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Catch of the day

State stocking trophy trout in area waters

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Anglers with dreams of big trout can see those fantasies turn to reality thanks to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's trophy trout stocking program. The department is in the middle of stocking about 24,400 trout in seven river segments and 33 lakes and ponds around the state.

The trout are 2-year-olds, which, in some cases, exceed 18 inches although the average fish is about 14 inches, said Tom Wiggins, fish culture operations manager, who is in charge of the state's hatcheries.

Wiggins said a normal stocked fish is about 18 to 20 months old and measures about 9-11 inches.

"We're getting them up to two years," Wiggins said. "They're going over 14 inches on average. They're more mature fish and they're bigger fish."

The trophy trout stocking program isn't new. It came out of the trout management plan launched in the early 1990s with the intent to put more and bigger fish into Vermont waters.

But excitement over the trophy trout program seems to have exploded this year, Wiggins said.

"Last year (the large fish) started to generate excitement, but this year people are really catching on," he said. "People are basing their vacations on (the release dates). We have people traveling from out of state. Some of these fish are the biggest fish they've ever caught."

The program gained traction last year among anglers and is exploding this year as the number of locations receiving big trout has increased.

What started as a program to stock trophy fish in sections of four rivers has expanded to seven rivers and now 33 ponds and lakes around the Green Mountain State, bringing the program closer to more of the state's population. Now, no matter where an angler lives, there's a good chance there are trophy trout being stocked nearby.

The department is stocking browns and rainbows in the rivers, while rainbows and brook trout are going into lakes and ponds.

"The trophy rainbow and brown trout stocked in the Black, Winooski and Lamoille rivers as well as Otter Creek have provided exciting fishing for many anglers of all ages and skill levels for many years," Fish & Wildlife Commissioner Wayne Laroche said in a news release. "We are now also stocking trophy trout in sections of East Creek in Rutland, the Missisquoi River in Enosburg and Sheldon, and the Passumpsic River in St Johnsbury. In addition, 2-year-old brook trout as well as some large rainbows will be stocked in selected lakes and ponds to provide excellent fishing opportunities."

For details on where the trophy trout are stocked in rivers and which ponds and lakes are receiving the big

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trout, see the department's Web site at [www.vtfishandwildlife.com/fish stocking.cfm](http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/fish%20stocking.cfm).

Anglers can find the stocking schedule for rivers as well as when the fish were stocked in the lakes and rivers. That could help an angler decide when to fish as much as where.

"The best time to fish for them is the next day," Wiggins said. "The fish are aggressive."

Trout season in Vermont began April 12 and runs through Oct. 31.

All fishing regulations apply to these waters including the two-fish limit. For details, see the department's "2007 Guide to Hunting, Fishing & Trapping," which can be picked up anywhere licenses are sold as well as on the department's Web site.

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Illustration: JOHN HALL / VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE

Tom Jones of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department tosses a bucket of trophy trout into the Winooski River in Waterbury on Friday. Vermont's trophy trout program now includes seven stream sections and 33 lakes and ponds.

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