

FISHING HOLE

WHY GO: Spring brings annual runs of steelhead trout up stream to the first set of falls in Gooseberry Falls State Park. Despite being one of the most popular state parks in the state, it typically sees less fishing pressure than other steelhead streams closer to Duluth. Farther inland, the Gooseberry is home to native brook trout and has been known to produce some larger brookies.

ACCESS: Access to the mouth of the stream up to the first natural barrier, the steelhead water, is all via Gooseberry Falls State Park. Outside of the park, the stream is almost exclusively bordered by private land—though one stretch is paralleled by the Superior Hiking Trail. There are a handful of stream crossings that allow anglers to legally access the stream bed, including Hwy. 3.

VITALS: This 23-mile stream is entirely in Lake County. It's known for its irregular, flashy discharge, particularly dependent on rain, spring runoff and melt. That's because it drains a relatively small watershed of about 27 square miles. Fisheries management of the stream was recently handed off from the DNR's Lake Superior office in Duluth to the Finland area office, where supervisor Dean Paron said he's looking forward to getting to know the stream better.

"It's in my plans to get to know it better, but we just inherited it in January," Paron said.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Brook trout, steelhead trout, rainbow trout and coaster brook trout.

STEELHEAD: Nic Petersen, a DNR fisheries specialist based in Duluth, said Gooseberry ranks in the top five in terms of catch rates for spring steelhead; with it taking an average of five hours of angler effort per caught steelhead.

"In steelhead terms, that is pretty good," Petersen said. "That is better than the Knife River. But it is one that is a little bit deceiving because depending on the year, it gets quite a bit different angling pressure."

The steelhead run from the mouth on Lake Superior is just under a mile long.

"There is one big run that goes around that first bend, and that's pretty much where people fish and they stack up," Petersen said.

That stretch is a deeper pool and estuary, making Petersen wonder if it draws fish (not just steelhead) outside of the spring.

BROOKIE: Both Paron and Petersen have heard about some decent catches of brook trout on the upper stretches of

GOOSEBERRY RIVER

the stream.

"Upstream it gets into a lot of private land," Paron said. "There are native brook trout there, and a few locals fish it for some nice brookies in some of the spots."

Petersen noted that one of his DNR colleagues had noticed in the stream one of the largest brook trout he'd ever seen.

FALL COASTER BONUS: Petersen said the mouth of the Gooseberry is one of the places DNR goes to survey for beautiful coaster brook trout in the fall.

The last time it was surveyed was in 2013—there were fish in the 12- to 14-inch range, but none of the larger fish approaching 20 inches they were looking for.

"They congregate there in the fall to spawn," he said, hinting at the conditions then, and it should be noted that the season closes on Sept. 4 this year. "It's difficult conditions to sample in the fall, particularly when it gets late in the year, and we have ice forming on the rivers."—*Javier Serna*

