

LAUREL HILL CREEK:

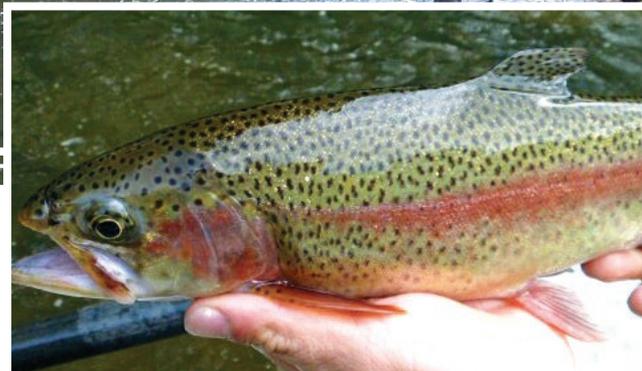
a Creek with a Split Personality

by Charles Cantella

photos by the author

Starting high in the Laurel Mountains of southwest Pennsylvania near the town of Bakersville, Laurel Hill Creek plays a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde routine, boasting two Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only (DHALO) areas, a Keystone Select Stocked Trout Water, a lake and a mix of coldwater and warmwater fish. Above the Laurel Hill Lake, the creek is a quaint mountain stream gurgling around boulders, over riffles and through the mountain forest. From the outlet of the lake, the stream changes into a slower, warmer creek as it continues to wind its way through a mixture of fields and wooded areas. Along the way, various tributaries feed into the creek, giving Laurel Hill Creek cooler water as it works its way to the Casselman River. The Casselman River shortly thereafter joins the Youghiogheny River, which runs into the Monongahela River, which meets the Ohio River, and ultimately makes it into the Mississippi River.

The section of Laurel Hill Creek from 200 yards downstream of the T-364 (Countryman Bridge) downstream to the T-364 Bridge upstream of Laurel Hill Lake is a Keystone Select Stocked Trout Water and is managed as a DHALO fishery. The stream is a nice collection of riffles and pools and is covered with a forest canopy that keeps the water cool and allows trout to carryover through the summer. There is a parking area and well-worn paths along the banks. Fishing



A Rainbow Trout caught in Laurel Hill Creek, Somerset County.

here is well-known for stocked trout. However, sound management practices keep good numbers of fish in the creek throughout the year.

Since this section is a DHALO section, bait is prohibited. But spinners, trout magnets and small spoons, produce well for the spin angler. Fly anglers may find that patterns of little black stoneflies, cream caddis and black caddis work well early in the year while slate drakes, blue-winged olive duns and March Browns pick up as the weather warms. Streamers and nymph patterns in appropriate sizes should work for the fly angler as well. This stream isn't big by any stretch of the imagination and stealth, more than long casts, will be rewarded.

When Laurel Hill Creek enters the lake, the water slows and warms before continuing downstream. Like many other streams that are fed by top release dams, the water is not very cold when it leaves the lake and becomes increasingly warmer during the summer months. Still, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission stocks the entire creek as well as numerous tributaries including Jones Mill Run, Allen Creek and Blue Hole Creek. Laurel Hill Creek runs through various terrains from wide open areas to canopied forests. The tributary creeks provide cool



Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only areas are posted by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission.

water, helping trout in Laurel Hill Creek withstand brutal summer temperatures.

The second DHALO section, from the footbridge on State Game Lands #111 Road in Humbert downstream to Paddytown Hollow Run. This section has limited road access, and an angler has a better chance at escaping the crowds if he or she is willing to walk a bit. Here, the creek gets wide and shallow. Smallmouth Bass, Rock Bass, crappies and other warmwater fish, along with trout, may end up on your line.

Challenges ahead

Laurel Hill Creek appears to be a fantastic creek in an ideal situation. Not only does it have two DHALO sections, intensive stocking allotments, good landowner/angler relations, all nestled in the beautiful Laurel Highlands region, but there are numerous organizations including Chestnut Ridge Trout Unlimited, Casselman River Watershed Association and Somerset Conservation District keeping an eye on it. Unfortunately, looks can be deceiving. These are troubling times for the creek. According to Ben Moyer in a March 16, 2008 Pittsburgh Post Gazette article, former Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Bureau of Law Enforcement Captain Emil Svetahor called Laurel Hill Creek "...the most popular creek in the region, and it has a big following from Allegheny County." But, popularity has its drawbacks. Conservative figures from the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau, estimate that 1.5 to 2 million people annually visit the Laurel Highlands region. Other estimates put the

number at closer to 3 million visitors. All of these people, even those who don't fish or hike, or spend much time outdoors, have an effect on the watershed due to increased demands for water. This is the challenge Laurel Hill Creek faces, dwindling water supply. Brought about, in part, by people who may not even realize their impact, or more frightening, may not care.

How serious is the water issue? In 2009, Laurel Hill Creek was listed at seventh on American Rivers "Most Endangered Rivers" list, due to "...the creek lacks safeguards to protect it from excessive water withdrawals." This designation led to Laurel Hill Creek being named as part of Act 220 of the State Water Plan. Unfortunately, progress has been limited due to budget constraints. Laurel Hill Creek is still a viable fishery, and many attempts are being made to halt the siphoning of water, but that doesn't mean the challenges aren't still there. ☐

For more information:

Chestnut Ridge Trout Unlimited
www.chestnutridgetu.org

Casselman River Watershed Association
www.casselmanwatershed.org

Somerset Conservation District
www.somersetcd.com

Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only regulations

- Open to fishing year-round.
- Fishing is permitted on a 24 hour basis.
- Minimum size is 9 inches, caught on, or in possession on, the waters under these regulations from one hour before sunrise on June 15 to one hour after sunset on Labor Day.
- The daily creel limit is three trout (combined species) from June 15 through Labor Day caught on, or in possession on, the waters under these regulations. From the day after Labor Day until June 15, the daily creel limit is zero.
- Fishing may be done with artificial lures only constructed of metal, plastic, rubber or wood, or with flies and streamers constructed of natural or synthetic materials. All such lures may be used with spinning or fly fishing gear.
- Taking baitfish or fishbait is prohibited.
- An angler in a boat may possess bait and fish caught in compliance with the seasons, sizes and creel limits in effect for a water from which it was take, provided that the boat angler floats through the Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only area without stopping or engaging in the act of fishing or the boat angler puts in or takes out his or her boat at an access point within the Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only area.
- A current Trout-Salmon Permit (or combination Trout-Salmon/Lake Erie Permit) is required.

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