

The East Branch of the Delaware is one of the two main branches that combine to form the Delaware River. The East branch is approximately 75 miles long from its source to its confluence with the West Branch in Hancock, New York. From its source in Grand Gorge, NY the East Branch winds its way through the western edge of the Catskill Mountains draining an area of around 371 square miles.

In 1955 Pepacton Reservoir was completed on the East Branch. This is New York City's largest Reservoir at 5,763 acres and with the capacity to hold 140.2 billion gallons of water. Since this reservoir was completed the cold water releases from it, which average around 40 degrees, have created a perfect habitat for Trout and the Insects that they feed on.

The area of most interest to the visiting angler is the section that begins at the spillway of the dam in Downsville, NY and runs to the confluence with the West Branch in Hancock, NY. This section of river is roughly 33 miles long and over its course contains some of the most varying water types found in the region.

The first section, from Downsville down to the town of East Branch is approximately 16 miles. This area receives the most influence from the icy Tailwater releases from Pepacton Reservoir. Visiting anglers are sometimes surprised to find a river that far more resembles a classic spring creek than a modern day tailwater type river.

Throughout this section the East meanders through a beautiful valley whose terrain varies from steep forested slopes of hemlock to fields tilled for corn and other farm crops.

Anglers will find a river here that averages 75 to 150 feet wide and is flat throughout most of its course. In this section there is very little riffle water, and pocket type water is not present. Instead the river is a series of slow runs and short riffles that dump into even slower deep pools.

The bottom throughout this section is made up of mostly small gravel and silt in the runs while some of the deeper pools are filled with large boulders and ledge rock. Aquatic vegetation is present throughout most of this section. For most of the year the Upper East is subject to low gentle flows and is generally a wader friendly section of river.

The waters of this section are home to Wild Brook Trout, Wild and Stocked Brown Trout and the occasional Wild Rainbow Trout. Brown Trout however are the most dominant fish in this section by a huge margin. Anglers will find most of the fish here to fall in the 12" to 14" range but 18" fish are very common. This area is also known to produce some truly Huge Brown Trout and stories of encounters with these beasts are common from those who regularly fish during periods of high water and darkness.

Insect hatches in this section are excellent and anglers will find fishable hatches here from mid April through the summer months and right up until the season closes in mid October. All of the insects known to emerge on Catskill waters will be found on the tailwater section of the East Branch but some are true spectacles each year. These include the early season Hendrickson's and the giant Green and Brown Drakes.

Overall this section of river is probably the most consistent river environment in the region as far as habitat goes. From the anglers point of view however this section is probably the most challenging. Anglers who fish this river know that patience accurate casting and a good knowledge of insects are a must. It is these reasons that seasoned anglers are drawn back here time and time again.

The Lower section of the East Branch extends from the town of East Branch to where it meets the West Branch in Hancock, NY. It is at the beginning of this section where the Beaverkill enters the East Branch and the river changes its character dramatically. In the lower section the river doubles in size. The river here is dominated by fast runs, riffles, pocket water and long deep pools that are more common in a steeper gradient freestone type river.

It is in this section where the East loses the cold water influence from Pepacton Reservoir. Fishing conditions on this section are dependant upon rainfall and cool weather and normally do not fish well during the summer months of July and August.

Anglers will find prolific insect hatches throughout the season on this section. The diversity in the water types supports heavy populations of Mayflies, Caddisflies and Stoneflies. Snowstorm like Caddis flights are common throughout the spring time on these waters.

Anglers will find a good mix of Brown and Rainbow Trout throughout this section. Most of these fish are wild as this section has not been stocked by the state in the last few years. Rainbow Trout are more numerous than the Browns in this section but the Browns that are here average larger than in other areas of the river. The Riffles and Pockets of the lower river are excellent habitat for Rainbows and its no wonder that they thrive here. Most Rainbows will average 12" or less but 15" and above fish are very common. These larger Delaware River Rainbows are built for speed and most will have you in your fly line backing in seconds while jumping all the way.

When to Fish

Trout fishing on the East Branch opens each year on April first. In the area from the Pepacton dam downstream to Hancock the seasons are split into 2 sections. The section from the Shinhopple Bridge upstream to the dam closes yearly on October 15 to protect spawning Trout. The section of river downstream of Shinhopple bridge stays open for fishing until November 30 but after October 15 all Trout fishing is Catch and Release only.

In about Mid April waters will start to warm to a point where both Trout and Insects will become active again. It is about this time each year that we get treated to a 10 week period where both Insect and Trout activity are in high gear. It is in this time period where we see intense insect hatching daily and our yearly visit from the larger Mayflies, including the Giant Sized Green Drakes!

Because of the constant cold water being released into the river the East has excellent summertime fishing in the upper section. Visiting anglers will be treated to very challenging match the hatch type dry fly fishing during the early morning and late afternoon hour's right through the summer months of July and August.

The beginning of September usually brings rainfall that raises the flows throughout the river. This combined with the cooler nights spur another period of high activity for both Trout and Insects. During this period all 33 miles of river below the dam will fish well. This Autumn season which lasts through November is one of the most beautiful times that an angler can wet their line in the Lower East Branch.

Our Autumn Foliage is second to none and the Fishing is Spectacular!

In Roscoe we have several great Fly Shops that can provide up to the minute conditions. All would love to talk fishing with you!

Baxter House River Outfitters (607)290-4022
Beaverkill Angler (607) 498-5194
Catskill Flies (607) 498- 6146
Dette's Trout Flies (607) 498- 4991

Fishing Access

To help explain river access it is best to split the East Branch into 2 sections.

The first section is from the Pepacton Dam in Downsville down stream to the town of East Branch. In this section anglers will find plenty of public access along route 30 which parallels the river for most of this stretch. There are many pull offs and public right of ways which access the river directly from route 30. In addition there is public parking at the Covered Bridge in Downsville, at the Corbett Bridge and at Al's Sport Shop in Shinhopple. All fishermen should remember to respect landowner rights and not cross private property to access the public stream rights.

The second section runs from the town of East Branch downstream to the town of Hancock. This is a big section of river with limited public access and large sections of posted property. There is parking in East Branch along old route 17 with walking access both up and downstream from there.

There is a DEC Parking area adjacent to the Fishes Eddy Bridge. There are also parking areas in both Cadosia and Hancock which offer wading access as well as Drift Boat / Canoe access. All fishermen should remember to respect landowner rights and not cross private property to access the public stream rights.

Additional Information

Trout fishing season on the East Branch is split into river sections.

From Pepacton Dam downstream to the Shinhopple Bridge April 1 to October 15.

From the Shinhopple Bridge downstream to the mouth at Hancock April 1 to November 30

Creel Limits- 2 Trout per day 12" minimum. After October 15 the remaining open water is Catch and Release fishing only.

General fishing regulations pertaining to tackle apply throughout this section.

Article contributed by: Baxter House River Outfitters