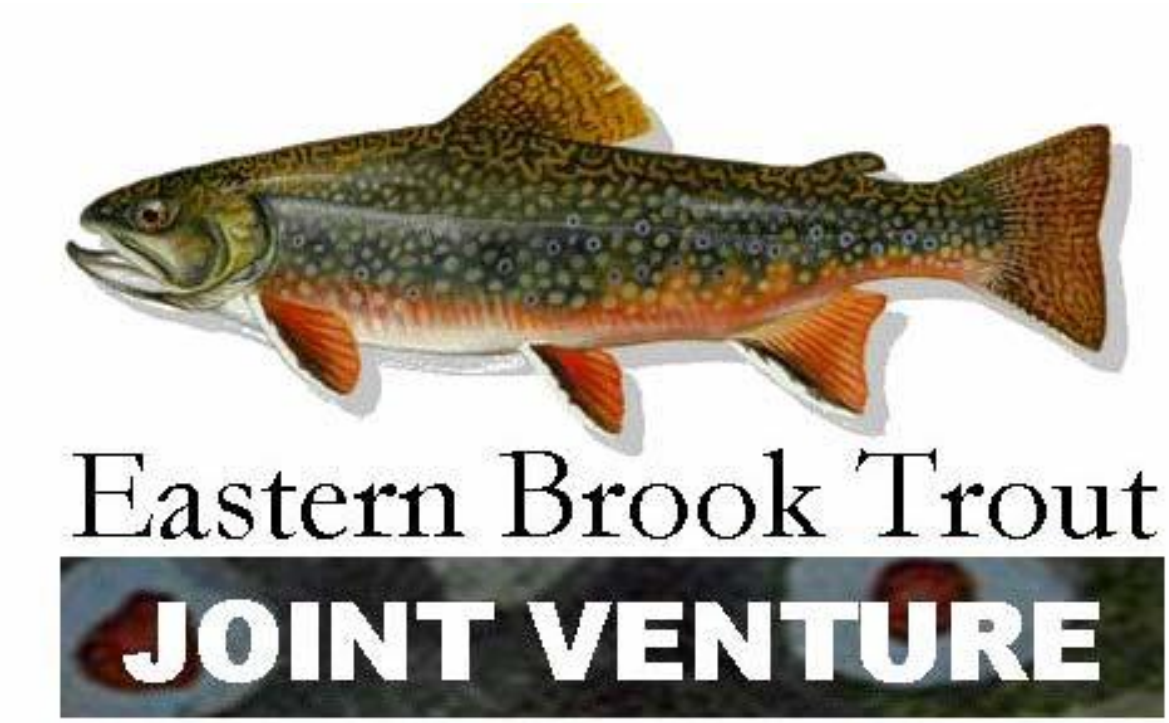
Conserving the Eastern Brook Trout: Action Strategies



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Executive Summary

Brook trout *Salvelinus fontinalis* are a recreationally and culturally important species, regional icon, and indicator of high water quality; however, populations are declining across their historic eastern United States range (Maine to Georgia). The Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (EBTJV) is a partnership of state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and academic institutions. This collaborative approach to brook trout management is justified because (1) brook trout are declining across their entire eastern range; (2) causes for these declines are similar; (3) an integrated approach would be cost effective; and, (4) watersheds of concern span state borders and state and federal jurisdictions.

In 2005, the EBTJV completed a range-wide assessment of brook trout populations throughout their native eastern United States range (Hudy et al. 2005). The study area encompassed approximately 25% of the native range of brook trout in North America and 70% of its native United States range. The assessment revealed wild brook trout populations in the eastern United States are impaired. Intact stream populations of brook trout, where wild brook trout occupy >90% of historical habitat, exist in only 5% of the watersheds assessed. Populations of stream-dwelling brook trout are greatly reduced or have been extirpated from nearly half of the watersheds in their native range. The vast majority of historically occupied large rivers no longer support self-reproducing populations of brook trout. Watersheds with intact populations of lake-dwelling brook trout are almost exclusively located in Maine, although some lakes and ponds in New York, New Hampshire, and Vermont still contain self-sustaining brook trout populations.

The EBTJV partners agreed that a broad-scale, range-wide conservation strategy is necessary to stop brook trout declines, improve technology transfer, and effectively prioritize funds and projects to restore this important species. This Conservation Strategy is a goal-oriented, science-based, action plan that explicitly states EBTJV principal goals, presents guidance for decision-making, and provides methods for evaluating success. Findings from the range-wide status and threats assessment serve as the foundation for the development of the vision, goals, objectives, strategies, procedures, and guidelines contained within the EBTJV Conservation Strategy. The EBTJV believes this structure will result in a focused, technically credible, publicly accountable program linking EBTJV projects to specific objectives so funding will be effectively utilized.

The vision of the EBTJV is to ensure "healthy, fishable brook trout populations throughout their historic eastern United States range." The principal goals of the EBTJV are: (1) conserve, enhance and restore brook trout populations that have been impacted by habitat modification, or other threats and disturbances; (2) encourage partnerships among management agencies and stakeholders to seek solutions to issues such as regional environmental and ecological threats; (3) develop and implement outreach and educational programs to ensure public awareness of the challenges that face brook trout populations; and (4) develop support for implementation of programs that perpetuate and restore brook trout throughout their historic range.

This report summarizes the range-wide, regional, and state-level goals, objectives, and strategies designed to achieve the overall principle goals of the EBTJV. This report also focuses on strategic planning to develop partnerships and secure funding to ensure the continuation of the EBTJV. In addition, individual state conservation strategies are presented, which demonstrate the commitment of all EBTJV partners and focus range-wide goals and objectives down to the state and local levels. Together, the components of this working document represent the framework necessary to begin the conservation of brook trout in the eastern United States.