

Brook Trout Restoration in Lake Superior

Isle Royale National Park, Michigan, is participating in several research and management activities aimed at the protection and restoration of native *coaster* brook trout. The coaster is a large and colorful form of lake dwelling brook trout that was once abundant in the near shore waters of Lake Superior and parts of the lower Great Lakes. In the early 1800s, the coaster provided a spectacular and cherished fishery, but overfishing and habitat loss reduced populations to the remnant stocks in isolated areas that exist today. Several small populations of coasters at Isle Royale may represent the last viable stocks in U.S. waters (a few small stocks also exist in Ontario).

Park staff have worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ashland, Wisconsin, to develop a consortium of Great Lakes fisheries

management agencies and private foundations to research and manage coaster brook trout. Cooperators include state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) agencies, Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Natural Resource agencies, and Trout Unlimited.

Initial projects at Isle Royale have focused on collecting data on the size of the wild populations and the biology and life cycle of the coaster brook trout. In addition, DNA analysis is being performed on tissue samples from Isle Royale and the region to determine the genetic relationship of coasters to stream resident brook trout. Preliminary results suggest that existing coaster populations are small and vulnerable and that genetic differences do exist.

Because coasters may spend part of the year in streams, Isle Royale took steps to severely restrict the harvest of brook trout in inland streams beginning in 1994. The park also requested the Michigan DNR to provide additional protection in Lake Superior waters, which led to a larger size limit beginning in 1996.

Finally, Isle Royale has provided logistical support and assistance to cooperators attempting to collect gametes from wild coasters in the park to establish a parent hatchery brood stock. This stock, to be made available to fisheries managers throughout Lake Superior, will be a key element in reintroducing and restoring coaster brook trout to much of its remaining Lake Superior habitat. For further information, contact Jack Oelfke (NPS) at 906-487-9080 or Lee Newman (USFWS) at 715-682-6185.