



Southcentral PA's Autumn Trout Hotspots

by Robert L. Petri

One of the most closely guarded secrets among trout anglers has long been that some of the best fishing of the year is during autumn. As the nights grow cooler and daytime water temperatures remain for the most part in the trout's comfort range, the fish become more active. An ancient instinct in the trout's makeup advises him that the long Pennsylvania winter is just ahead and now is the time to fatten up in anticipation of the leaner days to come. The trout often feed at this time of year with an abandon uncharacteristic of any other season.



Long before the Commission instituted the fall stocking program on selected lakes and streams, autumn was my favorite time to fish. Many of the fish from the plantings of spring remained in the streams, and the relative solitude of autumn trout water combined with the vivid scenery of the season have often come together to bring me some of my best days on the water.

Every portion of the state has fine autumn trout fishing opportunities, but for variety and good fishing, it's hard to

beat the mixed farmland and rugged ridge setting of Pennsylvania's southcentral counties. Here are some of the best bets for the autumn angler in southcentral Pennsylvania.

Commission Area 7 Fisheries Manager Larry Jackson is responsible for the streams of the lower Susquehanna and Juniata drainage basins. He recommends that anglers in search of southcentral trout in autumn concentrate on the streams and lakes that are included in the Commission's fall stocking program as well as some of the smaller freestone



Cove Creek, Fulton County

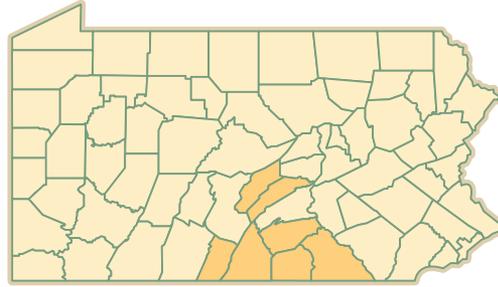
photo: Robert L. Petri

waters of the region where a good holdover of stocked fish from spring often combines with a decent wild trout population to make for worthwhile fishing. Southcentral Pennsylvania has no shortage of either of these water types.

Cumberland County

In Cumberland County, Jackson recommends several of the famous limestone streams that have made this area one of Pennsylvania's most popular trout fishing destinations.

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The fly angler can find good fishing in the Delayed-Harvest, Fly-Fishing-Only (DHFFO) project on **2** Green Spring Creek near Newville. The project on this small meadow limestone extends from the mouth upstream about one mile and receives a fall stocking of brown and rainbow trout.

Anglers looking for a mix of specially regulated and open water in a larger stream setting can do well on the **1** Yellow Breeches, both in the mile-long barbless-hook, artificials catch-and-release project on the stream at Allenberry and in the open water upstream. Even though the Breeches receives no autumn stocking, it holds fish well all summer. Its trout population is also augmented by supplemental stockings by area sportsmen's clubs.

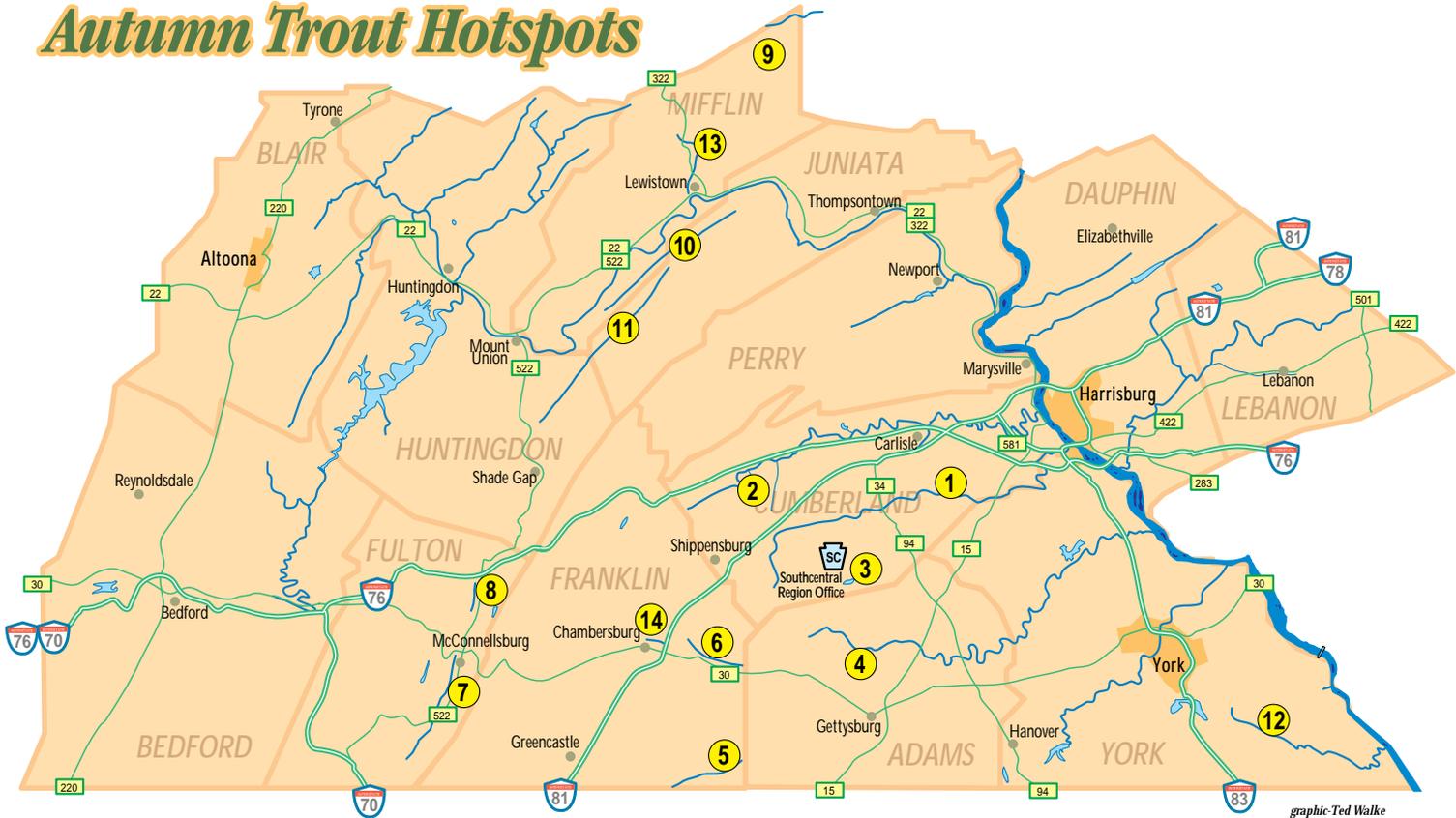
If a flatwater autumn trout fishing experience is your preference, Cumberland County has two lakes that benefit from the fall stocking program. **3** Laurel Lake in Pine Grove Furnace State Park in southern Cumberland County is a 27-acre impoundment on Mountain Creek that receives an autumn stocking of rainbow trout. The lake is managed by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), which provides an access area for launching canoes and shallow-draft boats powered with electric motors. Camping is available nearby at the state park. Mountain Creek within the confines of the state park also receives an autumn stocking of brook and brown trout.

Opossum Lake, about six miles northwest of Carlisle off PA Route 641, is a 59-acre impoundment on Opossum Creek and a very popular fishing destination. The lake is managed by the Fish & Boat Commission and is limited to electric motors. Opossum Lake receives a fall stocking of rainbow trout.

Adams County

Just to the west of Cumberland County, Adams County offers limited autumn trout fishing opportunities. According to Jackson, the best autumn bet in the area is the DHFFO project on **4** Conewago Creek. The project begins at the Route 34 bridge near Biglerville and continues upstream for about a mile. The project section receives an annual fall plant of brown and rainbow trout, and offers good fishing and pleasant scenery.

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graphic-Ted Walke

- 1 Yellow Breeches Creek, *Cumberland County*.
- 2 Green Spring Creek, *Cumberland County*.
- 3 Laurel Lake, *Cumberland County*.
- 4 Conewago Creek, *Adams County*.
- 5 East Branch Antietam Creek, *Franklin County*.
- 6 Conococheague Creek, *Franklin County*.
- 7 Cove Creek, *Fulton County*.
- 8 Cowans Gap Lake, *Fulton County*.
- 9 Havice, Treaster Runs, Upper Honey Creek, *Mifflin County*.
- 10 East Licking Creek, *Mifflin/Juniata Counties*.
- 11 Blacklog Creek, *Juniata County*.
- 12 Muddy Creek, *York County*.
- 13 Kishacoquillas Creek, *Mifflin County*.
- 14 Lower Falling Spring Branch, *Franklin County*.

Franklin County

In Franklin County, the available autumn trout fishing picks up considerably with two Delayed-Harvest projects, one open stream section and a lake all receiving fall stockings. A 1.1-mile-long section of the famous 14 Falling Spring Branch at Chambersburg is managed under Delayed-Harvest, Artificial-Lures-Only (DHALO) regulations. Extending from Walker Road downstream to Fifth Avenue in Chambersburg, this project on this classic limestone spring creek flows through a residential area and offers excellent autumn fishing.

In extreme southern Franklin County, another limestone stream, the 5 East Branch of Antietam Creek, has a one-mile section on the eastern edge of the city of Waynesboro managed as a DHFFO project. The project begins at the PA Route 16 bridge and extends down to Township Road 365. Restrictive regs and a fall stocking of brown and rainbow trout make this a productive destination for the autumn angler.

Conococheague Creek 6 in Caledonia State Park off U.S. Route 30 about 12 miles east of Chambersburg is a moderate-size freestone stream managed under open regulations. It is popular and heavily stocked with brook trout, including an autumn stocking.

Letterkenny Reservoir is a 54-acre impoundment managed by the Fish & Boat Commission. An access area is provided, with all craft limited to electric motors. The reservoir receives a fall stocking of rainbow trout. The reservoir is located near the village of Roxbury off PA Route 641 about 10 miles northwest of Shippensburg.

Juniata, Mifflin counties

Good autumn trout fishing can also be found in Juniata and Mifflin counties, along the northern edge of the southcentral region. For 1999, a new DHALO project has been established on the forested upper reaches of ⑩ East Licking Creek in Tuscarora State Forest a few miles east of Mifflintown. The project section begins at the Karl B. Guss State Forest Picnic Area and extends upstream for four miles. The lower reaches of the project are in Juniata County and the extreme upper reaches are in Mifflin County.

East Licking Creek in the project section is a small freestone waterway with some deep pools and undercut banks. In addition to a fall stocking of brook and brown trout, this section of the stream is also home to a fair population of wild brook and brown trout.

Access to the East Licking Creek drainage is by way of East Licking Creek Drive, which leaves PA Route 35 just west of Mifflintown.

Anglers looking for autumn trout in Juniata and Mifflin counties might also want to consider the small freestone tributaries in the Honey Creek watershed near Reedsville. These streams, ⑨ Havice Run, Treaster Run, and Upper Honey Creek, all have stocked sections that flow through state forest lands. Even though none receives autumn stockings of trout, all remain relatively cool throughout the summer, helping to encourage holdover of spring-stocked trout. All are also home to modest populations of wild brook trout and a few wild browns as well. Access to these small streams is by way of LR 1002, which travels east out of Reedsville.

Fulton County

On the western edge of the southcentral region, Fulton County offers some good fall trout fishing. Larry Jackson recommends that anglers sample the new DHALO project on ⑦ Cove Creek near the village of Big Cove Tannery off U.S. Route 522 a few miles south of McConnellsburg. The project begins a few hundred yards below the PA Route 928 bridge and extends downstream for about one mile to the lower boundary of Buchanan State Forest. The project water receives an autumn stocking of brown and rainbow trout.

Cove Creek in this section is a medium-size stream with good water quality and cool temperatures, thanks to an abundance of small spring tributaries. Fisheries Manager Jackson cites Esther Run, a small limestone stream that enters Cove Creek in the project section, as contributing a shot of cold, fertile water to the main stem.

For the lake angler, Fulton County offers ⑧ Cowans Gap Lake, a 42-acre impoundment located in Cowans Gap State Park. The lake is managed by DCNR. There is a DCNR-maintained access area here where small watercraft can be

launched. Propulsion is limited to electric motors. As water temperatures cool in the fall, Cowans Gap Lake receives an autumn stocking of rainbow trout. Access to the lake is by way of U.S. Route 30 at the top of Tuscarora Mountain.

Other good spots

There are many other waterways in southcentral Pennsylvania worth some of your autumn angling time. The two-mile-long DHFFO project on Muddy Creek near Bridgeton in southern York County is a pleasant, medium-size stream that receives an autumn stocking of brown and rainbow trout in the project section. The upper section of Blacklog Creek in Juniata County does not receive an autumn stocking, but local anglers claim that the stocked fish from spring hold over well and the area is isolated and scenic: The stream carves its valley flanked by Blacklog Mountain to the west and Shade Mountain to the east. Access is along Blacklog Creek Road off of U.S. Route 522 near the village of Orbisonia. The stocked sections of Kishacoquillas Creek along Route 322 near Yeagertown in Mifflin County hold good numbers of holdover browns in a tumbling limestone stream setting.

Fishing tactics

Wherever you decide to sample the autumn trout angling in southcentral Pennsylvania, the same basic rules of approach and angling techniques that served you well earlier in the season still apply. On freestone streams such as Conewago Creek, East Licking Creek, and Blacklog Creek, your approach to the stream in the typically low flows of autumn can be almost as important as your choice of bait, lure, or fly. Even newly stocked trout quickly learn to flee at an unnatural shadow or movement on the bank. So use streamside cover to mask your approach and wear earth-toned clothing.

A careful approach is a little less critical on the limestone flows of such streams as the East Branch of Antietam Creek and the lower Falling Spring Branch. However, limestone trout can become notoriously picky, and on these waters, accurate presentations become more important. Get your offering as close as you can to the place where you think the trout are holding and try to make a drag-free presentation.

On streams where bait angling is permitted, small red worms fished on small hooks and a light line can be deadly. Also, remember that at least until the first hard freeze, grasshoppers and crickets will be abundant, especially along the streams that flow at least in part through open terrain. These insects make excellent bait for autumn trout when fished on a light-wire hook and allowed to drift near the stream banks where the trout are used to seeing them. Use the lightest monofilament you can get away with. Four-pound test is usually about right. □



photo: Robert L. Peiri