

A photograph of a fisherman in camouflage gear and a cap, standing in a stream with a waterfall. The water is turbulent, and there are large rocks and snow in the foreground. The background shows a larger body of water with some trees and a boat.

Southeast's Special Regulation

Trout Waters

by Vic Attardo
photos by the author



I've been stomping around the southeast's trout waters for as long as I have held a rod and though I have my favorites, every one of the special regulation waters enthalls me with its character and spirit. The five streams I'm citing here have a uniqueness that makes them special to me.

Whether you're fishing in late-fall, or winter, or even next spring, the special regulation trout waters in the southeast corner of the state offer a variety of habitat and good numbers of fish.

Throughout the southeast, an angler can find limestone creeks and small to large freestone flows in both urban and rural settings.

You can work streams harboring only wild trout, while others have both wild and stocked fish, and still others solely with the hatchery-raised breeds.

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Saucon Creek

For anglers seeking the challenge of catching strong and tough-to-fool wild brown trout there is Saucon Creek in Northampton County. Saucon Creek offers over two miles of Trophy Trout water that runs the gamut from a rural woodland setting to a channelized park. There are parts of Saucon Creek that are anything but rustic—particularly under the I-78 overpass and the Bethlehem park—but there are other sections with a rich, pastoral feel.

Fed by springs near Hellertown, Saucon Creek flows into the Lehigh River at Bethlehem. For the most part, the special regulation area of Saucon Creek is not deep water. Walking its length you won't cover your hip boots, except during unusually high and unfishable flows. But Saucon Creek is full of short riffles and curving pools where its wild browns hang in the darkest water and are frequently looking for an easy meal.

Saucon Creek is an excellent off-hatch nymphing stream. I do well with tiny tandem rigged beadheads imitating caddis and generic mayfly nymphs. After a heavy rain, the stream quickly turns off-color and if the flow is not outrageous, this is my favorite time to drift a weighted Woolly Bugger along the banks.

You can enter the stream in Hellertown and work down the creek or start at the Bethlehem park and work upstream.

Tulpehocken Creek

Though it's located in the industrial city of Reading, Tulpehocken Creek is an oasis of municipal park land and excellent trout fishing.

The entire Tulpehocken Creek downstream from Blue Marsh Dam to the mouth of the Schuylkill River is open year-round to trout fishing. A 3.8 mile section from just downstream of the dam to the covered bridge adjacent to a municipal park is listed under Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only regulations, which has no closed season but carries seasonal creel limits; the "bottom section" of Tulpe-

hocken Creek, from the covered bridge to the Schuylkill River, is approved trout waters open to year-round fishing but with a series of seasonal creel limits and a catch and release period between March 1 and the opening day of trout season.

Aside from knowing the rules, it's important to understand that Tulpehocken Creek is big water and it often flows strong and hard. It might be the widest and average the deepest of any of the southeast special regulation flows. Anglers must frequently work its sidelines because of the burly water in its channels.

Fly fishermen take on a true challenge when fishing Tulpehocken Creek. It's a stream of many hatches and other than springtime, midges often dominate. While I enjoy midging and drifting caddis on the Tulpehocken Creek, I love to toss streamers into this strong flow. In fact, I concocted my Tar's Heavy Metal Minnow (HMM) for its deep braided water.

The HMM is a simple Woolly Bugger type tie made with metallic chenille, a grizzly hackle and marabou tail, however for the frequently green waters of the off-season Tulpehocken, my colors consist of gold metallic chenille and barred olive marabou with strands of pearl Krystal Flash. Be sure to widen the head with underwraps of lead for a broader profile. It takes a certain craftiness to consistently catch Tulpehocken trout.

The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission has stopped stocking fingerling trout in Tulpehocken Creek and has returned to planting adult trout. In a stream survey, anglers proclaimed they caught more fish with this type of stocking.

Little Lehigh Creek

There's no more popular stream in the southeast than Little Lehigh Creek. In the "Queen City" of Allentown, as well as throughout the region, the Little Lehigh is king. Barely a day goes by—winter, spring, summer or fall, sunshine bright or snowstorm white—that a horde of anglers aren't fishing this stream.

There are two special regulation sections on the Little Lehigh. The first, and by far the most popular, is a one mile Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only zone from the bridge on Fish Hatchery Road in the Lehigh Parkway downstream to near the 24th Street bridge. This section contains the famous "Hatchery Pool" that is so unnaturally full of trout that it sometimes seems the fish could constitute a foot bridge from bank to bank.

But just because there are tons of fish in this stretch doesn't mean that fishing is easy. The trout here become as selective as old dogs and often will only eat exacting copies of their current menu. A case in point is when Little Lehigh trout go after Tricos in the summer or midges when there are no other hatches. However, tiny midge pupa patterns are a real favorite with Little Lehigh anglers. Tie a size

20 with some copper wire or dark thread as a body with a fluffy thorax of beaver, muskrat or mink or a combination of all three, and you'll go to town in Allentown.

A second special regulation section is nearly two miles in length and runs from Wild Cherry Lane downstream to Millrace Road. In the upper limits of this stretch, you can literally jump across the Little Lehigh but then more springs enter the stream and to get across you'd need a boat—the shores have not only stretched, the water has gotten very deep.

The number of trout in this longer Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only zone is not as great as the Hatchery Pool. These trout can be an even greater challenge to trick, particularly in the deep waters bordered by rock cliffs on one side and a walkers' path on the other. This upper section has been my preferred area for years.

Little Schuylkill River

In some places you'll be fishing a narrow lane bordered by wild mountain laurel, tight as a back alley, in others you can stretch a fly line with a full-length forward cast drifting it over widely spaced rocks and riffles. The special regulation section of Little Schuylkill River is less than two miles long but it has enough characters for a full length novel.

If streams were given a Comeback Player of the Decade Award, the Little Schuylkill River would have received it in the 70s and 80s. Since then, the once coal-black bottom (which still has some blackness) remains on an even keel with a good selection of stocked trout.

At this time of year, approach the Little Schuylkill River with Baetis, size 18 and 20, and black midge patterns. In the spring, the river is great caddis water also with Hendrickson, Sulphur, Cahill and the Grey Fox—all a pleasant surprise considering its former water quality.

The special regulation section extends from the Rt. 895 bridge at New Ringgold upstream to a rural bridge on T-848, Rausch's Bridge. Don't neglect the upstream section where Cold Run enters the river, and be sure to try north in the Tamaqua area.

Valley Creek

When I fish Valley Creek and West Valley Creek, my mind drifts back to the Revolutionary War and the men and women who sacrificed so much to create this country. Then, I think of the pollution-causing greed that precipitated some of the special regulations in this watershed. Still, due to the presence of the Valley Forge National Historic Park, this is a semi-idyllic place to fish with a strong population of wild brown trout.

The watershed carries a combination of Catch and Release All Tackle regulations with special bait restriction imposed by the federal park and DH regulations on 1.2 miles of West Valley Creek. Be sure to fish around the covered bridge, it feels historic. ☐