

FISHING HOLE

CASCADE RIVER

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: The Cascade River flows through some of the most gorgeous country in Minnesota. As its name suggests, numerous waterfalls line this fast-dropping river. In addition to some amazing scenery, anglers will be treated to some great trout and salmon fishing.

ACCESS: The easiest place to access the Cascade River is at Cascade River State Park, right along Highway 61. This is the most popular stretch of river with anglers because lake-run trout and salmon can only swim 100 yards before they encounter the first waterfall. Other road crossings provide access as well. Matthew Weberg, assistant area fisheries supervisor in Grand Marais, says the intersection of Bally Creek Road and Devil Track Road is a good place to try. The DNR has done stream improvement projects here, which have created cover and deep holes for fish. Anglers can also gain access where Cascade River Road crosses the river.

VITALS: The river runs 17 miles from its headwaters in the Boundary Waters to Lake Superior. Along the way, it passes through more than 20 lakes. The root beer-colored water gets its coloration from the wetlands the river runs through. Weberg says the water is stained by tannic acid in decaying wetland plants.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Brook trout, steelhead, coho salmon, Chinook salmon, pink salmon, northern pike, walleyes, perch and smallmouth bass.

FISHERIES OVERVIEW: "It's got a steelhead run and a fall pink salmon run," Weberg says. "It gets the occasional coho and Chinook salmon. I also see some Lake Superior brook trout as well. It's a large-enough stream where it can attract most species from Lake Superior."

BROOK TROUT: Brook trout predominate in the middle sections, from Cascade River State Park, upstream to Thompson Falls. "We usually sample fair to high numbers of brook trout from 6 to 8 inches, but it's not uncommon to see some surpassing 10 inches," Weberg says. "It's definitely been one of our more popular inland brook trout streams." Weberg says the river is deep enough and has enough flow for fish to both overwinter and survive the summer heat. The lower section, upstream to the first waterfall, also gets lake-run or "coaster" brook trout. These lake-run brookies grow large. In fact, they are protected by a 20-inch size limit below the first waterfall.

STEELHEAD: Steelhead attract a lot of anglers during their spring spawning run. Although the section from Lake Superior upstream to the first waterfall is relatively short, Weberg says this stretch has some good spawning habitat. "Below the falls, there's actually a decent run that has some pretty good spawning habitat of small to medium-sized cobble," he says. Steelhead fry had been stocked in the river up until 2016, but it was thought these stocked fish contributed little to the fishery and the program was discontinued.

SALMON: Pink salmon are common in Lake Superior and they have gained a quiet following on North Shore streams. "That fishery seems to be increasing in popularity over the last five to 10 years," Weberg notes. He adds that the Cascade River is one of the most popular pink salmon destinations. "It gets a pretty good run in some years," he says. "There's a little bit of a run every year, but some years are better than others." Up until 1995, the DNR stocked Chinook salmon in the Cascade River, and it was a popular fishery. Minnesota no longer stocks Chinooks, but the wayward Chinook and coho still end up in the Cascade on occasion.

COOLWATER FISH: In its upper reaches, above Thompson Falls, the Cascade River flows through several lakes, and species such as northern pike, smallmouth bass, yellow perch and walleyes swim from the lakes and into the river, although they are not widely targeted outside the lakes.

SEASONAL TIMING: Weberg notes that steelhead fishing is popular in the spring and pink salmon angling is popular in the fall from Lake Superior up to the first waterfall. If you're after brookies above the first barrier, Weberg recommends fishing in May, June or September. During the heat of summer, fish are stressed and they retreat to cool tributaries to ride out the heat.



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