

Chicog-Then and Now for June, 2026
JoAnn Malek

Trout streams ripple through Chicog township. But is stream fishing a thing of the past? The old guys who loved trekking woods and water may no longer be able. When they were young, fishing trout for supper would get them out of doing their chores.

Larry Damman, now retired, was long-time fisheries biologist for the Spooner DNR. Currently he advises the high school fishing team, and is president of the volunteer organization, Friends Into Spooner Hatchery (FISH).

Early in his career the streams, including Stuntz Brook, were stocked annually, though good trout streams don't need any fisheries assistance. Some Chicog lakes were stocked with trout, too, after being poisoned to remove other fish. But poisoning lakes is expensive; eventually the DNR discontinued that process.

The natural habitat for trout is cold water streams, though the nutrient content is low and other fish compete for the limited food available. Also, stream trout are constantly expending energy as they fight the current. Wild brook trout need three years to reach maturity, and can live five years, spawning (laying eggs) twice and dying after the second spawn.

Trout bury their eggs in stream-bed gravel. Water circulation, via river current or spring water entering from below, keeps the eggs aerated. Cold-water hatcheries in St. Croix Falls and Osceola collect enough eggs to ensure they can meet their fingerling quotas. Fishery managers were encouraged to find a use for the excess fish. At the same time, the DNR was looking for ways to increase usage of county forest lakes. In responding to these requests Larry made an interesting discovery.

Damman knew that wheat farmers in the Dakotas might supplement their income by stocking prairie potholes with rainbow trout. There were lots of bugs, and no competition for food. The fish would grow large, then be caught and sold.

A fish-less pond has abundant bug life and zooplankton. Trout can easily feed without fighting the current of the stream. What they eat goes into growth, not exercise. Larry had explored pothole lakes in Washburn County, checking water chemistry, fishing them. There were no fish. Typically 4-10 acres in size, the potholes were too small for predator loons to navigate. Eagles might land, but would more likely choose easier fishing for bass and pan fish in larger lakes.



Damman made the arrangements: Two-inch fingerling brook trout were stocked in Washburn county ponds in early spring. By fall they were 7-11 inches long. Larry expected winter kill from low oxygen as the pond froze, but to his surprise the fish were not only surviving but thriving! He says that the next spring trout attacked his line “like a herd of pirañas.” Because of the water chemistry in these ponds the trout grow fast and mature early. They only live for 2 or 3 years, already spawning in their first year and again the second. After only two winters some are wall-mount size, 18 or more inches.

Trout fishing is a spring tradition. During the summer trout move from shore to deeper, cooler water. I learned that the ponds produce the most and largest fish in the fall. Many anglers prefer winter ice fishing when it's easier through the shoreline brush.

Seventeen ponds in Washburn County forests have been stocked with rainbow trout annually since the 1990s. Damman has unofficially named fourteen of them.

So, my friends, if you're looking for adventure, check the map at Find Trout Ponds of Washburn County in the county forestry website. Most of these ponds are closed to motor vehicles. Some are as far as two miles from the nearest road. Finding them is part of the challenge, as posted road signs seem to go missing on a regular basis. Yellow signs at the lakes usually remain in place. When you fish one of these ponds, you may be bagging trophy rainbow trout.

From librarian Katy Larson: the bookmobile is still off the road. We don't have information on when the manufacturer will determine the necessary recall repair.

Do you have stories to tell about Chicog-Then?

I'd like to listen. Call or text me at (612) 250-0301.

Thank you for reading Chicog-Then and Now

Town Website: www.townofchicog.com

IMPORTANT JUNE DATES

Saturday 6/6, 7-3, Chicog clean-up day

Wednesday 6/10, 6pm, monthly Chicog meeting

Wednesdays 6/10&24, Namekagen Transit Service

Thursday 6/11, 10:30-12, Bibliodragon bookmobile, town hall

Wednesday 6/24, 10:30-12, Books&Bread, Beaverbrook