



The History of Marshville

Land Acknowledgement

The project team acknowledges that the Marshville Dam site is within the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabe—the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. This land was ceded under the 1836 Treaty of Washington. We honor the enduring relationship between the Anishinaabe people and this land.

The history of the Marshville settlement dates to 1861 when George M. Marsh, one of the first non-Native settlers in Oceana County, established a sawmill at this site. Two years later, in 1863, he built the county's first grist mill. By constructing the only bridge across Stony Creek, Marsh made it possible to travel around Stony Lake, opening the area to further development. Soon, the village of Marshville emerged, complete with both mills, a post office, and a general store.



photo by Harlo Elliott

From left to right: Marshville Settlement (circa 1910), featuring the powder house, general store, and grist mill.

1933 – Vandals attempt to drain the pond by digging a trench in the earthen berm east of the dam to allow steelhead upstream, but local fishermen intervene, preventing the dam's destruction.

1948 – The Marshville Improvement Association transfers ownership of the site to the Oceana Road Commission.

1970 – Another group of vandals, armed with shovels, breached the berm, draining the pond and causing irreparable damage to the dam. Much like in 1933, their goal was to provide steelhead access to smaller upstream tributaries. However, this unauthorized removal was both illegal and dangerous. Proper dam removal is a complex, scientific process that must be carefully planned and executed by professionals.

It was not until 2020, that members of the Oceana County Parks and Recreation Commission, alongside project partners, gathered to determine the future of the Marshville site. Their focus: conservation efforts, expanded public access, and the restoration of Stony Creek's natural flow.



Kelly family photo

Anglers proudly display their catches on the opening day of trout season in 1928

Marshville Through Time

1883 – In July, record rainfall caused the Marshville Dam to give way, sending floodwaters rushing into Stony Lake. The Channel Dam, near the Lake Michigan shoreline, also collapsed, destroying the lakeside community of Stony Creek.

1917 – The mill closes as the logging era comes to an end, nearby developments expand, and buildings fall into disrepair.

1924 – Noticing a decline in trout fishing due to the absence of the pond, local sportsmen formed the Marshville Improvement Association, rallied community support, and raised funds to rebuild the dam.

1927 – A new concrete dam is completed, restoring the site as a popular fishing destination.



A family enjoys Marshville Dam in 1960.

Revitalizing Stony Creek: A Collaborative Conservation Effort

The restoration of Stony Creek stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, uniting multiple agencies, community partners, and a blend of public and private contributions.

Spanning Oceana County’s Marshville Dam County Park and neighboring private land, the project was launched in 2020 by the Oceana County Parks and Recreation Commission. The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) secured critical funding for stream crossing replacements and dam removal, while Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) provided additional funding and project management to enhance stream and habitat restoration.

Construction began in the spring of 2024 with the replacement of three undersized culverts beneath Marshville Dam County Road. These outdated structures were replaced with a channel-spanning timber bridge, improving stream flow and connectivity. By summer, crews had removed the Marshville Dam, restoring the creek’s natural morphology for the first time in over 160 years. These efforts addressed long-standing issues of excess sedimentation and fish passage barriers, allowing cold-water species—such as salmonids and other native fish—to migrate upstream and spawn freely.



Construction crews working to transform Stony Creek.

Project Partners and Funders:

West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission | Conservation Resource Alliance | Oceana County Parks and Recreation Commission | Oceana County Road Commission | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Restoration Center Great Lakes Region | Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Division | United States Department of Fish and Wildlife, Green Bay Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office | Great Lakes Fishery Trust | Great Lakes Restoration Initiative | United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Eastern Region State, Private, and Tribal Forestry | National Fish and Wildlife Foundation | Garry & Julie McKeen | John Wynn | GEI Consultants | Scott Civil Engineering Company | L.S. Engineering, Inc. | Catskill Remedial Contracting Services | Kanouse Outdoor Restoration | J.E. Kloote Contracting, Inc. | The Wege Foundation | GVSU Annis Water Resources Institute | Private Landowners | DTE Foundation | Packing Corporation of America | Serra Family Foundation | Andrew R. and Janet F. Miller Foundation | Walters Family Foundation | The Brookby Foundation



Before: Undersized culverts under Marshville Dam County Road restrict the flow of Stony Creek.

The next phase focused on restoring nearly 12 acres of stream corridor. Large woody debris was strategically placed to stabilize the banks and enhance in-stream habitat, fostering a thriving aquatic ecosystem. To further improve the landscape and habitat, forest restoration and native wetland vegetation plantings were completed in areas once submerged by the dam’s pond. Additionally, a fishing platform was constructed to enhance recreational access, serving as a focal point for engaging with the restored ecosystem.

Though Stony Creek has undergone many transformations over the years, its restoration honors its legacy as a community gathering place while ensuring a healthier, more resilient environment for generations to come.



Fishing in the Stony Creek Watershed

The removal of the Marshville Dam and undersized culverts has restored full fish passage to over 10 miles of Stony Creek and its tributaries. Previously, only jumping salmonids could navigate the barriers; now, all species can access habitats blocked for over a century.

Stony Creek is designated as a Type 1 Trout Stream, offering ideal conditions for self-sustaining salmonid populations. These optimal conditions are largely due to its cold, groundwater-fed flow, which maintains an average July temperature of 56.7°F. The most common species include Brook Trout, Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout (Steelhead), Mottled Sculpin, Coho Salmon, and Chinook Salmon.

Angler Regulations and Guidelines

This waterway offers great opportunities for anglers, but regulations set by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) are in place to protect the delicate balance of this rare aquatic ecosystem from the long-term impacts of human activity. These regulations are subject to review, so check the Michigan DNR Fishing Regulations for the latest rules on seasons, size, and catch limits.

Additional Fishing Opportunities

A few miles downstream, Stony Lake is home to a diverse array of freshwater fish species. Anglers can try their luck at landing bluegill, black crappie, channel catfish, largemouth bass, northern pike, pumpkinseed sunfish, rock bass, and smallmouth bass.

Stony Creek is open to fishing from the last Saturday in April through September 30.

All trout and salmon caught must comply with the daily limit.

Anglers may keep up to five fish in total, but no more than three can be 15 inches or longer.

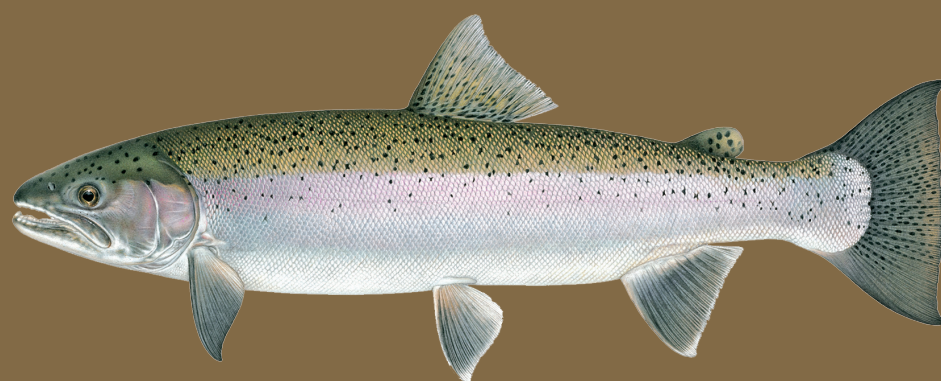
Minimum size limits to keep a fish:



Brook Trout - 7"
(Salvelinus fontinalis)



Brown Trout - 8"
(Salmo Trutta)



Rainbow Trout / Steelhead - 10"
(Oncorhynchus mykiss)



Chinook - 10"
(Oncorhynchus tshawytscha)



Coho - 10"
(Oncorhynchus kisutch)

