

FISHING HOLE

LESTER RIVER

WHY GO: This stream, inside Duluth city limits, has a lot to offer anglers in the spring, summer and fall. It has a major steelhead run in the spring, some excellent brook trout fishing in its upper reaches, and the opportunity in the fall to catch pink salmon.

ACCESS: You'll have to look closely at maps, but there's a mixture of land ownership bordering the Lester, providing a lot of opportunities for anglers afoot. Yes, this stream on the east side of Duluth, borders some private property. But there are public easements offering access on some of that private property. And there is a considerable amount of public land bordering the upper reaches of the Lester and its tributary Amity Creek.

VITALS: It's unclear just how much of this St. Louis County stream is open to anadromous fish that spend part of the time in Lake Superior but also run up the Lester. DNR's soon-to-be updated guide to North Shore trout streams suggests there are 5.1 miles of stream before the first barrier, and 16.5 miles of stream above that barrier. Fishing guide Carl Haensel of Namebini said there is definitely fewer than 5 miles of stream before the first barrier. Most of the fishing for steelhead occurs below the high falls upstream from the Superior St. bridge.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Brook trout, brown trout, Chinook salmon, coaster

brook trout, Kamloops rainbow trout, pink salmon and steelhead rainbow trout.

OVER THE RAINBOWS: The Lester is well-known for its spring steelhead runs, said Haensel.

"It is the first big river that opens up to steelhead fishing," he said. "As soon as we get everything to melt, it will be open. That lower end of it will have plenty of fish."

How soon it might open was hard to imagine in the middle of March, with its mouth firmly locked up.

The mouth of the stream is popular among shore anglers and boat anglers, Haensel said.

Minnesota DNR recently killed its Kamloops rainbow trout program following genetics testing showing they were hybridizing with steelhead. The Lester did receive Kamloops, which should continue to return for the next couple of years.

INLAND BROOKIES AND BROWNS: Haensel said the Lester, and its tributary Amity Creek, offer some excellent brook and brown trout fishing, particularly the farther up the stream you go.

"It is one of the few streams on the North Shore with wild brown trout," he said. "That doesn't mean it's always easy or a cake walk."

The stream narrows towards the top of the watershed and it gets pretty remote, de-

spite being so close to the hustle and bustle of Duluth. That's where you might tangle with some of the bigger stream trout, though, so don't shy away from these waters.

COASTERS: The stream also has been known to have some good coaster brook trout action. DNR has been working on restoring this catch-and-release fishery, and it's been a slow go. While these anadromous brook trout are known for running the streams in the fall, Haensel said they are just as likely to follow steelhead runs up the stream in the spring, when they opportunistically feed on rainbow eggs.

"There have been more coaster brook trout poking around," Haensel said. "You would be surprised, but they are in there. This last year we saw more coasters in the 15 to 20 inch range than we have for a while."

THE FALL TURNS PINK: While Haensel dismissed DNR's mention of Chinook salmon in the stream as not being a viable fishery, he mentioned the presence of pink salmon in the fall.

"The Lester absolutely has a pink salmon run in the fall," he said of the bonus fishery. "They will be there after the first decent rain in September."—Javier Serna



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