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Metallic Sulfide Mining: A Threat to Coaster Brook Trout

Coaster Brook Trout

The “coaster,” as it is commonly known, is a brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) native to Lake Superior that typically lives near the lakeshore and spawns in freshwater streams. More than a century ago, coasters were abundant, luring anglers from across the country to Lake Superior. But years of over-fishing, competition from introduced species, and habitat destruction have led to major population declines and extirpation from many Lake Superior tributaries.

According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, coasters are rare.¹ Researchers are working to determine whether the coaster is genetically distinct from other types of brook trout, but biologists generally appreciate that the Lake Superior coaster population is unique.² Today, the Salmon Trout River in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula is the only place on the U.S. mainland known to have a spawning run of native coaster brook trout.³ Yet, directly underneath this river, sulfide mining exploration is under way.

Trout, including coasters, generally need cold, clean, clear running waters to survive and reproduce. Increased sedimentation caused by erosion from roads and construction sites can adversely affect trout by covering spawning beds and lowering the oxygen content of the water. In addition, if a stream’s acidity

and concentration of toxic metals increases, trout are stressed. Chronic water pollution, as is often the case with acid mine drainage, leads to reduced fish populations and smaller fish. Accidents, spills, or leaks from a metallic sulfide mine near the Salmon Trout River could be devastating for wildlife, especially the last mainland population of coaster brook trout.



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¹ Newman, Lee E., and Dubois, Robert B., editors. *Status of Coaster Brook Trout*. A report by the Lake Superior Technical Committee (Brook Trout Subcommittee). March 1996.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.