



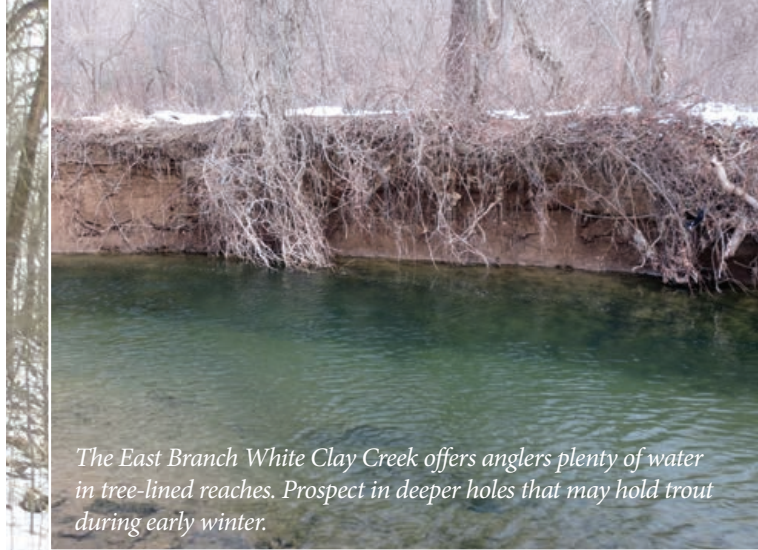
FISHING WHITE CLAY CREEK

by Carl Haensel

photos by the author

If you are looking for a great afternoon on the water in early winter, look no further than White Clay Creek, Chester County. Located just northwest of the Delaware state line, White Clay Creek has long been a favorite destination of wintertime anglers. It offers opportunities for both fly fishing and spin fishing for trout and hosts a broad suite of options depending on the season. While the stream lies within an hour's drive of millions of people, it still feels distinctly rural when you pull up to a trailhead along the creek. Much of this feeling of remoteness is due to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources White Clay Creek Preserve. Many of the 3,212 acres of parkland is along the stream, and protected land continues into Delaware across the state line into another state park. The stream has been so valued that it has even been protected nationally by an act of Congress in 2000 and is a National Wild and Scenic River.

While all of these attributes make for a picturesque experience, the trout fishing is the main wintertime draw. With waters that ice over only in the coldest conditions, the creek is a good choice when winter is in full force elsewhere in Pennsylvania. Importantly, the Middle Branch White Clay Creek is managed as a Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only (DHALO) fishery, offering stocked trout for anglers throughout the year. Under DHALO regulations, fishing may be done only with artificial lures or with flies and streamers on spinning or fly fishing gear. Live bait is prohibited and a current trout/salmon permit is required. The protective regulations only allow for harvest from June 15 through Labor Day, ensuring that wintertime trout stay in the stream for anglers to catch and release. Additionally, the



The East Branch White Clay Creek offers anglers plenty of water in tree-lined reaches. Prospect in deeper holes that may hold trout during early winter.



The main stem of White Clay Creek is larger trout water with great fishing opportunities. The main stem and both the East Branch White Clay Creek and Middle Branch White Clay Creek are managed as stocked trout waters, with extended season fishing opportunities available in the winter.



An angler fishes a section of the Middle Branch White Clay Creek. This DHALO section offers excellent winter fishing.



Brown Trout may be active during the coldest days of the season.

stream is part of the Keystone Select Stocked Trout Waters program. Under the program, 2- to 3-year-old trout, measuring between 14- to 20-inches, are spread among select waters under the DHALO regulations. Anglers should keep their eyes open for these bigger trout in the creek. Bring along a good net in case you hook up with one.

Trout can often be found elsewhere in White Clay Creek, both in the East Branch White Clay Creek and in the main stem of the creek below the confluence of the East and Middle branches. Trout are stocked in all three streams by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). Larger trout filter downstream from Middle Branch White Clay Creek stockings by the PFBC, and other fish head upstream from stockings in Delaware. The Middle Branch White Clay Creek hosts 1.67 miles of DHALO water, located from State Route 3009 (Good Hope Road) downstream to the confluence with the East Branch. Trail access is available by the Mason-Dixon Trail, Pennel Trail, Edwin Leid Trail, and other trails. Parking is available on Sharpless Road and provides good access to nearby streamside paths.

On a previous warm late February morning on the stream, I found success in fishing tandem rigs of small nymphs through deep holes and near large boulders. Small streamers also brought some trout out of the depths, with olive and black patterns producing the most strikes. Hatches are slim in the winter, though I've had good luck on midges. Spin fishing anglers will do well fishing jigs and smaller inline spinners. On the broader, larger portions of the main stem of White Clay Creek, minnow plugs, spoons, and large spinners can bring big trout to hand. ☐

For more information on fishing regulations:



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