



Riverkeeper's 2020 Legislative Agenda

Oppose - S.5021/A.7031 (Metzger/Woerner) - Oppose

An act to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to trout stocking practices of the department of environmental conservation

Riverkeeper strongly opposes the “Healthy Cold Water Fisheries Act” S.5021/A.7031 (Metzger/Woerner), that aims to alter New York’s trout stocking program through artificial selection.

The legislation proposes creating a pilot program in five waterbodies in New York, including in the Hudson River watershed to increase the thermal resilience of hatchery trout as streams warm due to climate change. The approach would take holdover trout that survived over winter and “wild” stream-bred trout (which could include hybrid native and hatchery trout) and harvest their eggs for deployment in hatcheries. The ecological concern is the risk of artificially selected trout outcompeting native brook trout, which are in serious decline in New York. Additionally, the risk is high that the artificially selected trout will dilute the genetics of the native trout, further imperiling their survival. Finally, we recommend the legislature look closer at opportunities for habitat restoration, dam removal and culvert right-sizing to prioritize fish recovery and passage.

In New York, according to the Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture, native strains of trout have been reduced to 5 percent of their historic streams and rivers because of human activities. New York can lose the genetics of fish that are in the process of adapting to climate change. We already stock trout selected for high-density hatcheries throughout the state, the issue needs much further study before a pilot program is authorized.

Native and wild trout are the canaries in the coal mines, and instead of trying to create stock exclusively for anglers we should try and protect the cleanest, coldest, undammed waterways. Stocking of artificially selected fish tends to mask declining habitat quality.

Native trout need assistance through conservation and restoration such as dam removal, fixing culverts to allow for fish passage, and habitat restoration to improve water quality and keep streams cool. Every effort should be made to restore our wild rivers and native species before we disrupt the situation even further. Riverkeeper stands ready to work with legislators to advance these critical solutions, as climate change continues to threaten native species and waterways.

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