

Written by **Sara Mullins**
Photography by **Lance C. Bell**

Stalking Trophy Trout on the Savage River



Above: Ashleigh Huber, Biologist with the US Army Corps of Engineers holds a beautiful Brook Trout.

Top right: Alan Klotz, MD DNR Western Region Inland Fisheries Manager holds a 19" Brown Trout.

Bottom right: Close up of the beautiful coloration and markings on the Brook Trout.

The fish in these photos were alive and released.

“Wisp Resort was named an Orvis Endorsed Fly Fishing Guide Service of the Year, becoming one of 230 Orvis-endorsed operations in the United States and the only one in Western Maryland.”

IN A WORLD BESET BY NOISE, traffic and endless pressures, fly fishing can be a pleasant antidote to the stresses of modern life. There’s nothing quite like standing in a stream amidst scenic, natural surroundings to soothe jangled nerves. The act itself elicits a mental focus that can be Zen-like in nature. It’s human versus fish, a quest that goes back more than 10,000 years.

For a world-class fly-fishing experience, avid anglers need look no farther than Garrett County’s Savage River Trophy Trout Fishing Area. Featuring all wild fish (no stocking necessary), this section of the Savage River is home to wild brown trout, native brook trout and a few rainbow trout that have migrated from neighboring waterways. Surveys conducted in 2008 by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) indicated that adult trout densities were at “near record levels with an average of 1,376 adult trout per mile throughout the river.” That’s a lot of trout.

Two sections of the Savage River are included in this Area: the Tailwater section from the Savage River Reservoir Dam downstream to the Allegany Bridge, which is designated as fly fishing only; and the section from the Allegany Bridge to the mouth of the Savage River, where anglers can use lures with one hook and flies. The stretch is noteworthy for the clarity of the water, allowing dramatic views of underwater rocks and boulders. The shoreline features heavily forested hillsides of hardwoods and hemlocks along with thick stands of rhododendron and mountain azaleas.

Management of this section as a Trophy Trout Fishing Area began in 1987. Previously it had been a “put and take” stream stocked with hatchery rainbow trout, with a limit of five fish per day. But after a DNR survey of brook and wild brown trout indicated strong growth rates, the DNR began working with the Army Corps of Engineers and the Upper Potomac

Background photo of the “Tailwater Section” was once the location of the World’s Whitewater Championships.



P. J. Daley, Orvis-endorsed fly fishing guide, Wisp Resort, fishes the Savage.

River Commission, which manages the Savage River Dam, to implement guidelines for cold water releases to maintain optimum trout habitat. The strategy succeeded so well that stocking ceased and by 1991, the four-mile Tailwater section of the Savage River was transformed into a wild trophy trout fishery. In 2002, a trout population survey indicated about 150 brown trout (greater than 12 inches) per mile and 37 brook trout (greater than nine inches) per mile. The total of all wild adult trout was estimated at more than 1,000 per mile.

“The Savage River is unique in Maryland,” says Saul McCartney, Vice-President of the Youghiogheny Chapter of Trout Unlimited. “All tributaries have good levels of brook trout, and the river has the largest concentration in the state. It’s one of the premier fisheries in the Eastern region.”

Anglers near and far have taken note. McCartney says, “It’s amazing to see how many people come and where they come from, especially in May and June. There are license plates from all over.”

For more than 50 years, members of Trout Unlimited nationwide have “worked to conserve, protect and restore North America’s coldwater fisheries and their watersheds,” in accordance with the group’s mission. The Youghiogheny Chapter played a role in supporting the DNR’s efforts to create the Trophy Trout Fishing Area designation for the Savage River Tailwater area. Many of its members frequently fish the area and help with annual cleanup efforts. The group also funds an annual work grant at Garrett College to support a student assistant’s work with DNR stream monitoring and other tasks.

Alan Klotz, the Western Region Fisheries Manager for the DNR, has witnessed dramatic changes since he began working with the Trophy Trout project in 1988. “I saw the wild trout population grow from about 200 wild trout per mile to the present 1500 wild trout per mile during my career,” he says. Noting its success and reputation among anglers, he says, “In a story run by USA Today, the vice-president of the Orvis Company ranked the Savage River #7 in the Top 10 fishing areas in the United States for the amount of fish, the quality of the experience and the accessibility of the site.”

Orvis is a big name in fly fishing circles as a source of high-end equipment and instruction, including fly fishing schools and guide services. In 2007, Wisp Resort was named an Orvis Endorsed Fly Fishing Guide Service of the Year, becoming one of 230 Orvis-endorsed operations in the United States and the only one in Western Maryland.



Alan Klotz, DNR Western Region Fisheries Manager and Ashleigh Huber, US Army Corps of Engineers, do a close check on several of the trout; all were found to be healthy.

The designation is considered quite a coup in fly fishing circles. Scott McEnaney, Eastern Director for the Orvis endorsement program, says, “The Orvis Company recognizes our endorsed members as the best destinations in North America for providing exceptional sporting facilities and world-class customer service synonymous with the Orvis tradition.” He adds that a high quality resource is necessary for the Orvis endorsement. In the case of Wisp Resort, the Savage River Trophy Trout Fishing Area was a key element for the endorsement, along with other fly fishing opportunities on nearby waterways such as the Youghiogheny, North Branch of the Potomac and Casselman Rivers.

It’s open season at this world-class fishing area, so anglers can enjoy fly fishing in all seasons. In most cases, a current Maryland fishing license and a trout stamp are required. Specifics on licenses and fishing regulations can be found in the *2009 Maryland Fishing Guide* published by the Maryland DNR.

As previously mentioned, there are different requirements for each section of the Savage River Trophy Trout Area. In the section from the Savage River Dam to the Allegany Bridge, anglers are restricted to convention fly fishing tackle, with artificial flies and streamers. In the section from the Allegany Bridge to the mouth of the Savage River, anglers may use only artificial lures with a single hook and single hook point, including artificial flies. The minimum harvesting size requirement for brook trout is 12”, while 18” is the minimum for wild brown trout. The creel limit for brook and wild brown trout is 2 per day.

continued on next page



Prevention to Perfection

Complete Care
DENTISTRY

Dr. Vincent F. Fiorentino, DDS
21907 Westernport Rd. SW, Suite 2
McCoole, MD 21562

- Gentle Personalized Care
- Children & Adults Welcome
- Dental Emergencies
- Now Accepting New Patients
- My Dental Rewards Program

301.786.7340 • www.completecaredentistry.com

Trophy Trout continued from page 49

There is no size or catch limit for rainbow trout. Klotz notes that most anglers practice catch and release. To minimize injuries to fish, The *Maryland Fishing Guide* recommends the use of barbless hooks.

McCartney offers a word of caution: “The river is difficult to wade because of big rocks, a strong current and an uneven bottom. Plus the water is always cold.” The Savage River averages about 55 feet in width, with a moderate to steep gradient. For more solid footing, the DNR recommends studded rubber soled waders. Flows can vary depending on dam releases; so for current information, the DNR advises that anglers check the Internet site <http://waterdata.usgs.gov/md/nwis/current/?type=flow>, or call 410-962-7687 before planning a fishing trip. Good fishing flows range from 50 to 100 cubic feet per second.

To get to the Savage River Trophy Trout Area, take I-68 to Exit 22. Turn left onto Chestnut Ridge Road and continue to a stop sign. Turn left onto New Germany Road and travel about five miles. Turn left onto Big Run Road and travel to where it ends. Then turn right onto Savage River Road, continue around the Savage River Reservoir to the Savage River Tailwater below the dam.

You won't be sorry. “With more than 1,000 trout per mile, it doesn't get any better than that,” says Klotz. “The Savage is a really healthy stream and the habitat is terrific.”

Roger Sines
Construction, Inc.
Premier Log Home Builder for Over 30 Years



301-387-0506
www.rogersinesconstruction.com

P.O. Box 237, McHenry, MD 21541
MHBR #170 MHIC #5531 MASTER PLUMBER #17538

Garrettland, Inc.

- Real Estate Appraisals **301-334-9915**
- Property Management • Apartment Rentals




1000 Thayer Center, Oakland, Maryland 21550
Mon. - Fri. 8am - 5pm www.garrettland.com