

Valley Angler

Bad News for the North Country

by Bill Thompson

It may come as a surprise to some people, but a great many of the White Mountain trout ponds never had trout in them. Some of these remote ponds are high enough up that Mother Nature never bothered to stock them. It was not until the Fish and Game Department was created that the first brook trout were stocked in these ponds. A few ambitious and rugged game wardens trekked fingerlings in on their backs.

Now there may be a few purists that might argue: “That if God didn’t put them there then they should have left well enough alone”. True enough there was no science and these old boys for the most part took it upon themselves to do the stocking. In the end though, I would guess that most of us appreciate their efforts.

These early programs were for the most part quite successful and have continued to be up until the present day. With the advent of the airplane many of these ponds continued to be stocked from the air. For the last decade or so helicopters have been used. This is a program that has provided a unique experience for anglers and hikers alike for many years.

To me there is no finer experience than hiking into a remote pond with my float tube for a day of trout fishing. I haven’t done it for while, but hiking into one of these ponds to camp and fish is a great experience. Catching a couple of trout and cooking them over an open fire for breakfast is a lot of fun.

As you might expect this program can be expensive. With fuel prices soaring (pun intended) the program has become even more expensive. As a result this year the aerial stocking program has been abandoned in the North Country as a cost saving measure by the Fish and Game Department.

Well, what did you expect? The Fish and Game Department has been telling us, the state legislature and the governor that they were facing a major shortfall for some time now. The ending of this program should be taken as a clear “shot across the bow”, a warning that this is just the tip of the iceberg and more cuts are sure to follow.

Interesting enough over time the cost of stocking by air had gone down. Some ponds were deemed unsuitable for trout habitat and other ponds due to new logging roads are now stocked by truck. In case your are wondering stocking the old fashioned way by back packing the trout in has proved in the long run to be inefficient and detrimental to the health of the trout being stocked.

On the whole the short fall is not a lot of money, a mere three thousand bucks, but enough to put an end to it. The entire budget for this program was only seven thousand. The largest expense

was four thousand dollars for fuel. The department even approached the National Guard for assistance and was denied.

In an effort to continue an offer was made to provide the needed funds from a private source. Even though the Department would not turn down the donation it becomes a Catch 22. Politicians would only take the view that this is an optional way of funding the department. As long as you can count on the private sector why bother to do the hard work of finding ways to fund Fish and Game.

The sad part of this is not only are the states sportsmen losing out; all of the residents of the North Country are losers too. In an era when the northern part of the state is in an economic downturn every last cent derived from tourism, and make no mistake hunters and anglers contribute a lot to the states tourism dollars, is badly needed. Politicians from the southern part of the state give a lot of lip service about aiding the North Country. In the end that is exactly what it is, just talk.

See you on the river.