

A woman with blonde curly hair, wearing a pink headband, sunglasses, and a camouflage jacket, is smiling and holding a large trout. She is standing in front of a stream with trees in the background.

Four Great Streams for Early Season Trout

photos-Stephanie DelVecchio

by Nick DelVecchio

Opening day of trout season may be a long-standing tradition among Pennsylvania anglers, but there are plenty of fishing opportunities in the weeks and months before this ceremonial date. March and early April are not typically thought of as “prime” months to go trout fishing, but anglers who brave some volatile weather conditions and always-changing water conditions may find great success on a number of streams in Pennsylvania. From nutrient-rich spring creeks to sprawling mountain freestones, there is both variety and quality to be had in these early season months that are sometimes overlooked.

Buffalo Creek

This stream less than one hour north of Pittsburgh provides trout anglers with some unbelievable opportunities for trout during the early season. Buffalo Creek, Armstrong and Butler

counties, receives a fall stocking of trout throughout the 3.7 miles Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only Section that is open to fishing all year. These fall trout winter over decently well, giving Buffalo Creek a strong trout population heading into the new season in spring. It is stocked again in March by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), but it is the dedication and work from the Arrowhead Chapter of Trout Unlimited that really sets it apart. Not only does this group do constant maintenance on the hundreds of stream improvements in the stream, but they operate a cooperative nursery and float stock thousands of additional trout. This means Buffalo Creek is full of fish during March and April, and some of the best days of the season can occur before opening day even passes on the calendar.

Spring Creek

Spring Creek, Centre County, is one of the most well-known trout waters in all of Pennsylvania, and for good

reason. With over 22 miles of Spring Creek open all year, it is the perfect spot to explore during the early season months when many other streams are closed. Strong hatches (such as early season caddis and blue-winged olives) bring trout to the surface to feed after the long winter. These fish are mostly beautiful wild Brown Trout, which is a nice bonus. It is this bug activity that sets Spring Creek apart from other streams on this list. There is the possibility of hitting some exceptional days during early spring when trout actively feed on the surface and give anglers a shot at banner days using dry flies. Access is also in no short supply thanks to many PFBC-owned areas that are well-marked with signage up and down the stream.



A colorful Brown Trout hits the net in March before being released.

Little Juniata River

The Little Juniata River has gained plenty of notoriety over the last decade due to its outstanding wild Brown Trout fishing. There are almost 14 miles of stream managed under Catch and Release All Tackle regulations that anglers can take advantage of fishing throughout the entire year. The Little Juniata River is a small, limestone spring influenced small river that features strong hatches and plenty of access from roads that parallel the water. Anglers are well-served to monitor the water levels here. After big spring rains or snow

melt, the stream can swell to unsafe levels and make wading treacherous. Even in these conditions, trout can still be caught using streamers or lures near the banks as fish move out of the heavy current and look for areas of reprieve.

Pine Creek and its tributaries

Pine Creek, Potter, Tioga, Lycoming, and Clinton counties, provides an extraordinary opportunity to fish big water for big trout during the months of March and April. Aside from Pine Creek itself, Cedar Run and Slate Run, Lycoming and Tioga counties, are two world-class streams that add a nice change of pace to the larger water and still give anglers solid options for spring fishing. Not only is there an opportunity to catch numbers of trout, but all three of these streams have exceptionally big fish. At any moment, it is possible to tangle with a large Brown Trout. In terms of sheer miles of fishable water, it is tough to beat Pine Creek and its two most well-known tributaries. As an added bonus, this is a terrific time to fish Pine Creek, Cedar Run, and Slate Run without much fear of the rattlesnakes, which reside in this area and are more active during the summer months.



There is nothing better than catching fish on trout waters open to year-round fishing.

While Pennsylvania trout anglers typically circle May and June on the calendar as the best months to pursue their quarry, the early season of March and April provides terrific action on many waters around the state. There is diversity and quality to be had for both stocked and wild trout as fish shake off the chill of winter and start feeding aggressively during this new year. Trout do not live by a schedule, and the start of trout season happens long before opening day. ☐